

# TRACKING HISTORY



Photos by David Moore

**GOING HOME** — Joseph Thomas, of the Regional Directorate of Public Works guides a Narrow Gauge Locomotive that once ramed Fort Dix ranges. The locomotive was located at Allaire Park in Moumouth County and now awaits restoration. The convoy containing the cargo prepares to enter Fort Dix. An original Dink locomotive operating at Fort Dix during the 1940s.



## RDPW hooks a missing link in Fort Dix history

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It wasn't a National Geographic special showing divers menaced by sharks, or cameras colliding with sunken warships but Fort Dix officials recently embarked on a mission every bit as thrilling.

For this display, Fort Dix Regional Directorate of Public Works traveled to Allaire State Park in Monmouth County, to recover a missing link in post history—a Dinky Railroad locomotive.

A locomotive that once carried thousands of soldiers to post training areas returned to Fort Dix on Dec. 4, 55 years after operations of an installation rail system here ceased. At times, the train was even the major transportation mode for moving soldiers to a lake on hot summer days for a swim. From Dix's railroad, soldiers entered the battlefields of World War II.

The two-foot wide Narrow Gauge Locomotive, affectionately referred to as 'Dinky,' traveled from Allaire to Fort Dix. It returns again as post history.

"History comes back to Fort Dix and that's a great deal," said David Taylor, of the Regional Directorate of

Public Works.

Taylor was one of two directorate workers who made the trip to Allaire to recover the rail artifact. He joined Joseph Thomas, RDPW, John Gaskill of Herman's Trucking, Pemberton, and Brian Ziegler, a heavy equipment operator with Dobbs, of

Thorofare, to hook up the historic artifact and return it to the installation in an operation consuming not quite four hours.

The locomotive's placement on a Fort Dix track closes an effort that started a decade ago to return the locomotive to its home post.

As workers surveyed the situation at the park, two rusted coffee cans covered the exhaust pipes, keeping hornets away. The locomotive was rusty and concerns arose, because of the rust, whether the now-fragile railway engine could be hooked and placed on a flatbed truck for its ride to Fort Dix. But after a quick survey, and a test of the placement of the heavy-duty straps, the crane operator lifted the engine and gently placed it on the flatbed trailer.

Initial attempts to get the railroad engine to the post were blocked more than 10 years ago when available funding was redistributed for the war in Southwest Asia. The plan was then

shelved. But some workers at Fort Dix never forgot or gave up on getting approval for the eventual transfer.

The Fort Dix engine had been identified and located at Allaire and was part of the park's New Jersey Museum of Transportation and Pine Creek Railroad collection.

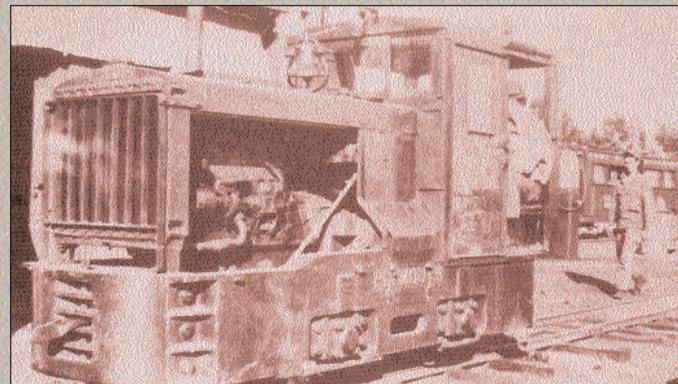
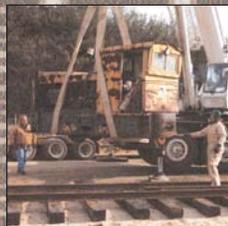
But as the years went by and collections switched around in the park, as well as deterioration, the small engines in the area were beginning to waste away into oblivion. Parts of whole narrow gauge engines were stored in corners, while three sat on tracks outside a park workshop.

Post and park officials worried there might not be rail cars available. Wooden panels and benches from the flat cars had rotted, after all. Other parts were cannibalized for other rail restoration programs.

Some of the narrow gauge locomotives were sold.

But interest by Fort Dix personnel peeked again and now includes retrieving a car from the park in January.

Ten years ago, Taylor had built the tracks to store the engine in the public works yard. He also built the tracks this time for the locomotive's temporary placement before it is restored to museum and military standard.



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