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## My Visist To The Casemate Museum At Fort Monroe Virginia

I visited the Casemate Museum at Fort Monroe Virginia. Fort Monroe is a decommissioned military base located in Hampton, Virginia at Old Point Comfort. The Casemate Museum is in the inner fort. The curator's objectives for the show is to journal the military history at Fort Monroe from the development of Fort Algernourne, the first defensive barricade in 1609, to the Army's Training Doctrine Command. The museum details how Fort Monroe played a significant role during the American Civil War. Upon entering the museum, there were exhibits featuring what life was like during the early 1800's on the fort. The museum is a self-guided tour. If you are a tall person, it may be a bit challenging walking through the exhibits. For someone short like myself at 5'1, it wasn't as challenging. I was able to walk through just fine without having to duck down as much. The exhibits were set up in each room with tablets and wall displays describing what is being seen. They had the rooms set up to where you could enter, but only up to a certain point as to not be able to touch anything. For instance, there was a room in the casemate that Jefferson Davis was briefly held after being wrongly accused of plotting the assination of Abraham Lincoln. In the room was a desk and a bed. The area where the bed and the desk are, is roped off to keep visitors from disturbing the area I assume. The rest of the exhibits were set up in a similar fashion. You can enter the exhibit; you can't get close enough to touch.

There are two presentation areas where visitors could watch a video about the exhibit. I decided not to partake. I felt that the presentation areas would be best fitted for a group. Moving further into the museum, there were displays that showed life-like statues of different people throughout history. There were also podiums to describe the people in the statues. Along the path, there were other artifacts such as warheads and different military uniforms depicting what were worn during the era explained. More wall coverings adorned the pathway leading to more exhibits along the way with life-like statues of people. The rooms felt a bit claustrophobic so for someone who might find it that challenging such as myself, may have a hard time standing in there for more than a few minutes. However, this is unavoidable as the building itself is a part of history so it cannot be changed.

One of the exhibitions that stood out to me the most was an exhibition about original English colonist. It displayed the weapons and arts of war current in Europe at the time. Upon entrance into the museum, there is a depiction of two colonists outside of the palisade of Fort Algernourne. There is a podium that gives a narrative of what this scene was like According to the description, this took place in about 1611. It explains the clothing that was worn by the

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militiamen and the weapons they may have carried. It also gives a description of what the fort looked like as described by a Spanish officer. He described it as a “weak structure of boards ten hands high.” It also explains that a “hand” is an old style of measure that for the Spanish equaled the span of outstretched fingers of an open hand or about nine to ten inches. The description also included a disclaimer that the design of the fort is unknown, but the display model is what it may have looked like. It goes on to state that the exact site has been lost and explains where it was most likely located.

There was also an exhibit accompanying the previous depiction of Fort Algernourne. It is on a podium encased in a sort of shadow box. I found this interesting because it gave an idea of what the settlement may have looked like. It is described as constructed in 1609 and was the first fortification of Old Point Comfort. The description goes on to describe why the fort was built the way it was in order to prevent the passage of hostile ships up the James River. According to the curator’s description, it was stockade and fortified with guns in 1611. This is seen in recreation in the exhibit. The inscription also shares that unfortunately, in the following year after the fortification, the fort accidentally burned down. They tried to rebuild but was unsuccessful due to the decaying land around them.

Overall, I was impressed by the exhibition however, it could have included more about the role that African Americans played in the history of Fort Monroe. There was a wall description upon entering the museum, but I did not see much after. Although it was a painful moment in history, I would have liked to see more about it. There is a marker on the outer fort about the First Africans in Virginia to explain a little bit about it. As mentioned before, the museum’s exhibits were well put together and easy to follow. In my opinion, I think it should be a guided tour. I would have liked to ask questions. During my walk through the exhibition, I found myself googling a lot to understand some of the exhibits. Nevertheless, I enjoyed it and plan to visit not only the museum, but the entire Fort Monroe to learn more about our history here in Hampton Roads.

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