

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

October 2017

Editor: Steve Johnson

Regimental Bands - An Important Component of Any

Army In the 1800's music was the most common form of entertainment, and almost every village, town, and city had a brass band. They would give Sunday concerts, play at fairs and weddings, and provide the music for dances and balls. When the war started, these local musicians joined the ranks of the militia and army units and became part of regimental bands. Army regimental bands had been formally authorized since 1821, and by the end of 1861 there were 618 regimental bands with a total of 28,000 musicians.

The duties of a regimental band included playing marches as troops went into battle, and providing music for concerts, reviews, and parades. When not playing music, band members became stretcher bearers, orderlies at field hospitals, and sometimes a burial detail. Members of the regular army regimental bands were sometimes expected to take part in combat; band members of volunteer militias were not. This caused considerable resentment among the regular troops. In fact, as the war became more deadly, some officers and politicians began to question the necessity of having bands at all, even accusing the musicians as being cowards afraid to fight. There was also the argument that regimental bands were paid more than the field musicians, and were an unnecessary expense. (It should be noted that field musicians were the drummers and buglers who were on the battle lines, sounding out commands in the din of battle.)

Dates to Remember

Thursday, October 19, 2017
S.F. Civil War Roundtable
6 pm "Siege of St. Petersburg"
by John Horn at United Irish
Cultural Center

Sunday, October 22, 2017
Military History of Alcatraz:
Workshop and Walking tour by
historian John Martini. 9:30 am
on Alcatraz

Sunday, October 29, 2017
Halloween at Fort Point

Bugler Frank Dorritie plays "To the Color" at Fort Point as the flag is being lowered. Buglers were expected to know at least 25 different bugle calls. Notice there are no valves on the bugle; all notes are produced by the player's embouchure (application of the mouth to the mouthpiece).

Photo credit: Don Roberto



In 1862 Congress created a committee to look into the army's finances, and heard testimony from the army paymaster that \$5 million a year could be saved by eliminating the musicians. Congress voted to permanently abolish all regimental bands in July of 1862. It did allow musicians to transfer to brigade bands, depending on the individual commanders, but only 16 were allowed in each band. However, most soldiers and officers loved their regimental bands and found ways to keep them, such as making them privates, having them hide their instruments, or just ignoring the orders. For example, U.S. Grant requested the 4th U.S. Infantry and its band to guard his headquarters at City Point, VA, in 1864. He probably did this more because of the regiment's Mexican War service than for its music, because he was tone deaf.

The Third Artillery Band on Alcatraz The U.S. Third Artillery had a long presence on Alcatraz, and they had their own band. Besides playing for events on Fort Alcatraz, the band no doubt played in 4th of July parades in San Francisco as well as other events there. We are very fortunate to have a group of musicians from Sacramento who come every year to play at the Living History Day on Alcatraz as the Third Artillery Band. On September 30th the band was here and played music of the 1860's for visitors just as they were arriving on the island's dock. They play on period instruments (some are actually from Civil War bands), and everyone who hears the brass instruments notice they have a much mellower tone than modern instruments. People also notice the peculiar configuration of some of the instruments. The tuba, as you notice, points backwards. The reason is that the band usually preceded the troops, and the troops needed to hear the music, especially the instruments that were keeping the beat. Among the instruments they play are the



E flat cornet, the B flat cornet, the alto horn, saxhorn, tuba, and of course the drum. If you wish to hear how these instruments sound, go to <https://makingmusicmag.com/civil-war-bands/> for a short description of each. The musicians who visit us are also known in Sacramento as the El Dorado Brass Band of Old Sacramento, who, like their forebears, give summer concerts and play at special events. If you missed their music on Alcatraz and would like to hear excerpts and perhaps buy their digital album, go to this link: <https://eldoradobrassbandofoldsacramento.bandcamp.com/album/live-from-fortress-alcatraz-the-el-dorado-brass-band-of-old-sacramento-presents-the-3rd-u-s-artillery-band> For more photos of the band, go to the “Activities” page of the FOCWA website and click on “Past Activities on Alcatraz”.



Living History Day on Alcatraz Re-enactors appeared on the dock of Alcatraz to welcome visitors and to tell the Civil War history of the island. Among the highlights of the day were: tours of Fort Alcatraz; a speech by the 1863 Governor of California, Frederick Low; cannon drills; and of course day long concerts by the band. The average number of people taking the tours was about 40, which shows the interest people have of the military story of Alcatraz- even among those from other countries. The cannon drills were especially popular, since visitors could participate in the exercise, if they wished. We are indebted to the very committed artillery re-enactors who came all the way from Nevada to participate in the day’s activities. Photo Credit: Steven Hormel

The Governor reassures San Franciscans that they are well protected by the U.S. Army on Alcatraz

Halloween at Fort Point

Thanks to Ranger Makoto, there will be Halloween activities at Fort Point on Sunday, October 29th, from 10 am to 4 pm. This event drew hundreds of people last year and was a real hit with children. The fort is the perfect place to hear ghost stories, make s’mores, and have a square dance. Re-enactors are encouraged to help out - you



can contact Ranger Makoto via the Fort Point website <https://www.facebook.com/search/str/fort+point%2C+san+francisco/keywords> blended featured posts

Military History of Alcatraz Workshop FOCWA member, military historian, and author of the book, *Fortress Alcatraz*, John Martini will be giving an in-depth history of Alcatraz as a fort and later a military prison on the island on Sunday, October 22nd, at 9:30 a.m. John will give a slide lecture in the staff lunch room, then take participants on a walk around the island to show where gun emplacements were, the location of the old barracks and officer's quarters, and will give a tour of the Citadel. This is the perfect time to ask John all those nagging questions you've had about Fort Alcatraz, such as how did they load those huge cannonballs into those huge cannons? Parking is free on non-metered streets on Sundays; there is also a parking structure right across from Pier 33 at 55 Francisco St. which usually charges \$18 for the day if you arrive before 9 am (\$20 after that).

Resources:

<http://music.allpurposeguru.com/2013/11/civil-war-regimental-bands-banned-and-disbanded/>

San Francisco Civil War Roundtable <https://www.facebook.com/SanFranciscoCivilWarRoundTable/>



FOCWA member Frank Avila shows the medical tools used by doctors in the 1860's on Living History Day. He described surgical procedures, medicines, and common practices in army hospitals.

Californians donated more than a third of all donations to the U.S. Sanitary Commission, which ran most of the army hospitals. It was the predecessor to the American Red Cross.

FOCWA member Gary Hormel leads a tour of Fort Alcatraz. Gary dresses as Captain Joseph Stewart, who served as commander of Alcatraz from 1859 - 1861. Photos credit: Steven Hormel

