

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

February 2019

Steve Johnson, Editor

Volunteers Welcome Again on Alcatraz The rangers on Alcatraz are again welcoming volunteers to help out on the island with dock announcements, programs, and patrols. We will soon propose a schedule for FOCWA members to give cannon drills, lead Fort Alcatraz programs, and give tours of the Citadel. In the meantime, you can contact Ranger Wendy Solis and let her know your availability so she can plan out the day's schedule and include your participation.

Fort Point Living History Day has been tentatively re-scheduled for Saturday, February 23rd. Please set aside this date because we will need volunteers to rotate sitting at the FOCWA recruitment table. This is one of the few times we can recruit local people to join our organization, so you would be doing a great service to our organization if you would assist us in this important endeavor.

The USS Cyane - Historic Ship of the West Coast The sloop of war USS *Cyane* figured prominently in several important actions that affected the history of California. She was built at the Boston Navy Yard and commissioned in 1838. Her cannons consisted of 18 32-pounders and 4 24-pounders. Naval sloops typically had a compliment of 140 officers and crew, often

Dates to Remember

Sunday, Feb. 17th, 2019

Board meeting, 10 am, Alcatraz

Tuesday, Feb. 19, 2019

Peninsula CW Roundtable

Lecture "The Generals of Shiloh"
by Larry Tagg, 11:30 a.m. at
Harry's Hoffbrau, Redwood City

Thursday, Feb. 21, 2019

San Francisco CW Roundtable

Lecture "Tom Custer's Civil War",
6:30 pm Gold Mirror Restaurant,
800 Taraval, S.F.

Saturday, February 23, 2019

Fort Point Living History Day 10
am to 5 pm



including a detachment of marines. The *Cyane's* first duty was in the Mediterranean to patrol for pirates, and in 1845 was sent to the Pacific coast. There she joined Commodore Sloat's Pacific squadron and, under the command of Captain William Mervine, members of the crew landed on the beach at Monterey in July, 1846. The marines and sailors marched up to the custom house and raised the American flag, signifying that California was now a United States possession. The ship then took John C. Fremont's California battalion along to help in the capture of San Diego. Later during the Mexican American War, the ship burned a small fleet at Guaymas and captured the towns of La Paz and Mazatlán.

In 1857 the *Cyane* assisted in the removal of William Walker and 150 filibusters from Nicaragua. Filibusters were Americans who were trying to establish slave states in Central America; Walker had taken over the Nicaraguan government by force-of-arms and ruled his slave state for two years until local armies forced him out. This incident convinced the North that the South intended to make all of the Americas slave states; using the U.S. Navy to remove Walker convinced Southerners that the U.S. government was against slavery.

The involvement of the *Cyane* in the *Chapman* incident is well-known. When Asbury Harpending tried to sneak out of San Francisco harbor with his crew aboard the sloop *Chapman* — with the plan to seize ships loaded with California gold off the Mexican coast and take it to the South — they were boarded by police and officers from the *Cyane*. The Southern sympathizers ended up in prison on Alcatraz.

During the Civil War and after, the *Cyane* patrolled the waters off the West Coast and the South American coast. She was retired in 1871 at the Mare Island Naval station.

The Center for Living History in Monterey every year re-creates the landing of sailors from Sloat's squadron and the raising of the U.S. flag at the Custom House. The non-profit group has a goal of building a replica of the *Cyane* to be used for historical re-enactments and sailings.

Wouldn't it be fantastic if a replica of the *Cyane* were to come to the Bay Area, where re-enactors could portray the capture of the *Chapman* and the prisoners brought to Alcatraz? What a Living History Day that would be!

Check out the Center's website, which provided some of the information for this article. They are accepting donations for the building of the *Cyane* replica. <http://www.cyane.org/home>



Memberships - Sill Due If you haven't sent in your FOCWA membership forms and dues for 2019, please do so. Only 5 members have renewed so far. If you can only participate financially, that will help keep the organization alive by funding our activities: Living History Days, maintaining the island's one cannon, providing Union uniforms for volunteers, and more. The membership form and information is on our website.

Board Meeting There will be a meeting of the Board on Sunday, February 17th on Alcatraz. Issues to be discussed: changes to the organization's by-laws; recruitment for the FOCWA table at the San Francisco History Days in the Old Mint, the first weekend in March; planning for the next Living History Day in May; ideas for recruiting young people to our organization. All members are invited to come. Meeting will start in the library at 10 a.m.

Excerpts from the description of Larry Tagg's Lecture on the 19th:

When war broke out in Charleston Harbor in April 1861, hundreds of new generals had to be minted to command hundreds of thousands of new soldiers. These new warrior-leaders were not professionals, but were elevated overnight from a hodge-podge of street-level occupations. Of the 63 brigade-and-up leaders at Shiloh presented in this book, only 14 were serving as career soldiers when Fort Sumter fell, a year before the battle. Thirteen more were lawyers, prominent in their communities and well-connected. Twelve were politicians, including the previous Vice President of the United States, now a Confederate. There were five businessmen (including an Iowa hatter), four plantation owners, two teachers, a millwright, a sheriff, a blacksmith, a riverboat man, a geologist, a horse breeder, a bishop, a newspaper editor, a farmer, a cotton broker, a stagecoach operator, a bridge engineer, a Navy ordnance officer, and an architect. The most famous of them all, Ulysses S. Grant, was clerking at his father's dry goods store in Illinois.

The consequences of the Battle of Shiloh were profound. Strategically, the Union armies, by defeating the Confederate concentration of the Army of the Mississippi, opened the way to capturing the rail hub of Corinth on May 30 and the city of Memphis on June 6, 1862, two months after the battle. The horrific casualty totals that appeared in the nation's newspapers, however, produced both the most immediate and the longest-lasting result of the battle: its effect on the nation's psyche. More than twenty thousand men lay on the field killed or wounded at the battle's end (and 19 of the 63 leaders on these pages), a number which shocked and dismayed the entire American public. These were unimaginable losses, higher than the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and Mexican War combined. In the Eastern Theater, news of the holocaust convinced Major General George McClellan, stalled on the Yorktown Peninsula, that his campaign must be won by strategy and maneuver, to avoid the sort of hard fighting that had produced such hideous gore at Shiloh.

Resources:

"The Army of the Pacific, 1860-1866" by Aurora Hunt (2004 edition, Stackpole Books)

<http://www.peninsulacivilwarroundtable.org>

<https://www.facebook.com/SanFranciscoCivilWarRoundTable/>