



NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz



February 2026

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In this issue: The Provost Marshal

A Coyote Visits the Island

The news of a coyote swimming to and landing on Alcatraz on January 21 captured the attention of the local and even national media, after a video was posted online showing this remarkable event. You can see the video here https://www.reddit.com/r/coyote/comments/1qjucji/coyote_swims_to_alcatraz_aidan_and_dan_alcatraz/ People have been amazed that not only could a coyote swim (they are actually good swimmers) but that a coyote could survive the 50° temperature of the bay waters. After searching the island the rangers generally believed the coyote likely did not survive and was probably washed back into



Dates to Remember

**Saturday, February 7
Living History Day**

the bay by the high tide. But they underestimated the resilience of this coyote, because three days later the coyote was spotted on the parade ground by a tourist who took this photo. Can it live on the island? There are plenty of bushes in which to shelter, leftover rainwater, and mice and birds to feed on. Now comes the question - should it be allowed to stay, as part of the natural migration of coyotes to a new territory, as happened on Angel Island? Or should it be removed because of the number of people who visit the island,

and because it will become a predator on the migrating bird population? This is a question the natural resources rangers will have to decide in the coming weeks.

Living History Day at Fort Point

The plan for the Fort Point Living History Day on February 7th has been confirmed and will include medical displays, an exhibit by the U.S. Balloon Corps, cannon drills, a cooking demonstration, tours, lectures, fife and drum music, and more. The fort hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and admission is free.



The Role of the Provost Marshal

In 1863 the U.S. Army (and the Confederate Army as well) established a unit commanded by the Provost Marshal whose duties were manifold: recruit men into the army, search for deserters, watch for spies, imprison disorderly or drunk soldiers, and deal with disloyal civilians. They were, in effect, the military police force, and were usually attached to a division in the field or at a military post.¹ The first Provost Marshal for the Union Army was General Andrew Porter, appointed in February, 1862.

As the war dragged on, provost clerks in many Northern states had difficulties in recruiting men, and in some areas were attacked, especially after the Conscription Act of 1863. Enrolling officers were pelted with eggs, harassed, or run out of town. At least 34 were killed.²

That wasn't the case in California, where men willingly signed up to join the army and conscription wasn't an issue. The duties of the provost marshals - one in Northern California, one in Southern California - mostly involved imprisoning soldiers who broke the regulations or violated the law. Soldiers in California who got into trouble usually wound up at Alcatraz. Since there were Southern sympathizers living in San Francisco, a small Provost office was set up south of Market Street whose officers kept an eye on suspicious civilians and their activities. Provost officers may have had a hand in arresting the conspirators aboard the schooner *Chapman* and delivering them to Alcatraz.³

Today the U.S. Army Provost Marshal General is a woman, Brigadier General Sarah Albrycht, something the soldiers in the 1860s could not have conceived of.⁴

¹ National Park Service, Harpers Ferry NP <https://www.nps.gov/places/provost-marshal-chief-of-military-police.htm>

² Shannon Smith Bennett, "Draft Resistance & Rioting", in *Civil War America, A Social and Cultural History*. p. 9

³ for the full story of the Chapman incident, go to <https://civilwartalk.com/threads/confederate-privateers-in-california.92003/>

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Army_Provost_Marshal_General