

# NEWSLETTER

## Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

April 2023

Steve Johnson, Editor

*Inside this issue: Soldier's Pay*

### New Members for FOCWA

We are pleased to welcome four new members to the Friends of Civil War Alcatraz: Ron Bischel, Ray Kiddy, and Anthony Vranicar. They expressed an interest in joining our organization while attending the Living History Day at Fort Point. Also new is Dave Myers from the 3rd Artillery Band. Thanks to an anonymous donor, all four were given a one year membership and will now be receiving our newsletter and a membership card. Welcome all, and you are welcome to join us for Living History Day on Alcatraz in return for spending some time at our information table that day.

### Living History Day on Alcatraz

By now you will have received the email about participating at the Living History Day on Alcatraz. We are pleased that the Third Artillery Band will be returning to the island to play period melodies and martial tunes during the day. We will also have tables displaying medicines of the time and soldiers' equipment and uniforms. Tours of the fort will be given by our members who are also Park Service volunteers. We will need members to be at our information table to chat with folks and answer questions they might have.



Members Robert Mayer and John Ferris explain the items a soldier would carry while on sentry duty at Fort Alcatraz, at the last Living History Day.

### Memorial Day at the Presidio

Members of FOCWA will be joining the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War in welcoming families who are visiting the national cemetery on Memorial Day, which will be on Monday, May 29th. We typically stand at the entrance to give out small flags to children, salute veterans, and listen to anyone who wants to tell their personal stories or of their loved ones. We also do a cemetery tour around noon at different gravesites to talk about the Civil War notables buried there. Afterward we have a picnic at 2 pm on the grounds of the Presidio.

### Dates to Remember

**Saturday, April 15, 2023**  
**Alcatraz Living History Day**  
**8 am - 4 pm**

**Monday, May 29, 2023**  
**Memorial Day at the**  
**San Francisco Presidio**

Anyone wishing to join us at 10 a.m., or take the tour at noon and stay for the picnic, are most welcome.

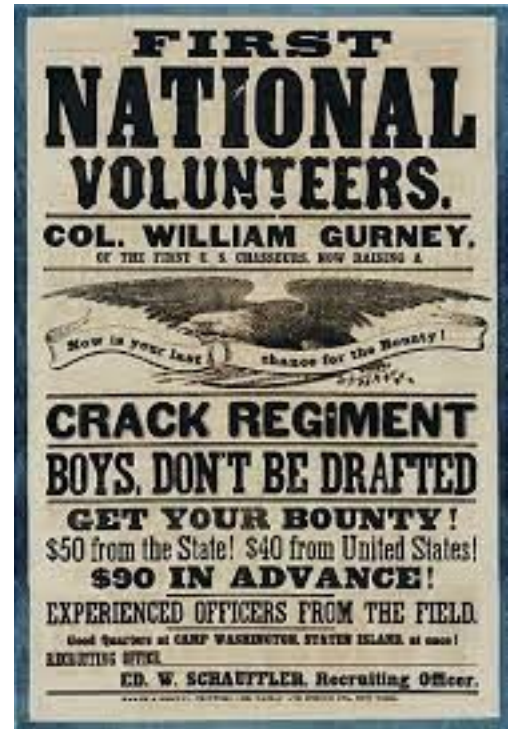
## How Soldiers Were Paid during the Civil War

At the beginning of the Civil War enlisted soldiers were paid \$11 a month.<sup>1</sup> Most states offered a bounty to entice men to join - from \$100 to \$350 offered by Rhode Island.<sup>2</sup> The bounties were intended to assist soldier's family while they were away from the farm. By mid-1861 when it looked like it was going to be a prolonged war, Congress approved a bounty of \$100 to all soldiers enlisting for three years. But this wasn't to be paid until the soldier was discharged, so it wasn't that great of an incentive. However, many states continued to offer a bounty of their own, which made enlisting more attractive. In 1863 the California legislature set aside a Soldiers' Relief Fund of \$600,000 as additional compensation to volunteers in federal service.<sup>3</sup>

Also in 1863, as losses mounted and enlistments fell, Congress passed the Conscription Act, which required men between 20 and 45 to register for the draft. A federal bounty of \$300 was offered as part of the act. Enlistments increased but there was a provision in the law that anyone with \$300 (a yearly wage for most workers) could hire a substitute to fight in his place. This caused bad feelings among the working class that it was "a rich man's war but a poor man's fight".<sup>4</sup> It led to the draft riots in New York in 1863 by mobs who had seen their friends and relatives slaughtered at Fredricksburg and Gettysburg and felt they were being recruited as "cannon fodder".

For many soldiers, though, Army pay was better than factory pay or farm income, especially when the crops failed. Many soldiers saved up their pay and would send money home to their families. This was done through allotments, which was money set aside for a specific family member and sent to the state treasurer who in turn allotted the money to the town official who actually paid the family member.

Soldiers were initially supplied with one pair of cotton drawers and a cotton shirt and wool socks every year. If these got lost or worn out (which they often did) the soldier would have to buy new ones out of their pay. Replacing shoes cost \$1.14, a blanket \$2.95, trousers \$3.95, socks 26¢, a hat \$1.35.<sup>5</sup> The soldier would also use his pay for incidentals like tooth powder, tobacco, sweets, newspapers, etc. And \$2/ month was deducted from his wages for the laundress to clean his clothes.<sup>6</sup>



<sup>1</sup> By June 1861 the rate was \$13. To see the pay for all ranks, see the March 2017 issue of this newsletter on our website

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.newmarketnhhistoricalsociety.org/military/civil-war/a-soldier-s-pay/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.thomaslegion.net/americancivilwar/californiacivilwarhistory.html>

<sup>4</sup> "A Poor Man's Fight" by William Marvel in the NPS E-book Library [https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online-books/civil\\_war\\_series/3/sec2.htm](https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online-books/civil_war_series/3/sec2.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Newmarket Historical Society, op. cit.

<sup>6</sup> "Tubs and Suds - Civil War Laundresses in the Field, Camp, and Hospital" by Virginia Mescher [http://www.raggedsoldier.com/final\\_laundry\\_vv.pdf](http://www.raggedsoldier.com/final_laundry_vv.pdf) Laundry costs varied by location and by year

There was a paymaster for every two regiments. In the case of troops in the Bay Area, there was probably only one paymaster, a colonel. He would disperse funds to company commanders, who would have an assistant to disperse funds to the troops. Army regulations required payments to be made on the last day of February, April, June, August, October, and December. Troops were mustered in companies and paraded to the pay table. Officers were paid first, then the enlisted men, in alphabetical order.

In 1861 both the federal and confederate governments issued paper money. This money was not backed by gold<sup>7</sup>, so there was a reluctance at first to use paper notes. But due to a lack of coinage they

became common on both sides. The U.S. bills were known as “Greenbacks” because of their color, and were in denominations of \$5, \$10, and \$20. At first they were signed by hand but soon the signatures had to be printed. Again because of the shortage of coins, change was given in the form of postage stamps in denominations of 1c, 2c, 3c, 5c, 12c, and 24c. Eventually the U.S. Treasury Department had to print images of postage stamps on non-gummed paper to meet the demand for change.

In California, however, coins in the 1850s and 1860s were more plentiful due to the gold coming out of the Sierras, and later the silver coming out of the mines in Nevada.<sup>8</sup> (Also, Section 34 of the 1850 California constitution had actually banned the use of paper money.<sup>9</sup>) The metals were turned into coins at the San Francisco mint and were used in everyday commerce. Since most San Francisco merchants would only accept gold or silver coin for payments, I suspect that’s how soldiers were paid at the time. But further research is required.



taken from *The Soldier in Our Civil War: a Pictorial History of the Conflict, 1861-1865*, edited by Paul F. Mottelay and T. Campbell-Copeland (1886)

<sup>7</sup> The paper money was backed by bonds, which could later be redeemed with gold

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.coinworld.com/news/us-coins/coin-less-years-in-the-1860s-and-1870s.html>

<sup>9</sup> “Why did California ban paper money in 1850?” by Shala Howell <https://caterpickles.com/2016/11/22/why-did-california-ban-paper-money-in-1850/>