



NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz



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Steve Johnson, Editor

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Island News

High season has already started, with boats full and sold out for every weekend in April. Rangers Loren and Eleanor will be leaving the island for their next assignment - Alaska! To celebrate Women's History Month, Alcatraz recently hosted programs about women in the National Park Service. Former ranger Lori Brosnan, volunteer and former child resident Jolene Babyak, and volunteer Constance Smith all gave presentations about their roles in telling the story of Alcatraz from a woman's perspective.

Dates to Remember

Saturday, April 11
Living History Day
on Alcatraz

Memorial Day
May 25

Living History Day Coming to Alcatraz Island

The island will be the setting for the spring Living History Day on Alcatraz. Participating groups include the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, the 20th Maine, the Third Artillery Brass Band, the U.S. Balloon Corps, Fife and Drum Corps, and of course members of the Friends of Civil War Alcatraz, which is hosting the event. Events include tours of the fort and the citadel, displays of soldier's equipment, medical equipment, and weapons of the Civil War. Let your friends know about the event, which only happens twice a year.



The Third Artillery Band re-creates the music of the band that was stationed on Alcatraz during the Civil War.

Paymaster Major Hendricks explains the currency used at the time of the Civil War to interested visitors.



The Hard Fighting in the Desert by California Troops

In August of 1861 delegates from the territory of New Mexico (most of whom were originally from the South) voted to secede from the Union, and the early in 1862 the Confederate government incorporated the southern halves of New Mexico and Arizona into the Confederate Territory of Arizona.¹ The capital was Mesilla, about 4 miles SW of today's Las Cruces, New Mexico. There were plans to expand the slave territory to the west, including to the port at Los Angeles. But the plans were blocked by volunteers in the U.S. Army from California, New Mexico, and Colorado.

In March of 1862 the Confederates - mostly men of the Texas Mounted Rifles - attacked the Union forces at Glorietta Pass, a crucial location on the Sante Fe Trail. Their plan was to drive out



Union forces, attack Fort Union, and gain access to the mines and railroads in northern New

Mexico. But Union volunteer infantry from Colorado - miners and farmers - under Col. John Slough marched 400 miles through howling wind and deep snow to reinforce the troops at the pass.² In the three day battle the Confederates were often outflanked but managed to hold on to the pass. However, when their supply wagons were discovered and burned by Union units from New Mexico and Colorado, the Confederates had to withdraw back to Texas. This was considered the "Gettysburg of the West" because it checked the advance of the Confederacy into the West.



The following month, in the southern portion of New Mexico territory (which included parts of Arizona) Confederate cavalry from Tucson met the Cali-

fornia Volunteer cavalry at Picacho Pass where there was a skirmish and the Confederates were turned back and eventually run out of Tucson. But this wasn't the end of it for California troops. They now had to contend with raids and attacks by Apaches, the great warriors of the Southwest. The Apaches had the advantage of knowing the territory intimately, and could appear out of bushes and rock piles without warning. They were armed with rifles, revolvers, and hatches and were excellent horsemen. The fighting was as vicious as any battles in the East. Plus soldiers had to endure heat, dehydration, disease and fatigue like their brothers in the Army of the Potomac. Here is what the author of *California and the Civil War* had to say about California troops:

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confederate_Arizona

² <https://blog.togetherweserved.com/civil-war-the-battle-of-glorieta-pass/>

In sum, there was nothing “soft” about California Volunteers’ service in the West. They faced the same paramount danger as the men back east: disease, which killed twice as many men in the Civil War as combat. They also faced danger unique to service in the West, namely the land itself. A California cavalryman on patrol in Arizona could die of heatstroke and dehydration in 120° F heat in the summer or freeze to death in a minus 20° F New Mexico winter. Californians had an additional burden to bear because surrender was rarely a viable option. Prisoners were sometimes kept alive for their hostage value, but usually they provided grisly entertainment at victory celebrations.³

Top Civil War Movies (selected from a list by The Hollywood Reporter)⁴

Ride with the Devil Future *Brokeback Mountain* director Ang Lee probed the complex, contradictory racial politics of America's bloodiest conflict with this handsomely shot epic about a youthful band of Missouri outlaws fighting for the Confederate cause. Tobey Maguire, Jeffrey Wright and folk singer Jewel lead an attractive young cast.

Cold Mountain Aspiring to the grand historical sweep of *Gone With The Wind*, Anthony Minghella's Civil War romance is a flawed but sumptuous saga featuring an all-star cast and some brilliantly orchestrated set-piece battles. Jude Law stars as a wounded Confederate soldier struggling to make it back home to his sweetheart, played by Nicole Kidman. Renee Zellweger won an Oscar for her rambunctious supporting role.

Gettysburg Originally planned as a TV miniseries for Ted Turner's TNT network, director Ronald Maxwell's painstaking adaptation of Michael Shaara's Pulitzer Prize-winning book about the 1863 battle of Gettysburg eventually became a forensically detailed cinematic epic spanning more than four hours. The huge ensemble cast includes Martin Sheen, Jeff Daniels and Tom Berenger, plus cameos by Civil War documentarian Ken Burns and Turner himself.

The Red Badge of Courage Adapted from Stephen Crane's definitive Civil War novella, director John Huston's visually striking battlefield drama stars real-life WWII hero Audie Murphy as Henry Fleming, a Union private desperate to prove he is no coward after deserting his regiment. Huston's darker, longer edit was notoriously cut to ribbons by MGM, but even the mutilated version remains a flawed classic.

Glory An Oscar-winning Denzel Washington portrays a volunteer soldier in Edward Zwick's stirring paean to heroism and brotherhood, partly based on the letters of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, played here by Matthew Broderick. *Glory* pays overdue tribute to the 37,000 African-Americans who died fighting for the Yankee cause, but does not shy from showing the racism and inequality that existed in the Union ranks.

Lincoln Daniel Day Lewis won an Academy Award for his Mount Rushmore-sized depiction of Abraham Lincoln in Spielberg's brainy historical epic, which deftly unravels the President's fraught maneuvers to push through the emancipation of slaves at the end of the Civil War. Though a talk-heavy political drama at heart, *Lincoln* features a spectacular recreation of the battlefield at Petersburg, Virginia.

Friendly Persuasion (Editor's pick) The 1956 Civil War drama features Gary Cooper as Jess Birdwell, a Quaker farmer in southern Indiana. As the war reaches his community, Birdwell faces a moral crisis, attempting to maintain his pacifist beliefs while protecting his family and farm.

³ Richard Hurley, *California and the Civil War*, p. 73

⁴ <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lists/critics-picks-10-best-civil-905713/>