

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

MAY 2016

Editor: Steve Johnson

Alcatraz and Mare Island, 1861 It is not hard to imagine the nervousness the U.S. Army was feeling about California at the outbreak of the Civil War. Both houses of the state legislature were dominated by the Democratic (pro-slavery) party. Reports were reaching Washington about Confederate sympathizers organizing militias, with the possible intent of taking over Union forts and facilities. Of particular concern was the armory in Benecia where muskets were stored, and the powder magazines at the Mare Island Naval Base in Vallejo. The first thing the Navy did to protect the

Dates to Remember

Monday, May 30, 2016

Memorial Day Ceremonies at the Presidio of San Francisco 10 am

June 4-5 Civil Way Days

Angel Island State Park

Sunday, June 12, 2016

FOCWA Board Meeting
(tentative) Place TBD



Mare Island Naval Base in the 1860's. Photo Credit: Vallejo Naval & Historical Museum

gunpowder was to assign the U.S. Coast Guard steamer *Active* to anchor off the magazine building in August of 1861. The captain was ordered “to keep his guns ready”. At about that time in Washington, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells asked Secretary of War Simon Cameron to send a company of soldiers to protect the magazines. On November

2nd, Asst. Adjutant General Richard Drum detached one sergeant, two corporals, and fourteen privates from Fort Alcatraz for protective duty at Mare Island. Sgt. Poe of the Third Artillery arrived with his men on November 5th. Several days later ten more soldiers came up from Alcatraz to reinforce the guard.

In January Major Leonard came to check on the men and found the discipline lax and their duty there to be of little service to Mare Island. He proposed to Commandant Gardner of the Naval Yard to send them back to Alcatraz, where discipline was stricter. Gardner objected to this; even though the soldiers were of no use, they had been requested by the Secretary of the Navy and he wasn't about to have them removed. But in March of 1862 the *Lancaster*, flagship of the U.S. Pacific Squadron, arrived for yard overhaul with a company of Marines on board. At this point, Gardner had the soldiers returned to Fort Alcatraz on the steamer *C.M. Weber*, and the Marines took over the sentry duty over the magazines. The soldiers, who had complained about the duty at Mare Island, were glad to be back at Fort Alcatraz, even though duty there was just as isolating and monotonous. Perhaps it was because the views were better from Alcatraz.

Details of this episode are from the book, "A Long Line of Ships: Mare Island's Century of Naval Activity", by Arnold S. Lott, Lt. Commander, U.S.N. Thanks to member Fred Bohmfalk for contributing this.

Future Dates

- The next meeting of the Board has been tentatively set for June 12th. Members will be notified by email about time and location
- The next Living History Day at Alcatraz has been set for Saturday, October 1st.

"And by the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within designated states, and parts of states, are, and henceforth shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and the navy authorities thereof will, recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons..."

Excerpt from the Emancipation Proclamation of President Abraham Lincoln
Contributed by Steve Boggart