

# NEWSLETTER

## Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

June 2017

Editor: Steve Johnson

**Memorial Day at the Presidio National Cemetery** The 149th annual commemoration of those who died in service to their country was celebrated at the Presidio in San Francisco on Monday, May 29th. It began with a parade, which included veterans, ROTC units, the Travis Air Force brass band, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, and Friends of Civil War Alcatraz. Dignitaries gave speeches about the appropriateness of spending a day thanking living veterans and remembering those who sacrificed so much in the call of duty. Among the speakers was a moving and powerful talk by Major Joshua Mantz (ret.) who spoke of his dying on the operating table in Iraq, being revived after 15 minutes, and always suffering the guilt of living while so many of his comrades were not so fortunate. He said it is citizens who honor and remember the sacrifice of military men and women that help validate their service and help them heal. After the speeches, veterans of each branch of the armed services in attendance were asked to stand as the band played their service's march. Once the ceremony was concluded, members of FOCWA and the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, Camp 24, positioned themselves at the headstones of particular Civil War notables to tell visitors their story. The following articles are about the National Cemetery itself, and the Civil War soldiers — as well as a woman — who were distinguished for their service.

### The San Francisco National Cemetery

In 1884 the War Department set aside 9 acres in the Presidio for the first national cemetery on the West Coast. The first internments were for the remains of the dead from the old post cemetery as well as the remains of soldiers from abandoned forts and camps all over the western frontier.



### Dates to Remember

#### Thursday, June 15, 2017

San Francisco Civil War Roundtable Lecture: "The Porter Conspiracy" 6:45 pm dinner, 7:45 lecture

#### Tuesday, June 20, 2017

Peninsula Civil War Roundtable Lecture: "Two British Generals & the Control of N. America" 11:30 am

#### Saturday, August 19, 2017

Civil War Day at Ft. Point

It was the beginning of national cemeteries reaching beyond the battlefields of the Civil War. Over time the cemetery was expanded to reach its present size of 28 acres, and in the decade from 1920 - 1930 the army built a new entrance, a concrete rostrum for ceremonies (still used today), a chapel, and expanded stone walls. The cemetery has close to 30,000 graves, including hundreds of buffalo soldiers, Civil War generals, and 35 recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor. There is a monument to the over 500 unknown soldiers buried in a plot on the north side of the cemetery.

## **Notable Persons from the Civil War interred at the National Cemetery**

These FOCWA members volunteered their time to talk to visitors who visited the cemetery after the ceremonies:

**The Civil War Monument** (Steve Johnson) Every state involved in the Civil War could receive funds for a Civil War monument from the government, and this one near the entrance was dedicated in 1897. It commemorates the servicemen of the Union Army who garrisoned all the forts and camps throughout the West, and the Union Navy who protected the gold shipments coming out of San Francisco. It is also a talking point about California's role during the Civil War, which included keeping the Union economy strong through its shipments of gold to the east, supplying 17,000 volunteers to the Union Army in the west, and stopping the advance of the Confederate Army into Arizona Territory.

(Editor's note: While standing at the monument a Filipino man and his wife came to the monument and wanted to know its significance. After giving them a brief talk, I asked the man if he was a vet because of his soldier's jacket. He said that he had served in Vietnam and that this was the first Memorial Day commemoration he had ever attended because it had always been too hard for him. He began to cry and said that he had fought for his country and "now they are taking away our freedoms". I hugged him and told him that I was very, very glad he had come. For me that was the most precious moment of the day)



**Pauline Cushman-Fryer** (Constance Smith) Pauline was an accomplished actress and she used those skills to acquire information from Confederate officers while performing in the South; her efforts helped the Union Army, for example, in the battle of Chattanooga. Unfortunately on one occasion Confederate pickets discovered her drawings of battle plans in her shoes, and she was arrested and condemned to hang as a spy. As luck would have it, Union troops arrived and set her and other prisoners free. She was made an honorary major by President Lincoln, and after the war went on the speaker circuit to talk of her exploits. Her headstone reads "Union Spy".

**Maj. General Rufus Shafter** (Brad Schall) Born in Michigan, Rufus was a teacher and farmer before he joined the 7th Michigan Volunteer Infantry. At the battle of Ball's Bluff he distinguished himself by continuing to fight even after being wounded; he concealed his wounds to stay with his regiment. He later led the 17th U.S. Colored Infantry in the battle of Nashville. During the Indian Wars he became known as "Pecos Bill". He became commander of the Department of California, and was responsible for the expansion of prison buildings on the parade ground of Alcatraz in 1900; the capacity of the prison would rise to 480.

Photo credit: William Bjornstad at [findagrave.com](http://findagrave.com)

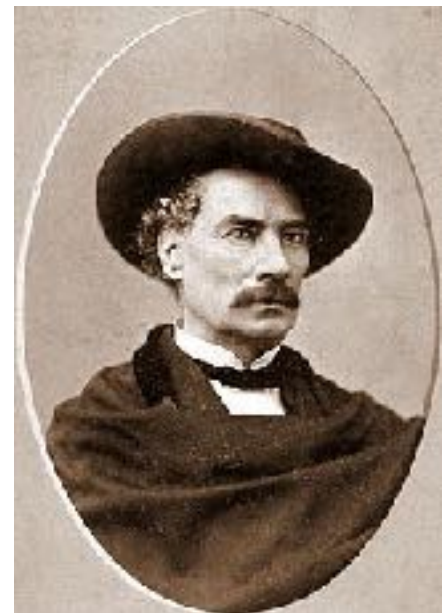


**Captain John Stewart** (Gary Hormel)



Joseph Stewart graduated from West Point in 1842 and became a career soldier. He fought in the Mexican-American War and at its end had become a second lieutenant. He came to California in 1852 and was involved in the war with the Bannock tribe in Oregon. He returned to the east coast in 1853, but was assigned the next year to the west coast again to lead troops in the Rogue River Indian War. By 1859 the fort on Alcatraz was nearly complete, and the now Captain Stewart became its first commander. The next year he was assigned to pacify the tribes in Utah, culminating in the battle of Pyramid Lake. He later was put in charge of recruiting and training volunteers at Fort Point. (Two of his children were born at Fort Point, and another on Alcatraz). Never one to stay idle, Stewart went on to serve in Sitka, Washington Territory, Boston, and Washington, D.C. He died in Berkeley in 1904.

**John C. Cremony** (John Gee) John Cremony also served in the Mexican-American war, and was a lieutenant with the 1st Massachusetts Infantry. After the war he worked as a reporter for the *Boston Herald* and then on the U.S. Boundary Commission to map the new boundary between the United States and Mexico. He was living in California at the outbreak of the Civil War and was commissioned as a captain of Company B of the 2nd California Cavalry. He distinguished himself while serving under the command of Col. Carlton's California column (noted for its repulse of Texas troops in the Arizona Territory). Later he was given his own command over the 1st Battalion of Native California Cavalry.



After the war he became a journalist and a writer. His book *Life among the Apaches* is still regarded as one of the best descriptions of Apache culture. Credit: [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com)

**Capt. Edgar W. Blake** (Ken Felton) Edgar Blake was born in Massachusetts and was living in Evansville, Wisconsin when the war broke out. He enlisted in the 13th Wisconsin Infantry and was



given the rank of Captain. The regiment was given the duty of seeking out guerrillas in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama. During their enlistment the 13th marched over 1,000 miles! Later the Wisconsin men were assigned patrol duty in New Orleans and finally were assigned to assert Union control over San Antonio until November of 1865. After the war Blake stayed for awhile in Bozeman, Montana Territory, then continued west to New Tacoma, Washington in 1880. He eventually made his way to San Francisco, where he died in 1882. The Adjutant General of the state of Wisconsin had this to say about these soldiers: “The 13th has never been engaged in a general engagement, but from their first experience of the hardships of a soldiers life, in the endless — and apparently aimless — marches on the western frontier...they have uniformly performed their whole duty, as ordered by their superior officers.” (Report, September 1868)

Information and photo credit: Wisconsin Veteran’s Museum

**Looking Ahead** The date for the next Living History Day on Alcatraz has been set for Saturday, September 30th, 2017. Re-enactors, FOCWA members, and NPS volunteers who wish to participate should check the FOCWA website in early September for information.

## Resources

San Francisco Civil War Roundtable <http://www.sfcwrt.com/170615.html>

The Peninsula Civil War Roundtable <http://www.peninsulacivilwarroundtable.org>

San Francisco National Cemetery <https://www.cem.va.gov/CEMs/nchp/sanfrancisco.asp>

Mourning practices during the 1860’s - 1890’s

<https://www.nps.gov/jofl/learn/historyculture/upload/MourningArticle2011.rtf>

As at most national cemeteries, flags are placed at every grave prior to Memorial Day by local scout groups.



Gary Hormel, dressed as a captain in the Artillery, and Constance Smith, dressed as a lady in mourning, prepare to leave the cemetery. In the 1860's, if a lady lost her husband she would spend a year in mourning, and would wear dark colors and clothes that were prescribed by the norms of the time. Men, on the other hand, would mourn for only 6 months, and would wear a dark mourning suit. Women were expected to be socially inactive during mourning, while men, of course, would continue to work.