

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

July 2023

Steve Johnson, Editor

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Island News

Several changes to the island staff have taken place in recent weeks. Ranger Christian has been promoted to deputy chief of interpretation for the GGNRA. Taking his place as acting site supervisors for Alcatraz Island will be Rangers Matt Connelly and Roger Fang. Roger will still be the volunteer co-ordinator and Matt will continue to be our liaison with the Parks Service. Ranger Tom Ryan has returned as a seasonal ranger and brings his many years of experience on Alcatraz as a bonus to the staff. Also coming with experience is Ranger Marie Wright, who has worked at many different national parks and has smoothly transitioned into the routines of Alcatraz. The NPS remediation team has completed its work in removing lead dust from A-Block and the citadel, and those areas are now open again for tours. A reminder that any tours of those areas during the day have to take place before 2 pm, at which time the Conservancy guides start their tours of the Citadel. FOCWA volunteers Constance Smith and John Ferris have been going out to the island consistently in the past two months to give programs, and we owe them our gratitude for keeping up our tradition of supporting the Park Service

Dates to Remember
Saturday, August 12
Living History Day
Fort Point
10 am - 5 pm
Saturday, September 9
Zoom Board Meeting
10 am - 11 am

Ft Point Living History Day in August

Plans are proceeding for a big Living History Day at Fort Point on Saturday, Aug. 12, 2023. The rangers at Fort Point have already been working on publicity and the schedule, and FOCWA members will be helping to plan out the day. Members of the 20th Maine will be participating as well as a number of civilian re-enactors. At the beginning of August the schedule will be emailed to our membership along with an invitation to participate. The weather should be warmer than the Living Freezer Day last February, and bigger crowds are expected in the summer.



A Worrisome First Year

In the first year of the Civil War, General Sumner - the commander of the Department of the Pacific - had plenty to worry about. First and foremost were the militias developing in southern California and possibly in Nevada Territory to support the Confederacy. In Utah there were continuing Indian attacks on the stagecoaches bringing mail and telegraph lines bringing news from the East. Tensions were still high in the San Juan islands over the actual border between British North America and the United States. Regular army units were being sent back east to become part of the federal armies there; forts in the West needed to be manned with volunteers. There was a demand for soldiers to deal with all these issues, so with the help of Governor Downey a call went out for volunteers, and close to 17,000 men responded. At first regular army troops had been sent to “various hot spots”, but now they were replaced by California, (and some Oregon and Nevada) volunteers. California Volunteers were typically trained at Alcatraz or Camp Merchant in Oakland and then sent to where they were needed the most.

Troops sent to Southern California

Hearing news that secessionist militias were organizing in Visalia and Los Angeles, General Sumner removed troops from Oregon and sent them to the southland. He sent cavalry south from the Presidio, and ordered the men stationed at Fort Tejon to reinforce the soldiers at Camp Latham (near today’s Culver City) in Los Angeles. Mayor Wilson of that city donated land for the building of a substantial Union garrison (Camp Drum, later named Drum Barracks).¹ Cavalry was sent from there to watch the Colorado River crossing at Yuma to stop secessionists heading East to join the Confederacy.

Troops sent to Nevada and Utah

There were also rumors of secessionist plans to take over the mines around Virginia City, so 20 dragoons under Capt. Moore were sent to Carson City to ascertain the situation and then move on to Virginia City. But the area was really a stronghold of Unionist men, and soon 400 local men had formed companies to protect Union interests and to put down any pro-slavery movements; they were ready to re-enforce Fort Churchill

if needed. In Utah territory, the army wanted to stop Indian attacks on immigrants and the stagecoaches, so Col. Patrick Connor was sent to both monitor the Mormons and suppress the Indians. His brutal war against Shoshone tribe included one of the largest battles fought by Californians during the Civil War and one of its most shameful episodes.²



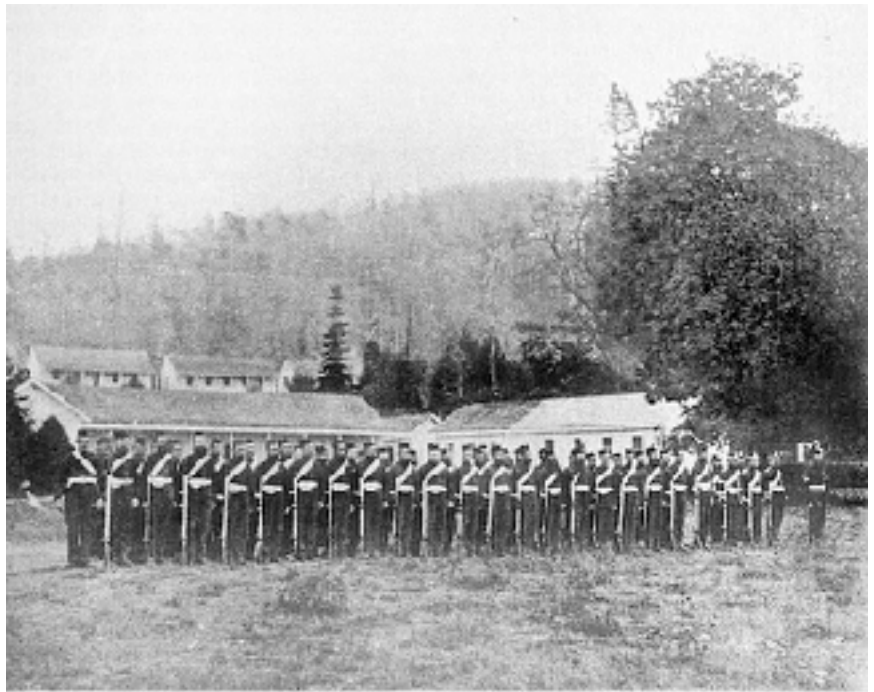
Members of the Nevada Civil War Volunteers prepare for a reenactment

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

² “Over the River Jordan: California Volunteers in Utah during the Civil War” by Tom Generous, in the California Historical Society journal, Summer 1984. Can be viewed at <https://www.militarymuseum.org/Utah.pdf>

Troops sent to San Juan Island

The so-called "Pig War" incident in 1859³ revealed that the tensions between British North America and the United States over the boundary between the two countries were so tense that a shooting war might erupt. Eventually both sides agreed to have a neutral party settle the matter. It wasn't until 1872 that the German Kaiser determined that the San Juan Islands belonged to the United States. But all during that time, both the British and Americans replenished their troops to keep an equal number on both sides of San Juan Island. General Sumner had to monitor the British troops there as well as the British naval station at Esquimalt, Vancouver Is.



British troops on San Juan Island, 1872

Troops sent to Western Forts

Troops trained in the Bay Area, including at Fort Alcatraz and at the Presidio, may have been sent to any number of forts in the west, including the following examples:

Arizona Territory:⁴

Fort Mohave, 4th California Volunteers

Post at Tucson, 1st California Cavalry, Co. A, and 1st California Infantry, Co. G

Fort Bowie, 5th California Infantry

New Mexico:

Fort Cummings, 1st California Volunteer Infantry

California:

Camp Independence, 2nd California Cavalry (Inyo Co.)

Fort Yuma, 1st California Infantry (Imperial Co.)

Camp Wright, 1st California Cavalry (San Diego County)

Fort Bragg, 3rd California Volunteer Infantry, Co. B (Humboldt Co.)

Utah Territory:

Fort Douglas, 3rd California Volunteer Infantry

Washington Territory:

Fort Colville, 2nd California Volunteer Infantry

³ <https://militaryhistorynow.com/2012/06/18/hostilities-with-a-side-of-bacon-the-outrageous-pig-war-of-1859/>

⁴ "Military Posts of the Old Frontier: Arizona - New Mexico" by Frank Schilling <https://www.militarymuseum.org/AZ-NMPosts.pdf>