

# NEWSLETTER

## Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

September 2017

Editor: Steve Johnson

### ***San Francisco Chronicle* reports on Civil War**

**Day at Fort Point** Chronicle reporter Alison Graham recently visited Fort Point during the Civil War Day celebration on August 19th. No doubt the reason was partly tied to all the controversy currently going on about Civil War monuments, the Confederate battle flag, and free speech. The title of the article, in fact, was “Civil War Re-enactment Held Despite Strife” and appeared in the Sunday, August 20 edition of the Chronicle. The reporter wanted to know why the re-enactors at Fort Point wanted to be part of this event, and interviewed Austin Bettencourt, who regularly comes to the Fort Point event held twice a year.

**Dates to Remember**  
**Tuesday, Sept. 19, 2017**  
Peninsula Civil War  
Roundtable Lecture TBD

**Thursday, Sept. 21, 2017**  
San Francisco CW Round-  
table Lecture: “Emory Upton,  
Reformer” 6:45 pm

**Saturday, Sept. 30, 2017**  
Living History Day, Alcatraz  
8:00 am to 4 pm



Re-enactors demonstrate a cannon drill on the Napoleon field piece at Fort Point  
Photo by Paul Kuroda/Special to the Chronicle

Austin said that the re-enactment was meant to show the daily life of a soldier, and to honor the sacrifice of soldiers on both sides during the war. (Though he was wearing the

uniform of a Union soldier, most of his ancestors fought on the Confederate side.) Another re-enactor, Jamin Gjerman, who has been doing re-enactments since he was a child, said the idea is for people to experience things in context, rather than just studying about it. ["We're not there] to make a political statement, we're just telling it like it is."

I would have added that in re-enactments all over the country, the idea is not to open old wounds, or fight new battles; it is to get a visceral feeling of what our ancestors went through during the Civil War. It is common for re-enactors on both sides to shake hands after a mock battle, to sit and swap stories, and to share a meal together. Just as what happened at Gettysburg 50 years after the battle, when veterans of both sides shook hands and swapped stories, as a band of brothers. Out of the Civil War came a united country, which is why on Civil War Days we typically raise the 1861 34-star flag; Lincoln refused calls to take off stars of the Southern states, saying that they were still part of the Union. These days we may not seem like a very united country, but the recent catastrophe in Houston has dramatically shown us that when communities are hurting, Americans do unite and come together to help each other. We should be proud of that.

Alison Graham's article can be purchased for 99 cents at <http://www.pressreader.com/usa/san-francisco-chronicle/20170820>

**Living History Day on Alcatraz** Preparations are now being made for the next Living History Day on Alcatraz — Saturday, September 30, 2017. If you are planning to attend as a volunteer or re-enactor, please go to this page on the FOCWA website which will give you helpful information on how to participate:  
[http://www.friendsofcivilwaralcatraz.org/lhd\\_2017.htm](http://www.friendsofcivilwaralcatraz.org/lhd_2017.htm)

### **Alcatraz Almost Abandoned in 1879**

In the 1870's the Citadel was being used to house officer's families, and by the end of the decade it was so full that the department quartermaster said it was "utterly unfit for use as a habitation by any persons not undergoing penal servitude". When the quartermaster general read this report, he suggested that Alcatraz be abandoned altogether, and move the military prisoners to some other location. However, Maj. Gen. Irwin McDowell, who was commander at the time of the Military Division of the Pacific, wrote to the War Department in defense of Alcatraz as an important post: "The place is the main station in the harbor; one most respected & most thought of; one whose flag all ships salute & from which all are saluted, & it will be retained whether the prisoners are there or not." He won his case, for not only was Alcatraz retained as a post, but in 1880 the first of three sets of officers' homes started to be constructed on the slope east of the citadel.  
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