



NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz



October 2024

Steve Johnson, Editor

In this issue: Cooking for the Army

Island News

The construction on the dock has been completed for now, and the dock area has been cleared of all the fences, cranes, and equipment. Further construction will take place probably in the new year. For right now, visitors arriving on the island can now gather in a group as the ranger gives the welcoming talk. The space under the guard tower is now open and that is where walking tours can begin again. Bill Baker, the last inmate from the penitentiary era has returned to the island, and has been signing his book in the main bookstore. Construction will be



taking place in the coming months on the north end of the cell house, requiring the main bookstore to move; it will be temporarily placed near the administration office in the cell house. Eventually there are plans to build a new bookstore/gift shop and cafe Pier 33. The winter schedule will start at the beginning of November, meaning reduced number of boats going to the island and shorter hours.

The dock area now has more open space again

Dates to Remember
Saturday, October 5
8 am - 4 pm
Living History Day
on Alcatraz
Monday, November 11
Veteran's Day at the
Presidio National Cemetery

Living History Day on Saturday, Oct. 5th

Currently we have 15 confirmed participants for the next Living History Day. There will be tours of Fort Alcatraz, cannon talks, and displays of the equipment carried by a soldier, along with displays of 1860s medicines, money, weapons, and clothing. There will be an exhibit of the U.S. Balloon Corps and the Women's Relief Corps. Visitors will learn about the vital role California played in the Civil War, and how Fort Alcatraz did its part to protect San Francisco Bay from possible attacks by Confederate raiders or foreign navies.

Randall Hawkinson explains "hardtack" to visitors



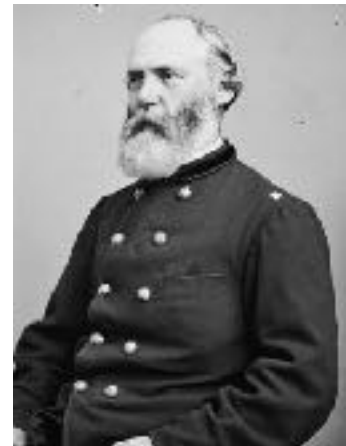
Feeding the Troops

The Union Army had two types of rations during the Civil War: “marching rations” and “camp rations”. Each man was given 16 oz. of hardtack, 12 oz. of salt pork, sugar, coffee, and, and salt to carry in his haversack when on the march. When time allowed, a fire was started to fry the meat, soak the hardtack, and boil water for the coffee. This was meant to keep the soldier from starving but was hardly nutritious. When the regiment was in camp, there was an allotment to every company of peas, beans, flour to make bread, molassas, coffee beans, and vinegar (for taste and to ward off scurvy). Since men in that era typically left the cooking to women, they were at a loss on how to cook decent meals, so food was typically fried or boiled. Usually the company would rely on one or two soldiers who had a rudimentary knowledge of cooking to prepare the meals when in camp, with varying results.¹

The U.S. Sanitary Commission, besides setting up field hospitals, also felt responsible for providing nutritious food to keep soldiers healthy and well fed.

This organization of men and women would collect food such as meat and vegetables and distribute these to camps wherever it was possible to do so. James M. Sanderson, a member of the Commission who had managed a hotel in New York and knew about food service, volunteered his services to the 12th New York Regiment to teach the soldiers how to cook properly. With attention to cleanliness and using the right seasoning and cooking techniques, he showed the men how to make meals that were more palatable and even delicious.

With this success, Sanderson went to the War Department with a proposal that a few men in each company should be trained in the basics of cooking; they would be given the rank of Cook Major, and assigned two privates as assistants. Eventually this idea was approved by the Senate, and Sanderson received a commission as Captain in the Office of Commissary General of Subsistence. He wrote a book which was published and distributed by the army entitled *Camp Fires and Camp Cooking; or Culinary Hints for the Soldier*.²



Captain James Sanderson

In an attempt to prevent scurvy, the Quartermaster issued cubes of dessicated vegetables which could be placed in water to make a stew, but the soldiers thought these tasted like hay and called the cubes “desecrated vegetables” and hated them. Later the army distributed root vegetables like potatoes and onions which could be stored, and canned pickles and sauerkraut, but these weren’t always available.³

By 1862 most regiments had trained cooks to provided three meals a day to soldiers there were in camps. Some camps actually had metal stoves, often that had been abandoned or had been

¹ “Food and Foraging”, U.S. Army Heritage and Education Center, https://ahec.armywarcollege.edu/exhibits/CivilWarImagery/chenev_food.cfm

² Tori Avey, “Civil War Cooking: What the Union Soldiers Ate” <https://www.pbs.org/food/stories/civil-war-cooking-what-the-union-soldiers-ate>

³ Feeding Billy Yank: Union Rations Between 1861 and 1865 <https://www.quartermasterfoundation.org/feeding-billy-yank-union-rations-between-1861-and-1865/>

confiscated from Southern homes. Most often the food was cooked in kettles over open fires that were sheltered from the wind by rocks or bricks. Dutch ovens, or sometimes ovens fashioned with bricks, were used to bake soft bread, which was a real treat for the men. By 1864, with more slaves fleeing to the Union side, some black men were employed by the Army to help with the cooking; this was a job often given to black soldiers as well.

What were some of the recipes that became common in Union camps? They included Fry Meat & Gravy, Hell-fire Stew, Suet

Dumplings, Hoe Cakes, and Dough Gods. To see these recipes (and maybe try them out) go to the website of the American Civil War Association, whose die-hard members for the sake of authenticity have tried these dishes at re-enactments:

<https://www.acwa.org/recipes>

To watch the Ranger Mary at Fort Scott (Kansas) prepare some Civil War era dishes, go to this link:

<https://www.nps.gov/media/video/view.htm?id=7BDB42BE-DC65-436B-BBE5-8FD18F76AEEC>

The soldiers stationed at Fort Alcatraz were fortunate because their meals included fresh bread, coffee, meat from the nearby ranches, and vegetables grown by the Italians and Chinese in gardens south of Market Street. You can see where bread was baked in the old Citadel, underneath the cell house. If available, a ranger or volunteer can take you down there to see the ovens.

California State Parks Is Re-evaluating LH Programs at State Historic Parks

Up to the year 2020 many California State Parks would allow and promote Living History programs at many state historic parks, such as Sutters Fort, Fort Ross, Angel Island, Coloma Gold Discovery site, and Columbia State Park. They included student overnights where fourth graders would dress as settlers or pioneers, and do the daily activities of the people of that time and place. Those programs were discontinued during Covid and have since not returned because the state park's interpretive division is re-evaluating how to interpret history that is broader and more inclusive. In particular, they want programs to include the unpleasant side of history which has been absent in so many narratives - such as the destruction of California's indigenous tribes, the ruining of the environment by the miners, and the racist policies towards the Chinese who had immigrated here. You can read about this here: https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=30464 This has relevance to historical interpretation in the national parks as well. For example, how do we include the fact that soldiers trained at Fort Alcatraz were sent to put down Indian resistance to being removed from their ancestral land? An honest narrative of the fort's history during the 1860s - 1870s would have to include that fact.



Let us at all times remember that all American citizens are brothers of a common country, and should dwell together in the bonds of fraternal feeling. - Abraham Lincoln, November 1860