

NEWSLETTER

Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

JULY 2016

Editor: Steve Johnson

Captain Joseph Stewart, First Commander of

Fort Alcatraz Joseph Stewart was born in Adair County, Kentucky on January 29th, 1822. At the age of 16 he entered West Point as a cadet; his classmates included William Tecumseh Sherman, William S. Rosecrans, and Winfield Scott Hancock. He graduated in 1842, and three years later he married Octavia Cripps Fayssox from Charleston. When the war with Mexico started, Stewart was assigned to Company B of the Third Artillery and achieved the rank of 2nd Lieutenant. His first son Joseph, Jr., was born in 1847, and three years later his second son, William, was born in Rhode Island when Stewart was stationed at Fort Adams.

In 1852 Stewart was transferred to California and then to Oregon to assist in the fight with the Bannock Indians, who resented the intrusion of settlers into their territory. In 1853 Stewart was back on the east coast, where his daughter Mary Elizabeth was born. Soon Stewart was sent back to the west coast to fight in the Rogue River Indian War, after which he established (the second) Fort Umqua near Gardiner, Oregon in 1856. Around this time his wife Olivia died. Three years later, in 1859, now Captain Stewart was assigned to Fort Alcatraz, which had received 86 pieces of artillery; he was put in command of the Third Artillery there. It was in San Francisco that Stewart married 18 year old Esther Moore from Astoria. A notable event at this time was the arrival of the first Japanese vessel to a U.S. port. But Stewart wasn't on Alcatraz very long before he was sent in to Utah Territory in May of 1860. Here the native people had retaliated against traders who had kidnapped two of their women and many settlers were killed. After the Battle of Pyramid Lake, Stewart established a fort on the Carson River

Dates to Remember

Sunday, August 14, 2016
Alumni Day on Alcatraz

Saturday, August 20
Civil War Day, Fort Point
10 am to 5 pm



Captain Joseph Stewart
courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society

(later called Fort Churchill) to protect both the settlers and the Pony Express route. Stewart returned to Alcatraz and it was there on the island that his fourth child Frances was born. (Esther was later to bear him six more children— which is a testament to his marital duties and her steadfastness despite all their moves around the country).

When war broke out, Stewart was transferred to Washington to become Chief of Artillery of the Army of the Potomac. But, no doubt due to concerns about the safety of San Francisco, Stewart was sent back to the Bay Area, along with Company H of the Third Artillery, to recruit and train California volunteers at Fort Point. It was here that two of his children —Charles and Helen — were born. In December of 1865 he was promoted to the rank of Major, of the Fourth Artillery.

In later years Stewart served in Sitka, Washington Territory, New York, Virginia, Boston, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Washington, D.C. In 1879 his wife Esther died after a premature childbirth, as well as her baby. (The baby is buried next to him at the Presidio National Cemetery; his wife was buried in Astoria) Stewart lived out his retirement first in San Francisco, then in Berkeley, California. He was president of the Sloat Monument Association, and director of the Yountville Soldiers' Home. He died April 23, 1904, after 37 years of military service.

Civil War Day on Angel Island

On the weekend of June 4 and 5, Angel Island State Park hosted the annual Civil War Days on the island. The scenario took place on the parade ground of Camp Reynolds, which was garrisoned by Union troops during the Civil War. It was an imaginary invasion by Confederate sympathizers, who attempt to take over the island but are repulsed by Union troops. The re-enactors were from the American Civil War Association, the National Civil War Association, and the California



Historical Artillery Society. Assisting were FOCWA members Gary Hormel, Steve Johnson, and Robert Mayer. It was an opportunity to let visitors know about the role of California and the Civil War, how cannons and muskets operated, uniforms of the two sides, and how a battle might look, sound, and smell.



FOCWA member Gary Hormel explains how cannons were transported, loaded, and fired.

Visitors watch as the Confederates load and prepare to fire the cannon



Union Troops fire the howitzer

Photo credits: Steven Hormel

Research credits for Captain Stewart:
Doris Brown, NPS volunteer
Gary Hormel, NPS volunteer

More photos can be found in the
"Activities" section of the FOCWA website