

# NEWSLETTER

## Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

March 2017

Editor: Steve Johnson

**Ranks on Alcatraz** When Alcatraz was a fort during the Civil War, the artillery soldiers there (identified by the red color) were organized by rank. Here were some of the ranks, and the duties of each.



**Private** These were the soldiers who did the hard work. They built roads, dug earthworks, moved cannons, did fatigue and sentry duty, and of course manned the cannons. The first soldiers were from the Third Artillery; later soldiers were California volunteers. Privates slept in the Citadel in bunkbeds, two on top, two below, head to toe, on mattresses filled with straw. Their pay was \$13 a month.



**Corporal** An enlisted man who showed exceptional diligence in performing his duties, following orders, and setting a good example to the other men in the company would be given the rank of corporal. His duties would include: Corporal of the Guard, making sure that men serving guard duty were properly monitored, and promptly relieved when their duty was finished; Color Guard, which consisted of carrying the flag when marching in parades; Fatigue Duty, which meant supervising privates when doing short irregular duties such as clearing roads, excavation, cleaning up an area, etc.; Patrol Duty, meaning going into the city to look for soldiers absent without leave, under the command of a non-commissioned officer. Their pay was \$14.



**Sergeant** Sergeants were usually the “Chief of the Piece”, that is, in charge of a cannon or a battery of cannons (three to six cannons). They were responsible for making sure the enlisted men did their duties, followed orders, dressed properly, and were well trained in the rigorous procedure of loading and firing the cannons. In the Citadel they slept separately from the enlisted men, usually two or three sergeants to a room. Their pay was \$17 a month.

The **Battery Quartermaster Sergeant** (right) was responsible for making sure a particular battery had the proper tools, equipment, powder, and cannonballs. He was paid \$17 a month. Notice the service stripes on the lower sleeve. Each stripe would represent five years of service. Trim around a stripe indicated service during wartime. This sergeant would no doubt have been a career soldier. He may have had a private room.



**Dates to Remember**  
**Tuesday, March 21, 2017**  
Peninsula CW Roundtable  
Lecture: “The SS Jeremiah  
O’Brien, Then and Now”  
11:30 a.m.

**Saturday, March 25, 2017**  
Living History Day on  
Alcatraz



**Hospital Steward** was appointed by the Chief Surgeon to attend to the medical needs of the men at the fort. He was supposed to be literate, skilled in pharmacy, and temperate (since he dispensed medicinal whiskey). He was considered a non-commissioned officer, with same pay as a sergeant major - \$21. Stewards generally had a room near the fort's infirmary.



**Ordnance Sergeant** had the over-all responsibility for all the munitions of the fort - all the cannons, gunpowder, cannonballs, canister, cannon tools, and other military stores. He had to keep records of all munitions purchased and used. Ordnance sergeants were assigned to a particular post or fort and always remained there. They were paid \$21 a month. On Alcatraz the Ordnance Sergeant either shared a room with another sergeant or had his own room.



**Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant** was in charge of ordering all supplies, including wagons and horses, food and fuel, boats, uniforms, weapons, blankets, tools — in short, everything needed to keep the fort operating other than munitions. He was also responsible for paying the troops, paying the vendors, and keeping the expense accounts in good order. He was paid \$21 a month. Given his importance, he probably had his own apartment.



**First Lieutenant** was a commissioned officer; artillery officers' shoulder bars were scarlet in color with a gold trim. The first lieutenant was the right-hand man of the captain, and would stand in for the captain if he was away from the fort. His responsibilities included keeping records of the post's activities, relaying commands, assigning duties, and reporting to the captain. He was paid \$80 a month, and lived in junior officer's apartments in the Citadel.



**Captain** was in command of a company of soldiers. During the Civil War there were at least two captains on Alcatraz — Capt. Stewart and Capt. Winder. Each captain was responsible for 80 - 100 men, making sure they were properly trained and supervised by the sergeants. The captain would command a series of batteries on the island, and make reports on their efficiency. He also had to send in frequent reports regarding his men: illnesses, accidents, promotions, etc. For long periods during the Civil War, the captains were the highest ranking officers on the island.

Captains were paid \$115.50 a month, and lived in their own apartments in the Citadel.



**Major** was most often the highest ranking officer on Alcatraz during the Civil War. He was responsible for: the defense of San Francisco Bay and the City of San Francisco; the well-being, morale, and efficiency of all the men under his command; the defense of the island; the protection of federal stores and property; proper accounting for all expenses; timely completion of reports and orders received. Of course most of these tasks were done by junior officers, but the major was ultimately responsible for them. The major's pay per month was \$169, and he lived in a private apartment in the Citadel.

Sources: [ushistory.com](http://ushistory.com) [civilwarwiki.net](http://civilwarwiki.net) Revised US Army Regulations of 1861



Housing for officers on Alcatraz improved after the war. By the 1890's spacious houses for high ranking officers were located on the east side of the island. The commandant's house is in the center. Officers could bring their families to live on the island. Small cottages to the right were for non-commissioned officers. Note the cannonballs used for decorative purposes. Photo from GGNRA archives and can be seen in the book *Fortress Alcatraz* by John Martini.

**Presentation of Award for Ranger Roldan** On February 25th at the luncheon held for Volunteers in the Park at the Presidio, members of the Friends of Civil War Alcatraz, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War Camps 24 and 23, The 20th Maine, and the volunteers of Fort Point, presented an award to Ranger Jose Roldan. Jose has been a ranger for many years at Fort Point, and has worked tirelessly to improve the programs and waysides at the fort, strived to get needed maintenance done, and always promoted the interpretation of the Civil War history of the fort. He has been a firm supporter of the living history days held twice a year, and has always been appreciative of the volunteers. He has accepted a government job closer to his home, which is good for his family but sad for us. We all wish him the best of luck in his new position.



L-R Gary Hormel, John Nevins, Brad Schall, Ranger Roldan, Steve Johnson, Chuck Graf, Constance Smith, and John Gee

**Alcatraz Living History Day** Once again FOCWA will sponsor a Living History Day on Saturday, March 25th. Among the highlights of the day: the Third Army Volunteer Band will be playing during the day; a flag raising ceremony will be held; the 1861 Mayor of San Francisco, Henry Techemacher, will issue a proclamation to the citizens. There will be tours of the citadel and “Fort Alcatraz” programs and exhibits.

Visitors and re-enactors should read the “Activities” page of the FOCWA website for information on attending this event.

[http://www.friendsofcivilwaralcatraz.org/Alcatraz\\_Events.htm](http://www.friendsofcivilwaralcatraz.org/Alcatraz_Events.htm)