



THE ALCATRAZ SENTINEL
The Newsletter of Historic Civil War Alcatraz Island
Published by the Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

Volume 1 Number 2
Summer 2009

Editor: Donald VanAuker

2009 Officers

Co-Chairpersons: Fred Bohmfalk
Brad Schall
Treasurer: Greg Tracy
Secretary: Jeffrey Vaillant
Publicity: John Nevins
Community: Gary Yee

Membership: Phil Blake
Activity: Susan Cohn
Docent Training: Chuck Gardali
Historian: Robert Hubbs
Parliamentarian: Rob Orr

Living History Day

The third Living History Day on Alcatraz was a huge success, if remarks from visitors during the boat ride back to San Francisco, is any indication. On the April 4, 2009, Living History Day, my wife heard visitors talking about how wonderful the time on the island was. They enjoyed seeing union soldiers and ladies in period dress on the Island. Visitors said they had plenty of pictures to show the people back home as they would not believe that real civil war soldiers were manning their posts and guarding Confederate prisoners on Alcatraz. I suspect that a great many of the visitors that day felt the same way. As you know, the effort it takes to put on such an event is tremendous. Special tours into the Citadel were offered to all re-inactors by the N.P.S. The "FOCWA" thanks all N.P.S. staff, re-enactors that participated, and all FOCWA members that helped to make the event such a success.

The next scheduled Living History Day is October 31, 2009. If you want to help, contact: Event co-chairpersons Brad or Fred. Besides having a great time, the photo opportunities are endless. We hope to see you there!

*



Union Soldiers Standing Guard at Alcatraz during Living History Day April, 2009

Interesting Facts about Alcatraz

The first United States Army soldiers arrived on the island in 1858.

Did you know that the Citadel had a dry moat to enhance its defensive potential.

There was a popular legend of “Dungeons” below the main cell block

Alcatraz is home to the oldest operating lighthouse on the west coast of the United States.

Alcatraz was used to house Confederate sympathizers from the West Coast as prisoners as early as 1861.

April 15, 1865 - When news of President Lincoln's assassination reached San Francisco, altercations broke out between defenders of Lincoln and those who were celebrating the news. An order was put out that anyone publicly cheering Lincoln's assassination would be arrested. A total of 39 civilians were jailed on Alcatraz under these pretenses. They were released after serving two months on the island.

During the Spanish-American War the prison population was up to 450.

After the 1906 earthquake the city of San Francisco civilian prisoners were sent to Alcatraz.

During the First World War a prisoner wrote a pamphlet entitled “Uncle Sam’s Devil’s Island” about his experiences.

*

Page 2

2010 West Coast Civil War Conference

The Friends of Civil War Alcatraz along with The San Francisco Civil War Round Table will co-host the Annual West Coast Civil War Conference in 2010. This event will bring top speakers from across the country to the Bay Area. Due to the down turn in the economy the conference format has been changed to make it more affordable to attendees. It still will be an exciting and informative program on the civil war era in San Francisco Bay. The new format will include talks, tours of fortress Alcatraz and other bay fortifications, as well as other events. This is an event not to be missed by all Civil War enthusiasts and the general public.

The date for the conference is set for November 12-14, 2010. The keynote speaker will be the renowned Civil War author, historian, and speaker James McPherson. His book; *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*; has sold six hundred thousand copies. I am sure if you bring a copy to the conference Mr. McPherson will be glad to sign it.

More information to follow in future issues of the news letter.

*

The Gardens of Alcatraz

For more then a century, the residents of Alcatraz created gardens to lift their spirits and soften the harshness of their environment. Families, staff, and prisoners gradually built a landscape of flowering terraces, rose gardens, greenhouses, and lawns. When Alcatraz was abandoned in 1963, this manicured landscape became overgrown and wild. Only the rich variety of plants-over 230 species-remained as evidence of the island's rich garden history.

In 2003 an effort to preserve and restore the historic gardens was started. Volunteer crews now work with N.P.S. staff year round to plant and maintain the gardens. Today these tough plants that survive with little water do well on the island. Visitors to Alcatraz find a landscape alive with fragrant old roses, fig trees, bulbs, and colorful succulents, historic examples of sustainable planting.

When you visit the island, be sure to stop, look, and smell. You will be surprised to see and smell all the beauty and fragrance around you.

For more information or to volunteer in the gardens, visit www.alcatrazgardens.org

Gardens of Alcatraz



Page 3

With each edition of the Alcatraz Sentinel news letter there will be a short bio of a “FOCWA” officer or member. This issue features Fred Bohmfalk, one of the founding fathers and one of the Board of Directors Co-chairman:

Frederick Bohmfalk Co-Chairman FOCWA

Fred is a native Californian, born in Red Bluff, a graduate of San Leandro High School and of San Jose State University with a degree in Industrial Management. He obtained his Masters degree in Systems Management from U. S. C.

Fred was commissioned a 2/Lt in the USAF. After flight training he was an Electronic Warfare Officer on a B-52 crew at Loring Air Force Base, Maine, where he later also held instructor and wing staff assignments.

He later served as an RC-135 flight crew member and instructor in the 55th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing (SRW) at Offutt AFB, Nebraska. The wing’s mission was worldwide reconnaissance; it included a tour in Vietnam.

He was assigned to staff intelligence/reconnaissance operations with the 6th Strategic Reconnaissance Wing, Eielson AFB, Alaska.

His Alaskan tour of duty was followed by assignment to the Strategic Air Command (SAC) intelligence staff, Offutt AFB, Nebraska. Duties there included intelligence briefings to the SAC commander-in chief, participation in operational planning of Linebacker II missions, and development and management of the SAC Signals Intelligence (SIGINT) Collection Management Program.

Upon retirement from the Air Force, Fred worked as a program and project manager for TRW/Sunnyvale in the Missile/Space Division. He came to Sacramento as the TRW project manager for the installation of the Local Area Network system at McClellan Air Force Base.

After retirement from TRW, Fred worked in family businesses and continued his lifelong passion for history through writing, speaking, reading and participation in various history-related groups.

Fred was Commander of Camp 22 of the Sons of Union Veterans and was past president of the Sacramento Civil War Roundtable. Among relatives who have

served in the military, Fred had two great-great grandfathers who fought as privates in the Civil War, one with the 1st Wisconsin Calvary (Union) and the other with the 6th Texas Infantry (Confederate); both died of disease during the war.

Fred's family includes his wife of forty-six years, Julie, daughter Leigh Bohmfalk, daughter and son-in-law Liz and John Thawley and a long-awaited grandchild – three-year-old Zeke Thawley – who is now the focus of much of his time and attention.

*