

SONS OF UNION VETERANS OF THE CIVIL WAR
General Alfred Pleasonton Camp 24



NEWSLETTER for January 2021

Editor: Steve Johnson Camp Commander: Robert Mayer

Camp Meeting Held Online

Our recent camp meeting on January 16th was held online, which is probably going to be standard practice from now on, because it allows our members who are spread over the Bay Area to meet easily and efficiently. Present were ten members of the camp and a special online visit by the Department Commander, Rudy Velasco. Brother Rudy administered the oath of office to the officers of our camp for the year 2021. These are: Commander Robert Mayer, Senior Vice-commander Ken Felton, Junior Vice-commander Glenn Martin, and Secretary/Treasurer Steve Johnson. Minutes of the meeting have been sent to the members of the camp.

Welcome to our newest member, Chris Brozek

Our camp is fortunate to have a new brother, Chris Brozek, who joined us as an associate member. His wife's ancestor, Charles Stein, joined the Union Army in 1865, and that inspired Chris to do some research which led to discovering information about the Sons of Union Veterans. He decided to join us because he believes in our values of patriotism and honoring the veterans of past wars. He was administered the oath of membership by JVC Glenn Martin. Chris lives in San Carlos with his wife and three children.

Camp Activities on Hold for Now

Normally at this time our camp would be participating in the Civil War Day at Fort Point, held every January. This is a big event, which draws hundreds of visitors and allows us to meet the public, explain our organization, and recruit new members. We join with re-enactors of the American Civil War Assn. and the National Civil War Assn. in various activities, such as cannon demonstrations, fort tours, flag ceremonies, and lectures on various topics related to the participation of California in the Civil War. Unfortunately because of the pandemic the fort is closed and all events have been cancelled. There is a remote possibility that the usual August Civil War Day at the fort might happen, depending on how well the effort to vaccinate the population goes. As new information comes in from the rangers at the fort, you will be advised about future activi-

ties. That also goes for the Memorial Day parade at the Presidio and Veteran's Day activities around the Bay.

Brother Ken Felton describes Civil War forts around San Francisco Bay to an interested visitor at the Fort Point Civil War Day, August 2019.



Captain Joseph Stewart, First Commander at 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 Fayssoux 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



Captain Joseph Stewart
courtesy of the Nevada Historical Society

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 (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.



Brother Gary Hormel, as Capt. Stewart

This article appeared in the Friends of Civil War Alcatraz newsletter, July 2016

Sons of Veterans Reserve

Commander Robert Mayer has helped form a unit of the Sons of Veterans Reserve, attached to Camp 24. The SVR is the uniformed, ceremonial unit of the SUVCW which participates in parades, flag ceremonies, funerals, and other events. This particular SVR unit will be named Company H, Third Artillery — this company actually served on Alcatraz during the Civil War. We already have 11 members, including some from other camps. Hopefully this unit can participate in the Veteran's Day parade in San Francisco in November, if the pandemic is in check by that time.

Presidential Pardons by Lincoln

President Lincoln had a reputation among the troops as being interested in their welfare, and they were aware that cases of sleeping on duty - an offense that brought the death penalty - were most often pardoned by him. In 1864 he ordered the War Department to commute the death penalty for deserters and keep them confined until the end of the war, thus saving the lives of 64 men. Some generals - particularly General Butler - criticized Lincoln for this, but Lincoln believed there was enough bloodshed already in the war, and understood the value of clemency to demoralized troops.

"The Forgotten Side of Lincoln's Clemency Policy" , a paper presented by P. Ruckman and D. Kincaid at the meeting of the Illinois Political Science Assn. 1994

Articles Requested

Do you have an idea for an article for this newsletter? It could be about your ancestor or about some aspect of the Civil War that you have researched and would like to share with your camp brothers. Please submit to Steve Johnson for the next newsletter, coming out in the spring.