



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

THE GUIDON NEWSLETTER
MAY / JUNE 2021

Editor: Steve Johnson Camp Commander: Robert Mayer

The Passing of Commander Mayer's Father

Recently Commander Robert Mayer's father passed away after a battle with cancer. Garrett Mayer was born in the Bay Area, along with his brother and two sisters, who were all very close to each other. Garrett attended Holy Rosary School and middle school in Antioch, and high school in Colorado. He returned to the Bay Area and received his B.A. in accounting. After college, he worked for the family jewelry store for many years, then became the accountant for the First Northern California Credit Union, a job which he loved. He and his wife adopted Robert and Matthew and was very involved with the boys. He coached Matthew's baseball team and often took the boys camping. Until he became sick he was coaching for the CYO baseball and softball teams. One of his proudest moments was to see Robert knighted in the Knights of Columbus, a fraternal Catholic organization. A memorial service is pending.

Brother Steve, as camp secretary, sent the family a bouquet on behalf of the camp, with a card expressing our condolences and our desire to be of help if needed. We all send Brother Robert our sympathy and support during this time of grief.

Letter from the Commander

I hope this finds everyone well. I want to take this time to thank everyone that has helped the Camp over these hard times; I really appreciate your support. I also want to thank you for those that are helping me personally with the very hard time I am going through in my life. With that being said, please bear with me through this time. If you have any questions, concerns, or just want to chat, you can reach out to me at robert.j.mayer1@gmail.com

I know that in this past year we had to make some adjustments, such as having to meet virtually, and not having any events. Now that things are reopening, I hope we can meet in person once again. Brother Steve has been able to secure our next camp meeting — which will be in person as well as online — at the Benicia Arsenal/ Camel Barns on Saturday, July 10, 2021.

Unfortunately we are not able to do anything formal for Memorial Day, but if you do go to a local commemoration in your area please let us know about it. Hopefully there will be some Civil War events happening later this year in which we can participate. I look forward to seeing everyone at the next camp meeting

Robert Mayer

Camp 24 Commander

Council member, Dept. of California and Pacific

Chief of Staff 6th Military district SVR

SVR commander, Battery H 3rd US Artillery

Finally, an in-person meeting

Because vaccinations have proceeded relatively rapidly in California and the Bay Area, and due to changes in safety procedures, we have decided to hold our July camp meeting in person, on July 10th, at 10 a.m. It will be held at the Benicia Museum at the Camel Barns, which has a remarkable amount of Civil War history. It was the site of the U.S. Armory, whose buildings still exist. Nearby was the Mare Island Naval Station, which serviced Russian warships in 1863. And it was the last stop for the Camel Corps, the U.S. Army's attempt to supply desert outposts using Arabian camels. After a short meeting, we will tour the museum and then have a picnic in the gardens. You are welcome to bring family and friends. If you have any portable chairs and a portable table, bring them along; the garden only has benches. For anyone not able to come in person, the meeting portion will be on Zoom, and you will be sent the link several days prior to the meeting. Here is the website of the museum, with directions on how to get there. <https://beniciahistoricalmuseum.org/>

Benicia and the Mare Island Naval Station

Prior to the Civil War, Benicia was the site of the U.S. Armory on the West Coast. It stored muskets, powder, and artillery for use of the Army and even the state militia when needed. Not far from Benicia, and across the channel from Vallejo, is Mare Island, the site of the naval station by that name during the Civil War. It was built to service ships of the Pacific fleet, notably the *USS Cyane* which patrolled the Bay and the Northern coastline. It is not hard to imagine the nervousness the U.S. Army was feeling about California at the outbreak of the Civil War. Both houses of the state legislature were dominated by the Democratic (pro-slavery) party. Reports were reaching Washington about Confederate sympathizers organizing militias, with the possible intent of taking over Union forts and facilities. Of particular concern was the armory in Benicia where muskets were stored, and the powder magazines at the Mare



U.S. Naval Station, Mare Island, in the 1860's. Note the dry dock, the chimneys for the iron works, the warehouses, and the barracks. Some of those brick buildings are still there on Mare Island.

Island Naval Base in Vallejo. The first thing the Navy did to protect the gunpowder was to assign the U.S. Coast Guard steamer *Active* to anchor off the magazine building in August of 1861. The captain was ordered "to keep his guns ready". At about that time in Washington, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells asked Secretary of War Simon Cameron to send a company of soldiers to protect the magazines. On November 2nd, Asst. Adjutant General Richard Drum detached one sergeant, two corporals, and fourteen privates from Fort Alcatraz for protective duty at Mare Island. Sgt. Poe of the Third Artillery arrived with his men on November 5th. Several days later ten more soldiers came up from Alcatraz to reinforce the guard.

In January Major Leonard came to check on the men and found the discipline lax and their duty there to be of little service to Mare Island. He proposed to Commandant Gardner of the Naval Yard to send them back to Alcatraz, where discipline was stricter. Gardner objected to this; even though the soldiers were of no use, they had been requested by the Secretary of the Navy and he wasn't about to have them removed. But

in March of 1862 the *USS Lancaster*, flagship of the U.S. Pacific Squadron, arrived for overhaul at the yard, and had a company of Marines on board. At this point, Gardner had the soldiers returned to Fort Alcatraz on the steamer C.M. Weber, and the Marines were assigned sentry duty over the magazines. The soldiers, who had complained about the duty at Mare Island, were glad to be back at Fort Alcatraz, even though duty there was just as isolating and monotonous. Perhaps it was because the views were better from Alcatraz.

Details of this episode are from the book, "A Long Line of Ships: Mare Island's Century of Naval Activity", by Arnold S. Lott, Lt. Commander, U.S.N. (Published by U. S. Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 1954)

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 late summer.

Websites of Interest

American Battlefield Trust An organization dedicated to preserving America's important battlefields. You can take virtual or guided walks through many important Civil War battlefields. <https://www.battlefields.org/>

Garry Adleman of the Battlefield Trust visits Alcatraz.

<https://www.facebook.com/americanbattlefieldtrust/videos/10156295561613851/>

Liberty! The American Revolution This PBS series came out years ago but it is one of the finest documentaries on the revolution, using actors speaking the actual words of historical personages and scholars giving excellent background to major events. A good thing to watch on the 4th of July. If you are a member of a public tv station you can see the episodes, or you can see them on YouTube here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hCAWRXfdD3I&list=PLplosAuIS9H_JwRPGGeeriJVNzTk9kxUz