



Volume 46, No. 1
January 2006

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Battle Cry deadline is
1:00PM Wed. two weeks
before the regular meeting.
Items can be given the
editor by hand, mail or e-
mail.

Battle Cry

Founded 1961,
Newsletter of the Sacramento Civil War Round Table
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President's Message:

Another year is upon us and my hope for 2006 is that our organization will continue to grow and our opportunities to obtain interesting speakers will also continue. On that subject our good fortune in having among us scholarly talent was well demonstrated by Maurice Mitchell's timely presentation on the failure of reconstruction and subsequent events to correct our shameful problem of denial of equal rights to all citizens. The well intentioned constitutional amendments notwithstanding, a century and nearly a half has not brought about a just resolution of this major difficulty. Maurice's research, his handouts, transparencies and talk were well received and I received several compliments from members. Our own people have a lot to impart to the rest of us and those members who would like to give a presentation are encouraged to contact me. Thank you, Maurice.

In 2006 we will continue to meet on the second Wednesday of each month at the Plaza Hof-Brau with the exception of February, April and November. In February we will host Professor Brian Wills on Monday, Feb. 6th at the Studio Theater, 1028 R. St. In April we will enjoy guest speaker Scott Hartwig, date and place uncertain. Scott is the chief ranger at Gettysburg and a well recognized historian. (I apologize for getting his name wrong in the last newsletter). In Nov., of course, we will host the Annual West Coast Civil War Conference at The Doubletree on Nov. 10-12. In May we will seek 15 volunteers on Friday to escort school-kids at the Gibson Ranch Civil War Reenactment (usually the first weekend).

Wishing all of you joyous holidays and a great 2006. Thanks to the numerous new members who joined us in 2005. See you for Fred Bohmfalk's talk on Stephen Foster and his connection to the Civil War January 11th.

NEXT MEETING!!! January 11th at 7:00PM at the Hofbrau on the northeast corner of El Camino & Watt Ave. Come early for dinner and conversation.

SEE UPCOMING PROGRAMS ON PAGE 2.

The cash balance following the December 14, 2005 meeting was \$1,379.61.
 Thanks to members and guests, the raffle brought in \$69.00.
 George W. Foxworth. Treasurer

MINUTES
SACRAMENTO CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2005
HOF BRAU RESTAURANT 2500 WATT AVE., SACRAMENTO

Attendance-31

Members-27

Don Hayden, President
 George Foxworth, Treasurer
 Edie Keister, Secretary
 Ken Berna
 Roy Bishop
 Fred Bohmfalk
 Mitchell Cnota
 Ardith Cnota
 William Donaldson
 Lydia Donaldson

Shelley Jones
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 Grace Long
 Leslie Michaels
 Jim Middleton
 Maurice Mitchell
 Betty Mitchell
 John Nevins
 Ruben Orozco
 Ron Perisho

Paul Rudd
 Brad Schall
 Richard Sickert
 Drew Van Winkle
 Bob Williams
 Maxine Wollen
 John Zasso
Guest-4
 Charles Collins
 Robert Hanley
 Vivian Miller
 Horst Penning

1. Meeting started at 7:05. New members were welcomed. "This Day in Civil War History" was read. Fred Bohmfalk reminded members of the Feb. 6th meeting which will be downtown at the R St. Theater. Brad Schall announced there will be another tour of Alcatraz on December 29th, and gave information on training docents.
2. Our own Maurice Mitchell presented his talk on Reconstruction, concerning new amendments to the Constitution, on the newest citizens after the war- the slaves. Maurice, you really know your stuff! A lot of information and well presented- thank you Maurice.
3. Raffle was held- meeting ended at 8:28.

I hope everyone has a happy holiday and a blessed New Year.

Edie Keister
 Secretary

COMING PROGRAMS		
Month	Speaker	Topic
January 2006	Fred Bohmfalk & Ed Sims	Stephen Foster
February 6, 2006	Brian Wills	Life & Times of Nathan Bedford Forrest
March 8, 2006	Ever True	(A Couple's Civil War Letters)
April (date pending)	Scott Hartwig	Gettysburg Ranger

SCWRT SPECIAL PROGRAM
FEBRUARY 6th 2006

The Sacramento Civil War Round Table is pleased to announce a special February presentation in lieu of its regular monthly to be held February 6th, 2006 at 7 PM featuring

Professor Brian Steele Wills
Chair Department of History and Philosophy
University of Virginia at Wise

who will speak on

The Life and Times of Nathan Bedford Forrest
Confederate Major General of Cavalry

At
The Studio Theater
1028 R. Street
Sacramento, CA

Questions? Fred Bohmfalk (916)-965-4776 or Don Hayden (916)-485-1246

**The Ellet Family Navy and the Return of
Memphis to the Union**

By Bob Williams: 12-28-05

To become an Engineer during the first half of the nineteenth century, it was necessary for a person to either enroll in one of the country's two engineering schools, the U. S. Military Academy at West Point or the Rensselaer Technical College at Troy, New York; complete a long-term apprenticeship under a practicing engineer; or, pursue studies at one of the technical institutions in Europe. Charles Ellet, Jr. (1810-1862) followed the latter route. With the aid of Lafayette, to whom he had a letter of introduction, he was enrolled

in the prestigious ENPC (Ecole Nationale des Pont et Chaussees) School of Bridges and Roads in Paris in 1831. During time-outs from his lectures, he traveled Europe extensively inspecting engineering works such as canals, railroads, bridges, dams and flood control facilities. All of these items became his life's work and interests.

On a later European trip during the Crimean War, Ellet witnessed a naval battle in which the smaller Russian ships were being bested by the larger war ships of the Allies. He wondered why the smaller steam-propelled vessels could not be structurally reinforced such that they could purposely collide with and

sink the larger ships? Known as “ramming” this certainly was not a new naval warfare approach. It was used extensively during the days of oar-powered galleys, but not so during the era of sailing ships due to lack of maneuverability. Had not steam-power again made this a possibility, he asked himself? He filed this information in his memory for future consideration.

During the 1840’s and 50’s, Charles Ellet became one of the country’s leading civil engineers. He was employed on the Eire Canal, C. & O. Canal, B. & O. Railroad, and was Chief Engineer for the James River Canal. He developed a flood control plan for the Mississippi River which emphasized tributary flood detention reservoirs and by-pass flood channels rather than the levees only plan then (1850’s) being propounded by Lieutenant A. A. Humphreys of the U. S. Corps of Engineers. With his colleague (and frequent competitor) John Roebling (1806-89), he pioneered the use of wrought iron wire for suspension bridge cable construction. He built a number of suspension bridges including the first one at Niagara Falls, but his crowning accomplishment was, perhaps, the 1040 foot long bridge for the National Road over the Ohio River at Wheeling, WV completed in 1852, and still in use (See recent photo).

It was on this latter occasion that Charles Ellet first met Edwin M. Stanton (later Secretary of War). To pass under the new bridge at high water, steam boats had to lower their stacks and sail boats their masts. This they could do, but it was a costly and time consuming process. Accordingly, the river boat companies sued the bridge company for creating a navigational hazard. Stanton was the attorney for the plaintives and Ellet was, of course, a representative of the bridge folks. Although they were adversaries in the court room, they came to like each other, and became friends.

As the Civil War approached Charles Ellet, recalling the Crimean War battle he saw, approached the U. S. Navy with an offer to build a steam ram fleet. He was not welcomed with open arms; rather he was shown the way to the door. He continued his crusade ultimately approaching the Secretary of War with the idea in early 1862. Stanton had just then learned from General Halleck that the rebel navy was in

fact building a number of small vessels in New Orleans to be used as rams on the Mississippi River.

Accordingly, Ellet was authorized “to proceed immediately to Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, and New Albany and take measures to provide steam-rams for defense against iron-clad vessels on the Western waters”. Ellet would have preferred to build the ships from start; however, time would not allow this. His approach was to buy swift powerful tug-boats and strengthen their hulls. This was done by running 16” and 24” thick solid timber bulk heads fore and aft from bow to stern, with heavier bracing and reinforcing throughout, plus staying the hull from side to side by iron rods and bolts, including iron stays in all directions for the boilers and engines. The nine vessels he selected, reinforced and otherwise modified, to constitute the ram fleet were: the *Lioness*, *Sampson*, and *Mingo*, powerful stern-wheel towboats; the *Queen of the West*, *Monarch*, and *Switzerland*, large side-wheelers; the *Fulton*, and *Horner*, smaller stern-wheeler; and the *Lancaster*, a smaller side-wheeler. The average dimensions of the seven larger boats were: 175 feet long, 35 feet beam, 5 feet draft, and 7 feet depth of hold. Speed of these powerful craft is estimated to have been in excess of 15 knots as compared to 5-8 knots for a typical large iron-clad.

For crews Ellet selected experienced civilian captains, pilots, engineers and most deck hands. It should be mentioned that at this juncture the U. S. Navy had no role in this endeavor. It was an army only affair for which Charles Ellet had been commissioned a colonel, reporting directly to Secretary Stanton. He was authorized to add a military guard of from 12 to 20 men to handle small arms in defense of the boats, but there were no large guns on board at first. His relation with the navy commanders was only that he obtain their “concurrence” in his operations; and this arrangement proved very awkward indeed from an orderly command and control viewpoint.

Another quirk in this otherwise strange operation was the extreme nepotism involved. Ellet arranged for his brother, Alfred, earlier a Captain in the 59th Illinois Infantry, to become Lt. Col. second in command, as well as 12 other family members, sons, nephews, cousins, and in-laws to become ship’s officers.

Notwithstanding, it would have been difficult to have found a more daring and brave group of men than the Ellet Clan. His son, 18 year old Charles Rivers Ellet, stands out as one of the latter for reasons to be discussed. The Ellet ram fleet was effectively completed, manned, and ready for operations on 28 April 1862.

The situation on the Western Rivers at that time was that Forts Henry and Donelson had been taken by mid February; the Navy had participated in the battle of Shiloh to some extent, and had taken Island No. 10 under Commodore Foote. Captain Charles H. Davis assumed naval command 9 May, upon reassignment of Foote due to his Donelson injuries. The union naval vessels, consisting of the seven Eads "City Class" Ironclads, the *Benton*, the three Rodgers acquired gunboats, *Lexington*, *Tyler* and *Conestoga* and some 30 mortar rafts, were above Fort Pillow at the time when eight confederate gunboats, including two rams made a concerted attack, damaging two union ironclads, *Cincinnati* and *Mound City*.

On 17 May advanced boats of the new ram fleet arrived much to Davis' surprise. Flag Officer Davis had not been informed who Ellet was, nor as to the reporting arrangements. Their first meeting was very unsatisfactory to both. Davis, who had served very well in headquarters staff assignments proved to be a lackluster, unassertive fleet commander. (He was replaced by Acting Rear Admiral D. D. Porter in October 1862.) Davis was simply unwilling to take the risk of running below the Fort's batteries and attacking the rebel fleet. Negotiations between the two continued until 5 June, when the rebels evacuated Fort Pillow. Colonel Ellet landed a force to occupy the Fort and run up the union flag. Davis moved the gunboats fleet some 30 miles downriver to about two miles above Memphis without telling Ellet of his purposes or plans. Ellet followed with the rams. Of course, the City of Memphis was the objective of both.

Memphis, the fifth largest city in the Confederacy, was then (and now) the largest river city between St. Louis and New Orleans. An industrial-commercial city with rail connections all the way to Richmond, Mobile and Charleston, and the main transfer point for trans-Mississippi goods which the South sorely needed for their conduct of the War. Here again was a situation in the West where Jeff Davis,

with all his wisdom and micromanaging, would fight like hell to protect small parcels of rural real estate, while at the same time leaving major commercial-industrial centers essentially unprotected. With the abandoning of Fort Pillow, the only remaining defense that Memphis had was the confederate navy. The City was built on level ground, unfortified, and any attack by either gunboats or land forces could readily destroy it. The confederate gunboats protecting the City were the *General Lovell*, *General Beauregard*, *General Price*, *General Van Dorn*, *General Thomson*, *Sumter*, and *Little Rebel*. They were commanded by CSN Captain James E. Montgomery. On the evening of 5 June, Montgomery at a public meeting invited the citizens of Memphis to come down to the waterfront the next morning and watch him destroy the union navy.

On morning of 6 June 1862 both the union gunboat and steam ram forces moved downriver the short distance to Memphis. Initially the gunboats were in the lead, but they were soon passed by Ellet in *Queen of the West* with *Monarch* close behind. As *Queen* sped through the lumbering ironclads they were greeted with cheers from Davis' sailors. *Switzerland* and *Lancaster* should have been in line following, but due to problems and misunderstandings they were not and took no part in the battle. Davis' ironclads fired on the rebel fleet from a distance while Ellet engaged them intimately. Montgomery suffered a shock when he discovered the union rams were not the typical union gunboat, but rather a swift ram taking full advantage of the downstream current. *Queen* struck and sank *Lovell*, and moments later *Monarch* sheered off *Price's* starboard wheel slowly sinking that vessel. *Monarch* next went for *Beauregard*, tearing up that ship and causing its boiler to explode and to surrender. Davis finally got his gunboats into action, firing into and seriously damaging *Little Rebel*, Montgomery's flagship; later Alfred Ellet in *Monarch* pushed *Rebel* hard aground, but Montgomery and crew escaped into the woods much to his disgust. The rest of the rebel fleet fled downriver with Davis' squadron in pursued. Ellet did not follow, but wondered what had happened to his other ships, for had at least two more of them been present he could have bagged the entire rebel squadron in less than an hour. As it was the battle took 90

minutes and casualties were 180 to 1, not large but very unbalanced. Charles Ellet was the only casualty on the Union side. He took a pistol ball above his left knee. Although incapacitating, it was not at the time considered to be life threatening.

Davis' participation in the engagement occurred several minutes after *Queen* had sunk *Lovell*, and *Monarch* rammed *Price*. His ironclads depended upon firepower not speed. Though they came downstream with the current the heavy ships made about 10 knots (which, of course, included the flow velocity of perhaps 4-5 knots). Shells from the ironclads had disabled *Thompson*, exploding her magazines; and, further downstream Davis' faster gunboats had overtaken *Sumter* and *Bragg*, whose demoralized captains readily surrendered. Only the *Van Dorn* escaped, after a 35 mile chase by Alfred Ellet, who gave up the chase thinking it best to return to attend to his wounded brother.

When Davis passed with his squadron downriver, he left unfinished business behind, namely the City of Memphis. Ellet spotted white flags flying on the levee, and took rapid action. He designated his son Charles Rivers Ellet (middle name derived from the time he was involved in Mississippi River studies), whose 19th birthday it was, to be his envoy. Young Ellet went on board *Lioness* and with three marines landed at the city wharf. They met with the Mayor John Park. This was somewhat of a repeat of the 25 April 1862 surrender of New Orleans, but not so drawn out (See "Battle Cry", Sept. 05). The condition was simply that they be permitted to raise the union flag over the custom house as "an emblem of the return of your city to the protection of the constitution". After spending a few minutes reviewing his options the mayor realized he really didn't have very many. Weighing over 300 pounds Mayor Park ushered Charley Ellet and the marines rapidly through the hostile crowd to the Custom House/Post Office. Finding no flag pole, they mounted the Stars and Stripes on a board suspending it over the side of the roof to be seen from below. After removing some rebel banners elsewhere, they returned to their boat at about the time a detachment of federal infantry was arriving to occupy the City. Colonel Ellet dispatched a boat to inform Flag Officer Davis of the

surrender, but he ignored it, holding his own surrender ceremony (undoubtedly much to the annoyance of the mayor) upon returning from downstream. In his communication with Secretary Welles, the Flag Officer made no mention of Ellet's earlier occupation of the City. Davis eventually salvaged four of the rebel rams; *Price*, *Bragg*, *Sumter* and *Little Rebel*. He found them to be better boats than expected and added them to his flotilla, but offering none to Ellet.

Infection was spreading rapidly around the Colonel's leg wound. It was not until 10 June that the pistol ball was removed by his surgeon. Ellet thought that would take care of things, but it did not. His wife was notified by Stanton of his turn for the worst and she arrived in Memphis 17 June. Returning home on the *Switzerland*, he died 18 June just before arrival at Cairo. Four days later his grief stricken wife died suddenly. Charles Ellet, Jr. who never liked to wear a uniform, was given a full military funeral in Independence Hall, Philadelphia. They were buried in Laurel Hill Cemetery on 25 June 1862.

With the fall of Memphis another huge blow was dealt the confederates. Along with New Orleans, it was the only place on the river with the resources to build gunboats. The CSS *Tennessee*, under construction, had been torched to avoid capture, and her sister ship, the *Arkansas*, had been slipped out of town earlier and taken up the Yazoo. The latter would be heard from later. But only one remaining major obstacle now stood in the way of Union control over the entire Mississippi: Vicksburg. The Union Ram Fleet, reconstituted under command of Alfred Ellet with Charley Ellet as Captain of the *Queen of the West*, would have a role in those subsequent affairs. (The Ram Fleet was further reconstituted 7 November 1862 to be brought under the Navy, reporting directly to Rear Admiral. D. D. Porter, but it still managed to maintain considerable autonomy.)

References:

"Charles Ellet, Jr. The Engineer as Individualist 1810-62", by Gene D. Lewis 1968
"Ellet's Brigade The Strangest Outfit of All", by Chester G. Hearn 2000
"Battles and Leaders of the Civil War"
Volume 1 Part 2
"ORNs vol.XXIII" and "ORAs vol.LII"

Graphics for the "Ellet Family Navy and the Return of Memphis to the Union", June 1862



Charles Ellet, Jr.



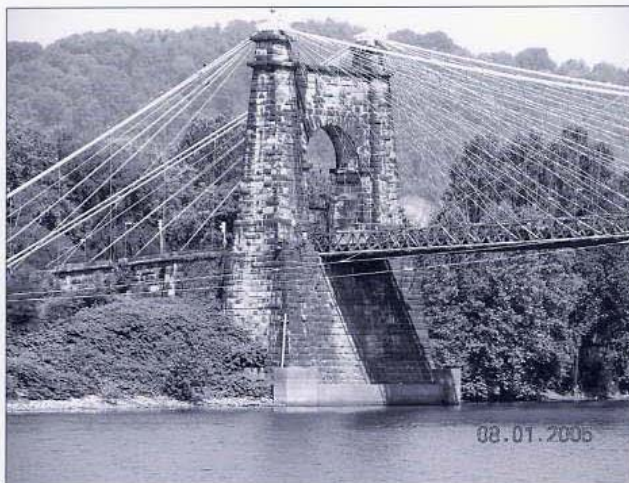
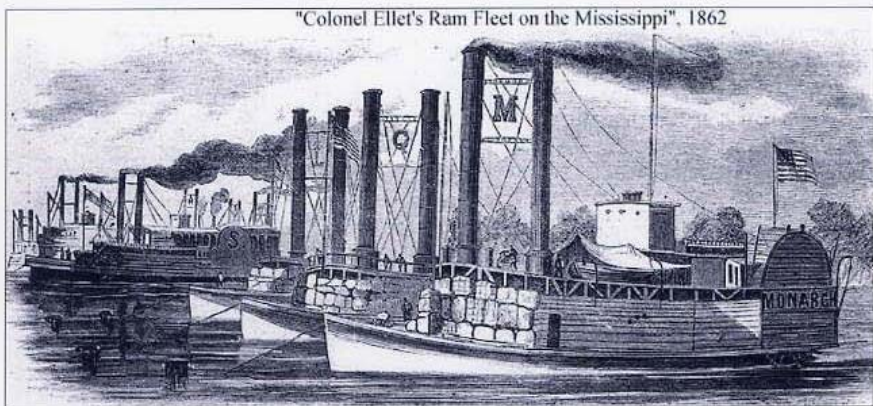
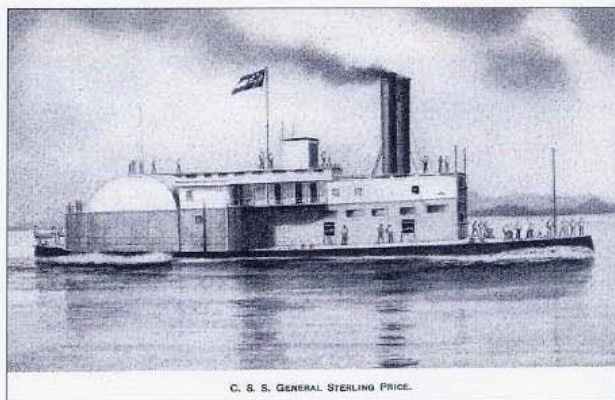
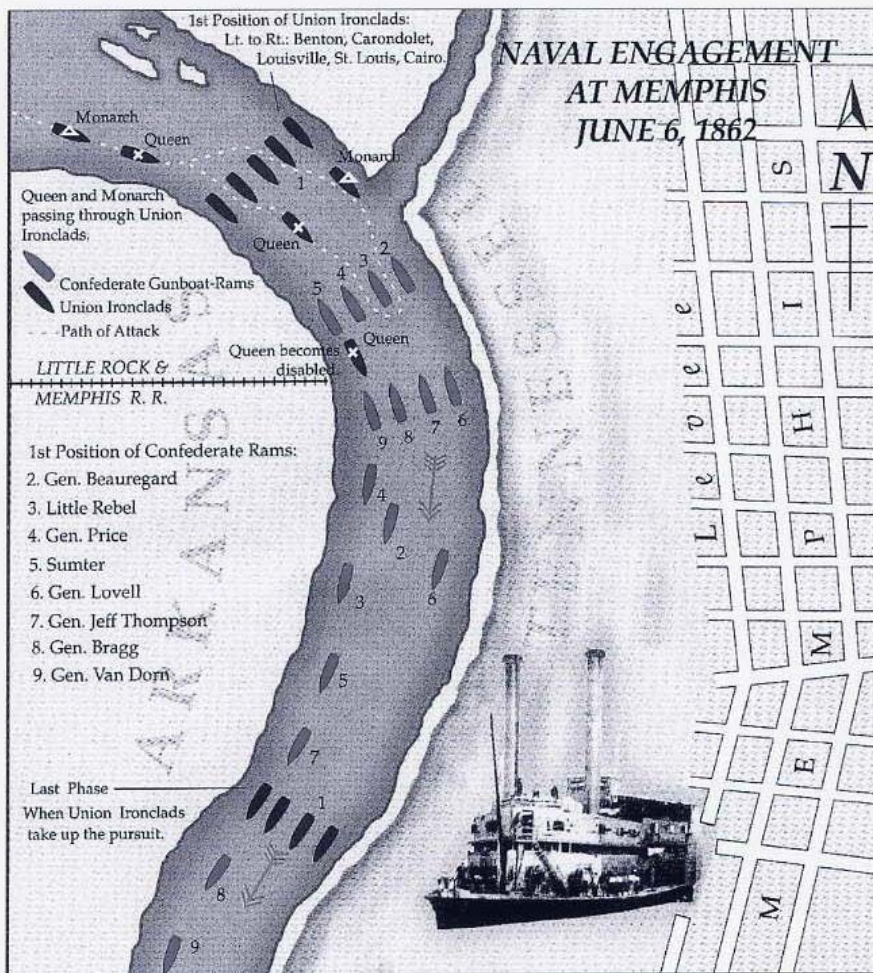
Charles Rivers Ellet



Alfred W. Ellet



Charles H. Davis



Ellet 1852 Wheeling, WV Bridge Today



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Alcatraz Tour – Sunday January 29, 2006

1000 hours Meet at Blue and Gold – Pier 41 for tickets.
If you have reserved tickets through the committee then see Brad Schall or Fred Bohmfalk at 1015 hours in front of the Pier 41 ticket booth. You need to pay for your ticket by January 20th. Checks should be made out to Friends of Civil War Alcatraz. Parking is at a premium near Pier 41. There are several locations in the Fisherman's Wharf area that are less expensive.
Alcatraz ticket prices for group tour: adults \$11.50, seniors (62 or over) \$9.75, child \$8.25 (5 to 11)

1045 hours Blue and Gold boat leaves for Alcatraz.

1100 hours Orientation at dockside on Island.

We will be divided into two groups with a park ranger leader and a committee member representative. Tour will last about 2 hours.

Group A – Ranger John Cantwell and Phil Avila

Group B – Ranger Jayeson Vance and Fred Bohmfalk

1300 hours Ranger will lead you to old bakery area for lunch and program. Bring your own lunch and drinks. There is no food sold on the island. Rangers will speak on Civil War Alcatraz. Fred Bohmfalk will discuss the opportunity to be part of a volunteer program supporting Civil War Alcatraz.

1400 hours If you want to take the prison tour or spend time on the island, you can do so at your leisure. National Park Service will offer the audio tour complimentary to anyone interested in taking it, after the Civil War program and lunch. Boats leave for San Francisco every 30 minutes with the last boat departing at 1630 hours. Show your badge at the audio tour desk.

Committee members will be available to answer any questions that you might have on participating on the Civil War Alcatraz project. We would appreciate any suggestions you have on moving this project forward.

Tour will be limited to 40 people. Period attire is encouraged.