

## Fort Steilacoom and the Civil War

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protection of the sea coast. The ship did not reach the coast, but sank twenty-five or more merchant ships in the Pacific during this period. Local citizens were afraid that the *Shenandoah* would sail into Puget Sound and bombard their homes and businesses.

The Territorial Legislature memorialized Congress on several occasions during the War, asking for continued assistance in garrisoning the military establishments and urging their continuance.

In 1860 Colonel George Wright had designated Point Defiance near Tacoma and part of the coastline opposite it at Gig Harbor as military reservations. In 1864 Brigadier General Benjamine Alvord, commander of local troops, asked that "...application should be made for a fortification at Point Defiance." It was studied from time to time, but Army engineers felt that fortifications farther north would be more appropriate and nothing was done.

The threat of possible Indian outbreaks was given as the only reason for the continuance of Fort Steilacoom as a military establishment. Colonel Casey, before he left to fight the Civil War, urged that the

garrison at Fort Steilacoom be increased to make certain that local peace was kept.

In 1865, when Fort Steilacoom was occupied by two companies of the volunteer infantry, it was reported that:

...the large number of Indians in this vicinity makes this force necessary to hold in check lawlessness generally, or to punish any aggression on the part of the Indians.

Fortunately the peace was kept in the Northwest, and it did not become necessary for the troops at Fort Steilacoom to do more than "show the flag" during this period.

When the Civil War ended, the regular army went back to its pre-war size. Officers who had been generals were reduced to their permanent ranks of Majors, Lieutenant Colonels, and Colonels. By the end of 1865 all volunteer troops had been released from service and the regular army was reassigned to the western frontier.

Major General George H. Thomas expressed the end of usefulness of Fort Steilacoom by writing:

Steilacoom, up Puget Sound, being also unoccupied by Federal troops since 1861, [is] no longer necessary for military purposes and situated

on private ground, for which rent has to be paid, it is recommended that the buildings be disposed of and the land turned over to the owner.

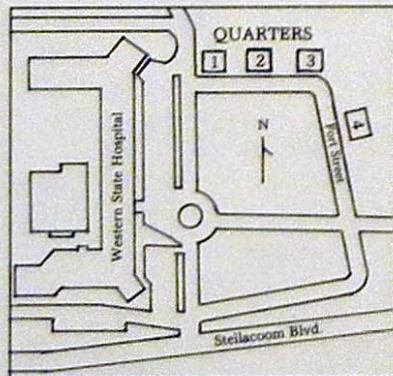
On April 22, 1868, Fort Steilacoom was officially abandoned as a military establishment. The last force assigned to the fort was E. Battery of the U.S. Second Artillery with five officers and one hundred twenty-four men. By the time the Army abandoned the post, the claims of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Puget Sound Agricultural Company were being adjudicated and title to the land would soon pass to the United States.

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disappeared again, leaving only bodies to show their presence.

After a while the continuous pop, pop of musket fire faded and finally ceased. The battle was over. As we reformed the brigade, the tears forming in my eyes and the pounding in my chest was not from the smoke or physical activity, but, rather, from the link I had established with those soldiers of 130 years ago. Their spirits had spoken to me.

**Coming event: Cannon Day on August 20, 1994**

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# Fort Steilacoom

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## Civil War Comes to Northwest



The Washington Civil War Association, in cooperation with the Northwest Civil War Association and Historic Fort Steilacoom Association, held the first Civil War reenactment in the Puget Sound area at Fort Steilacoom Park on Memorial Day weekend, May 28, 29, & 30. About 200 reenactors, including men, women and children in period dress and uniform, participated in what is expected to be an annual event in living history commemorating one of the most important episodes in American history.

The American Civil War has often been referred to as "The Second American Revolution," and, indeed, in many aspects it was. The war was fought to settle two great questions: Could states that freely joined together in union just as freely dissolve that union, and did the promise of personal freedom truly apply to all Americans.

The battle demonstrations did not attempt to present specific battles of the Civil War, but rather to demonstrate the tactics used by the three combat corps of the armies: the infantry, the artillery, and the cavalry. Since officers of both the Confederate and Federal armies were trained at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, the tactics employed by both armies were essentially the same.

The cavalry was the eyes and ears of the army. Its function was to scout out the location of the opposing forces and report that location to the command structure. Cavalry rarely fought cavalry, although scouting parties did engage each other. Cavalry was used to protect the flanks of the infantry, circle behind the enemy and attack the rear elements, destroy supply bases and communication lines, and screen the withdrawal of the infantry.

The artillery consisted of two components: the heavy artillery and the field artillery. The heavy artillery was used in fixed locations such as coastal forts and city defenses. The field artillery accompanied the army in the field. Artillery was used to directly support the infantry. It was used to blast holes in the opposing infantry, fill gaps in the infantry lines, protect the flanks of the infantry, and cover the withdrawal of the infantry. Each cannon was served by a crew of five to eight men and could be drawn about the battle field by a team of horses or mules. Artillery was particularly deadly at close range when it fired "canister

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### President's Message

Soon a number of you will be receiving reminders that your membership dues are, well, due. In fact, overdue. Perhaps we need to do a better job of telling you how much your membership fees accomplish.

A few weeks ago *your* museum hosted sixty fourth graders, three teachers and six parents from Arlington Grade School in Tacoma. Several docents wearing period dress portrayed Captain Maloney, Major Reagan's wife, Assistant Surgeon Wirtz, and Private Murphy. One teacher, speaking for the others, said it was the best field trip she had been on in twenty years. *Your* dues helped fund this activity. During the next academic year we hope to host several dozen fourth and ninth grade groups from all over the county.

A number of items have been added to the displays, for example costumes, a restored McClellan saddle, pottery for the married officer's home in Quarters One, etc. *Your* dues helped fund these acquisitions.

*Your* dues help fund this newsletter. *Your* dues are helping to fund a library of resource materials on the Fort and Washington Territorial history. *Your* dues help support the writing of carefully researched monographs and articles which are

available to historians, teachers, students, etc. One of *your* board members, Christine Finnigan, will be rewriting some of these materials into stories for *your* children and grandchildren.

*Your* hardworking museum volunteers are carefully squeezing a lot of mileage out of *your* dues. So if you haven't paid them yet, please mail them in right away so we can put them to work. And now that you know what *your* Historic Fort Steilacoom Association does with *your* money, perhaps you'd consider sending along a donation as well. If there's a particular activity you want the donation to support, please let us know. For example, each \$2.00 you donate will cover the costs of providing one school child with a living history tour of the Fort.

Raymond Egan

### We Need Volunteers

We need volunteers to paint, garden, to do carpentry, to do research, to mind the Sutler's Store when we're giving tours, to give tours, to sew period dresses and uniforms (we have the patterns), to contact clubs and organizations to let them know we give tours and talks, etc. Please call (206) 584-1528 for more information.

### Civil War Comes to NW (from p. 1)

rounds" consisting of hundreds of half-inch steel balls, in effect becoming a large shotgun.

The infantry was the mainstay of the army. Eighty percent of the army consisted of the infantry. The infantry was formed into tightly grouped formations consisting of thousands of soldiers. Over one hundred twenty thousand at the battle of Gettysburg, for example, marched toward each other, firing their .58 caliber rifle muskets as they marched, closing to less than one hundred yards, keeping up the fire until one side or the other gave way.

Attempts to gain the advantage were made by concentrating the infantry into columns and attacking at weak points, attempting to outflank the enemy, attacking "on the end" and trying to "roll up the flank." Bayonet charges were rarely used, but when they were, they were mostly for shock value, causing the enemy to scatter in fear and confusion.

Civil War battles were fluid, moving from one location to another as one side gained or lost the advantage. It was easy to tell where the battle occurred. The dead and dying revealed the location. During the war medical treatment was not very good by today's standards. The surgeon's and medical steward's tasks were overwhelming. Wounded soldiers were often left on the field for forty-eight hours or more before receiving attention. Wounded soldiers made their own way to field dressing stations. Those who could be helped were sent to general hospitals; those who could not were made comfortable and left to die. It is difficult to understand the huge numbers of wounded; for example, General Lee's ambulance train after the Battle of Gettysburg was over seventeen miles long.

In addition to the reenacted battles and medical demonstrations, each combat corps presented demonstrations of its equipment and skills. There was also an 1860s ladies fashion show and tea in the afternoon and the camps were open for inspection. Visitors were free to roam about, speak with the soldiers and ask questions. (See photos on page 3.)

If you are interested in becoming a reenactor, contact Ken Morgan in the evening at (206) 456-0917.

### Recruiting for 4th Infantry

Lt. Tom Melberg is accepting recruits for Fort Steilacoom's 4th U.S. Infantry. Call (206) 840-8072.

## Fort Steilacoom and the Civil War<sup>1</sup>

By Gary Fuller Reese

With the election of Abraham Lincoln as president of the United States, officers at Fort Steilacoom closely followed the events that lead to the outbreak of war.

As state after state left the Union, rumors about the lapse of all Army commissions, the inability of the government to pay the Army, and other concerns plagued those at the fort.

Of immediate importance to the officers at the fort was the status of their home states regarding secession from the Union. Most officers felt obliged to resign from the Army if their state seceded, and soon a number of officers from the southern states were leaving for their homes.

After the battle of Fort Sumter which opened the Civil War, the 4th Infantry, which had been stationed on the west coast for more than a decade, was ordered east. There was a flurry of activity at Fort Steilacoom as everyone packed up to leave. Since Fort Steilacoom was the largest of the several military posts on Puget Sound, orders were sent out to all quartermaster officers to send all surplus public property to Steilacoom. The quartermaster at the fort was ordered to visit each post to take charge of public property and appoint trustworthy agents to care for those items of property that could not be moved.

Interest of local citizens was drawn to the war as well as to the subsequent careers of men who had been assigned to Fort Steilacoom. Several men who had been at Steilacoom attained high rank in both the Federal and Confederate armies.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from *A Documentary History of Fort Steilacoom, Washington*, Second Edition, 1984, pp. 44-47.

Silas Casey, who had commanded Fort Steilacoom several times, eventually reached the rank of Major General and authored books on military tactics which were widely used.

David McKibben, who served both at Fort Steilacoom and at the post at Semiahmoo Bay with the boundary commission, rose from the rank of First Lieutenant in 1861 to Brigadier General of Volunteers in 1865.

Lieutenant August V. Kautz attained the rank of Major General of Volunteers in the Army and participated as a judge in the court martial of the group accused of plotting to kill Abraham Lincoln. After a career in the Southwest, Kautz commanded the Department of the Columbia for a short period and then retired. He later moved to Seattle where he died in 1895.

Maurice Malony, who commanded both Fort Steilacoom and Fort Chehalis at various times, became a Colonel in the 13th Wisconsin volunteers, but returned to the regular army in 1862 as a Major in the First Infantry. He received the rank of Colonel at the close of the War.

Of the many officers who chose to join the Confederacy, George Pickett was the most prominent. He reluctantly resigned his commission in the Army after Fort Sumter and eventually became a Major General in the Confederate army and led the last major charge at Gettysburg.

As the withdrawal of the regular army troops for war service began, the War Department authorized the establishment of the First Washington Volunteer Infantry. Under the general command of Colonel Justus Steinberger, this unit was to be raised in Washington, Oregon, and California. It was authorized to contain nine hundred-sixty men organized in ten companies and was mustered

into the service of the United States at Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, at Fort Vancouver, and at Fort Steilacoom.

In the meantime, Company E of the California Volunteers arrived at Fort Steilacoom to replace remnants of two regular army companies which left immediately for the East. Consisting of eighty-five men, this company was to serve Fort Steilacoom from November 16, 1861, until October 9, 1862.

Soon after the arrival of the Californians, the Steilacoom newspaper reported a flurry of robberies in and around the fort and blamed the new men. Soon things calmed down as the soldiers fit into the community. When they left nearly a year later, they were given a cheer and a Bon Voyage by the community, except for their commanding officer who apparently had not made a good impression on the local citizenry. Charles Prosch of the *Puget Sound Herald* wrote, "He is deemed fit only for a lunatic asylum, and a feeling of relief is experienced at his leaving."

The California troops were replaced by Company F of the Washington Territorial Volunteers, and, from time to time throughout the Civil War, troops belonging to the several volunteer organizations were assigned, moved, and reassigned to and from Fort Steilacoom.

The arrival of new settlers slowed to a trickle while the nation fought the Civil War. Fort Steilacoom and other army posts not directly connected with the fighting of the Civil War became "backwaters" and little mention of them is made even in the general histories of the area.

The Confederate Privateer *Shenandoah* was heard to be in the North Pacific in the spring and summer of 1865, and there was a series of demands for more adequate





## The Wilderness – 130 Years Later

by Ken Morgan

As a Civil War reenactor, I often ask myself why do I do this? Of course, there are the usual answers—honoring the soldiers, studying the history, the romantic nature of the war, sharing good times with like minded friends, and the enjoyment of doing it. The best answer, I think, is a deeply emotional and personal one, time travel. I long for those special moments when the location is correct, the smoke and confusion of battle is intense, the physical forces are just right, and I then truly know the feeling of actually being there. Those moments do not occur at every reenactment, but the quest for them does.

I recently participated in the 130th anniversary reenactment of the Battle of the Wilderness in Orange County, Virginia. My search for those special moments was satisfied.

My reenacting company, Company A, 20th Maine Volunteer Infantry, joined together with other companies of the 20th NCI and several other reenacting units to form Vincent's Brigade. We assembled early in the morning of May 7th and soon took our place in the line of march. The long, blue infantry column stretched as far ahead and behind as I could see. It seemed endless. Mounted officers, accompanied by their staffs and colors, galloped up and down the lines of soldiers, their approach signaled by the cheers of the men. A rain had fallen during the night soaking the tall grass and turning the Virginia clay roads to a slick mush.

The column was ordered forward, but because of the mud an orderly march soon turned into a disorganized movement. It was not possible to maintain the step. We passed by ponds swollen from the rain, newly mown fields, and dense woods. Regiments were detached from the column to occupy offensive



Vincent's Brigade participates in the 130th anniversary of the Battle of the Wilderness.

positions while Vincent's Brigade was held as a reserve force. The sound of cannon and musket soon reached our ears, but because of the trees and undergrowth, it was impossible to tell which direction it was coming from.

The fighting continued for some time before we were needed in the line. An officer galloped up the road, halted in front of the brigade, and ordered us into action. A battle line was formed on the soggy road, and we marched into the woods. It was impossible to maintain our formation in the undergrowth. Tree branches slapped our faces and vines entangled our feet. Our officers and sergeants did their best to keep the line formed and moving. Suddenly, we were being fired upon by an unseen Confederate regiment. The casualties caused by their volley were light, and we returned fire as we advanced. Our fire was effective, for we stepped over several bodies as we marched. The rain had returned

and the moisture, combined with the sulphurous powder smoke, watered our eyes and seared our lungs. Visibility was limited to only a few yards.

Perhaps because of the reduced visibility, or the closeness of the enemy, or who knows what, our officers lost control. We were marched to the left flank and right flank only to halt, turn about and return to our original position. This random movement continued for some time, interrupted only by fire from an unseen foe. Soon all resemblance to a military formation and sense of direction was lost, and we became little more than a disorganized mass of men. We continued to react to the fire, charging this way and that, shooting as our officers directed, and not really seeing the effects of our fire or who we were firing at. Confederates appeared out of the smoke and shadow, fired a volley or two, and

(Continued on page 6)