

Company "M"

The soldiers of Company M, 1st United States Artillery Regiment have the distinction of being the first American soldiers to serve in the Puget Sound region, which was then part of the Oregon Territory. The company arrived in the area in August, 1849, in response to a call for help from American settlers. Company M established Fort Steilacoom, named after the local Indian tribe, and garrisoned the fort until early 1853. Throughout this period, the soldiers of Company M provided protection for American settlers and established an American presence in an area long controlled by British interests.

As was typical of most American military units of the period, many of the enlisted personnel of Company M were foreign born. The Federal census of 1850 indicates that the majority of the soldiers were born in Ireland or Germany. Service in the United States Army gave the new immigrants employment as well as a chance to learn the customs and laws of their new country. After their term of service had expired, a number of the soldiers of Company M decided to settle in the region. Most filed land claims and established farms. Among the most successful was John Rigney who established a prosperous farm on a large land claim north of Steilacoom. He became one of the largest land owners in Pierce County, Washington.

Although, as artillerymen, the soldiers of Company M were trained



Private, Company M
1st United States Artillery Regiment 1849-1853

to serve cannons, they were also trained and equipped to serve as infantrymen. In fact, throughout their service the soldiers of Company M spent most of their time patrolling the Puget Sound region with muskets. In many ways, the soldiers of Company M provided the only American element of law and order in the area.

This artillery private (pictured above) is armed, equipped, and ready to traverse the Puget Sound countryside. He carries a .69 caliber Model 1842 Springfield musket, which, as a smoothbore weapon, has an effective range of approximately 100 – 150 yards. The soldier is

depicted reaching into his leather cartridge box to obtain a paper cartridge containing black powder and a musket ball. The cartridge box held 40 rounds of ammunition and protected them from the elements. The percussion caps used to ignite his weapon are carried in the small pockets of his jacket. Later, leather cap pouches may have been issued to the soldiers for this purpose. His sky blue fatigue uniform is typical of the style worn by the Army during the Mexican War of 1846-1848. His jacket has yellow "tape" at the collar and has brass buttons, indicating that he is an artilleryman. Although sweeping new uniform regulations were adopted by the United States Army in 1851, it is unlikely that the men of Company M would have received any of the new uniforms before the unit disbanded at Fort Steilacoom in early

1853. It was customary for the Army to insist that units, particularly those posted to the frontier, use up existing stocks of uniforms before new ones were issued.

For service in the field, this private carries a knapsack on his back and a canteen and haversack slung over his right shoulder. He also wears stout, low heeled, leather brogans for tramping around the prairies and forests of Puget Sound.

Alan H. Archambault, *Soldiers of Early Washington, 1805-1865* (Published by the Friends of Fort Lewis Military Museum, 2006).

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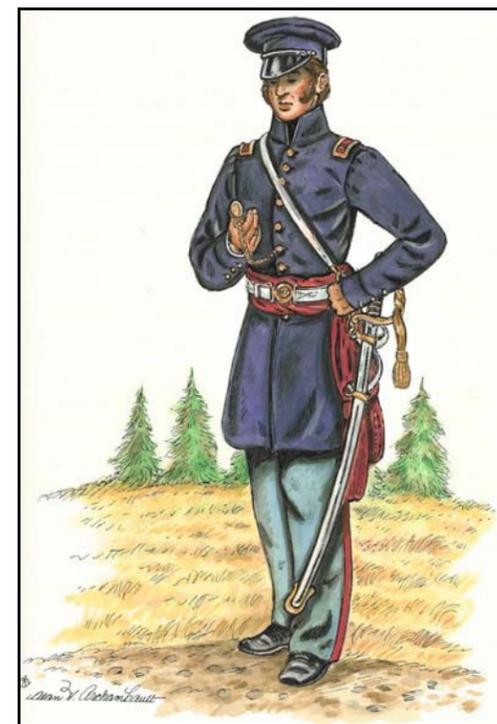
Company "M" Arrives at Steilacoom

by Alan H. Archambault

On November 10, 1848, two companies of the 1st United States Artillery Regiment left Fort Hamilton on Governor's Island, New York, bound for service in the Pacific Northwest. The regiment was newly reorganized after service in Mexico during the recently ended Mexican-American War. The detachment consisted of Companies L and M which were brought up to full strength and made ready for the journey west. The artillery detachment was commanded by Captain (Brevet Major) John S. Hatheway and consisted of eleven officers and 153 enlisted men. Captain Bennett H. Hill commanded Company M.

The detachment left Fort Hamilton on board the Army transport ship, *Massachusetts*, an auxiliary steam packet of 765 tons. The *Massachusetts* was considered one of the most modern ships in the United States fleet since she was equipped with screw propellers rather than the popular paddle wheels of the day. The ship had transported troops to Mexico during the war and was to be turned over to the U.S. Navy in San Francisco after the two companies of the 1st Artillery were landed in Oregon.

The *Massachusetts'* route to the Oregon Territory took it around Cape Horn and then north along the coast of South America. During the course of the trip, stops were made, to take on coal and supplies, at Buenos Aries, Santiago, Chile, and Honolulu, Hawaii. On May 9, 1849,



Captain Bennett Hill
1st United States Artillery Regiment

the *Massachusetts* reached the mouth of the Columbia River. The ship then steamed up the river and on May 13, 1849, dropped anchor at Fort Vancouver, the British Hudson's Bay Company post.

The officers of the detachment selected a site overlooking Fort Vancouver and the soldiers of Companies L and M began to construct a post which they named Columbia Barracks. Shortly after the troops' arrival, word was received that American settlers in the Puget Sound area were calling for protection. An American settler, Leander Wallace, had been killed by Indians at Fort

Nisqually, another Hudson's Bay Company post. The soldiers were not able to respond until August, when they boarded the bark, *Harpooner*, bound for Puget Sound. On August 23, 1849, Company M arrived at Fort Nisqually to provide an American presence in the region. The troops soon established Fort Steilacoom on the site of a Hudson's Bay Company owned farm left vacant by the death of its operator Joseph Heath.

Fort Steilacoom soon became the center of life for American settlers in the Puget Sound region. The Army provided security, law and order, and a payroll that was crucial to economic growth in the area. Captain Bennett Hill, of Company M, became the first commanding officer of the post. Company M was to serve at Fort Steilacoom until 1853 when elements of the 4th U.S. Infantry Regiment arrived at the post.

This painting represents Captain Bennett Hill as he may have appeared in August, 1849. He wears the service uniform of a captain of artillery which consists of a blue wool frock coat, fatigue cap, wool trousers, and shoes. His rank as a captain is indicated by the two bars on his shoulder boards which are backed with red cloth, indicating the artillery branch. The crimson silk sash and red trouser stripe also mark him as a company officer. He is properly armed with an officer's artillery saber which is supported by a white buff sword belt and strap.

(Continued on page 4)

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President's Message



Just a couple of things to share with you all. The Fort hosted a number of great events and lectures in 2010, and we once again ended the year with what I believe to be a quality event, Christmas at Fort Steilacoom, 1860. We had about twenty-plus Living Historians who took on the roles of residents and guests of the Fort. There seemed to be a steady stream of public during the event.

2011 looks to be another great year for events. We started with Miss Casey's Tea. Yes! This year the daughters of Col. and Mrs. Casey held the annual Tea and silent auction.

On Saturday, April 16th, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Quarters 2 the Fort will host its "Living History Swap Meet and Display." Admission is free to the public.

We will have some good lectures throughout the summer months. These are always very educational, so we hope to see you there.

This is also the time of year when we need to think about re-enlisting for another tour at Fort Steilacoom, W.T. If you have not done so, then it is time to renew your membership

with Historic Fort Steilacoom Association.

Lawrence Bateman



Alan Archambault Returns to N.W.

I am happy to be back in the Pacific Northwest after working for over two years in Washington DC. As some of you may know, in the late summer of 2008, I accepted a position as a supervisory curator at the U.S. Army Center of Military History headquartered at Fort Leslie J. McNair. The post is located on the grounds of the old Washington Arsenal and has a long history. In fact, in 1865 the Lincoln conspirators were executed in what is now the tennis courts of the post.

One of the problems of working in Washington DC is the commute. We decided to live in Brunswick, Maryland, which is on the Potomac River about 8 miles from Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. Brunswick is a railroad town and commuter trains run daily. In the morning they go one way east to Washington and in the afternoon they go back west. My daily commute averaged two and a half hours each way, so it made for a long day. My responsibilities at the Center of Military History included oversight over fourteen Army Museums. It was a challenging but rewarding job.

After almost 35 years of Federal Service I decided to retire and return to Washington State. This decision was influenced by the fact that we have family and friends here and we felt the quality of life was more to our liking than the Washington DC area. My hope is to devote much of my time working on my interests in art and history. One of my interests is the military history of the Pacific Northwest. The article in this issue of the newsletter is a product of this interest. I look forward to being a member of the Historic Fort Steilacoom Association once again and hope to be able to participate in future activities.

Alan Archambault

Living History Swap Meet and Display

Saturday, April 16th, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. in Qtrs. 2

Admission Free to Public

This is a chance for you to dig through all that extra gear or uniforms. Bring them out to the Swap Meet and get rid of them. Or are you just getting started in Living History? Stop on by. You just might find what you are looking for. Ladies, this is not a guys' only event. We know that you might have extra items collected over the years that you might wish to pass on.

We will also have some good displays set up for you to look at, and a chance to talk with the folks that put them together.

Tables will be rented to sellers for \$10 per table (\$5 if you are wearing period attire). Those who are setting up displays only must bring their own tables. Space is limited, so let us know if you plan to sell or display. The building will be open at 8:30 a.m. for set up.

P.O.C. Lawrence Bateman (253) 312-8732



Abigail Casey Hunt

Tea Commemorates Engagement

More than three dozen ladies of Washington Territory gathered at the home of Col. Silas Casey on February 19 to celebrate the engagement of Casey's daughter, Abigail, to Capt. Lewis Hunt.

The re-enactment party was the theme for the Fort's 2011 annual "Tea with Mrs. Casey."

Re-enactors from Historic Fort Steilacoom and the 4th U.S. Infantry, along with young ladies from Fort Nisqually, participated in the event.

Miss Cassie Young portrayed Abigail Casey and Miss Melissa Ng portrayed her younger sister, Elizabeth (Bessie).

Historic quilts, including several from the Steilacoom Historical Museum Association collection, several provided by Mrs. Charles Collier of Historic Fort Steilacoom, and one from the Day Island Historical Association, were displayed during the tea.

Erin Dorries, a member of the 4th U.S. Infantry, demonstrated the art of paper piercing, a technique used to create early quilts. Ms. Dorries pieced together a design known as "Grandmother's Flower Garden."

The actual wedding of Miss Casey and Capt. Hunt took place at Fort Steilacoom on December 28, 1860.

Nancy Covert



Photos by Nancy Covert and Jackie Dock

Miss Cassie Young (left) was Abigail and Miss Melissa Ng portrayed her younger sister "Bessie" during the tea.



Erin Dorries demonstrates paper piercing. Tulip quilt above from Beth Julian and Pat Collier's Baltimore quilt below.

