



Governors Island as it looked during the Civil War

Chapter 7

While the War between the States sooner or later involved all of our southern coast defenses, Fort Columbus and Castle Williams were so far north of the zone of operations that they offered no opportunity to engage in actual combat. However, they and their island were intimately associated with the federal war effort in many important phases.

And even if Governors Island was not able itself to participate in direct hostile action, it at least could enjoy the vicarious fame of shining in the reflected glory of some of those it had sent forth to battle. The gallant John C. Pemberton who wore the gray and gold of a Confederate lieutenant general was the same officer who, as a 4th Artillery shave-tail, had commanded Fort Columbus in 1837. General "Fighting Joe" Hooker had been plain Lieutenant Hooker when the 1st Artillery was on Governors Island in 1840; Major Samuel P. Heintzelman, whose family name was on Army rolls continuously for a century and a half, was one of

Fort Columbus' doughboy subalterns in 1861; and Brevet Captain "Sam" Grant would in the fullness of time go from the usual comforts of his room in Quarters 9, to the equally drab parlor of a farmhouse at Appomattox.

But the secluded garrison actually had plenty to do on its own account. As the central Army recruiting agency for our eastern seaboard, volunteers and draftees began to flow to Governors Island in a steady stream for processing and assignment. In addition, the island was a convenient assembly point for out-of-state militia organizations while en route to the south. At one time seven state regiments were encamped within the limited borders of the island. A Wisconsin outfit alone had 1,200 men. It is not hard to credit the statement of an onlooker that when these seven regiments, with their seven bands, simultaneously, presented seven individual evening Retreat parades, it was a thrilling spectacle.

Of considerably less appeal to many of those affected was the Army regulation then in force, which required the troops to attend divine service