

ALCATRAZ

Alcatraz sits alone in the middle of San Francisco Bay, a small, rocky island sometimes barely visible through the fog. It is only 1½ miles from Fisherman's Wharf—yet for years it seemed as inaccessible as if it were a thousand miles out to sea. Because the island appeared so uninviting, it played a vivid role in California history. It was the site of a powerful fortress, a military prison, and a federal prison whose inmates were isolated by a ring of water and a barricade of mystery created by the island's tight security.

Today Alcatraz is no longer a forbidden and forbidden place but a national park, open to anyone who wants to retrace its many interesting years. You can join a ranger-guided walk or explore the island on your own, following the sequence in this Map and Guide.

The National Park Service welcomes you to Alcatraz.

Dock Tower
"Your constant vigilance insures safety." The wharf was guarded by the dock tower during the federal-prison era. Three towers were strategically located on the island, where tower guards kept a lonely watch. Today, the dock tower is the last of the guard towers still standing.

Wharf
"The first glimpse of Alcatraz fills a convict with grim forebodings," noted Bryan Conway, one of the island's first inmates. From the wharf, the island's only safe boat landing, the men got the first glimpse of their new home. The original wharf was built in 1854, when Alcatraz was a military fort; it has been repaired and enlarged over the years.

Fortified Barracks/Exhibit Area/Theater/Bookstore
The ground floor of the fortified barracks, built between 1865 and 1867, originally served to bastion the wharf. When Alcatraz was a military fortress, the building was intended to house both soldiers and cannon. The guns, however, were technically obsolete before they were ever mounted. In 1905, a three-story apartment building for soldiers was constructed atop the brick fortifications. Today, the armored enclosures, or "casemates," meant for cannons are occupied by an exhibit area, theater, and bookstore.



Miran "Buddy" Thompson, executed for killing a guard during the 1946 escape attempt.
"Look, I know I've been involved in crime all my life. I've hardened to it. Maybe it's because I ain't had any education, any chance for a decent way of living. Maybe if I had been trained to work at something, I wouldn't have been so bad."

Joseph Creizer, caught trying to escape in May 1941; later killed during the 1946 escape attempt.
"I have no quarrel with society. It ought not have none with me. I only want what's coming to me. I've been wrong all my life. But I ain't bad. Now, in this hole, I fight the atmosphere, the silence, the bodies. No one feels the hard misery inside me."

Cellhouse
In 1907 Alcatraz became a full-time military prison. The military convicts sent there were sentenced to imprisonment and hard labor, which must have been hard indeed because, ironically, they mixed concrete and hauled girders to build their own prison.

When it was completed in 1911, this cellhouse was one of the world's largest reinforced concrete structures. Like prisons within a prison, four free-standing cellblocks stood within the massive cellhouse so that no cell adjoined an outside wall or ceiling that a prisoner might tunnel through. The cellhouse also contained a dining room, kitchen, shower room, library, and full-service hospital.

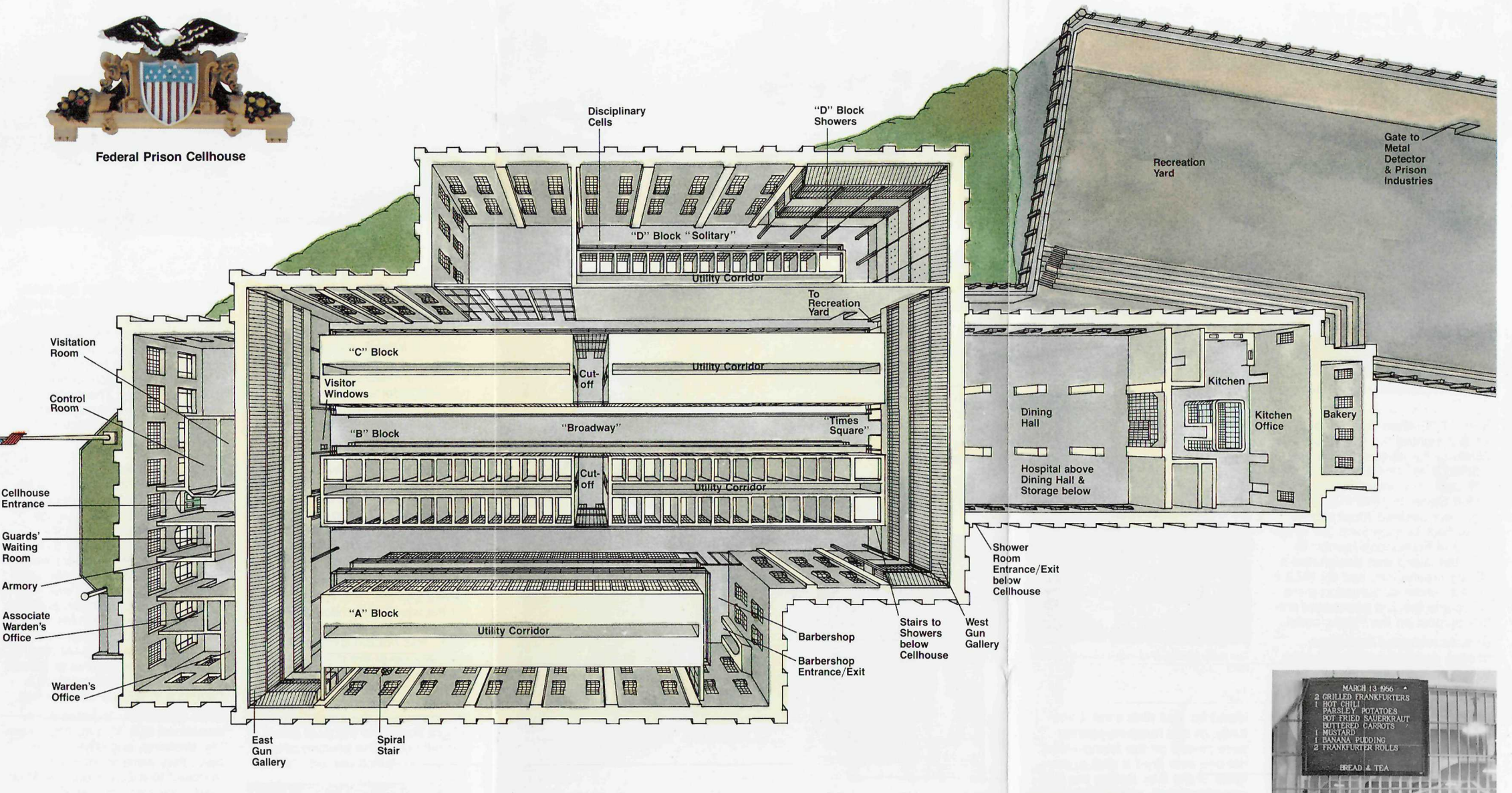
Alcatraz became a federal prison in 1934.

Cellhouse Entrance
A series of electronically controlled gates and doors made this the most secure entrance to Alcatraz. The door could be opened only from the bunkerlike control room. Here, behind three-inch-thick bulletproof windows, a guard controlled the entrance and the prison's arsenal of tear gas, pistols, rifles, and submachine guns. Near the entrance are the weapon vaults, along with offices for the warden, associate warden, and captain of the guard.

Officers' Quarters (Ruins)
On the harsh, rockbound fortress, life had its pleasanter side. Military officers and their families lived in handsome 1800s Victorian cottages surrounded by flower gardens. Though the cottages themselves were demolished in 1940, the brick basements and stairways of three homes are still visible in the dense foliage.

Warden's House (Ruins)
Once an imposing residence with spacious rooms and high windows opening onto spectacular views of the Bay, the warden's house was reduced to a charred ruin after a 1970 fire. The house had been built in 1929 for Col. G. Maury Cralie, commandant of the island military prison. Tough as well as fair, Cralie ended a 1926 mass-escape threat by announcing to the assembled prisoners, "Go ahead—swim!" The house was later occupied in 1934 by James A. Johnston, the first warden of the new federal penitentiary, and by all subsequent wardens.

Lighthouse
In 1854, the first U.S. lighthouse on the Pacific coast was built on Alcatraz. The lightkeepers lived in a cottage at the base and climbed into the high tower to clean the lens of the light and keep the oil lamp full. In 1909 the old lighthouse was replaced by an 84-foot tower, high enough to be seen above the recently completed cell-block. The oil lamp gave way to an electric light, but the lightkeepers remained on Alcatraz after the prison closed in 1963. The light is now automated.



"A" Block
"A" Block is the only part of the cellblock that still looks as it did just after the military prison was completed in 1912. Before Alcatraz became a federal prison in 1934, all cellblocks had strap-iron doors, key locks, and spiral staircases. The soft iron bars were replaced by hardened-steel ones, and the key locks by automatic locking devices. Since "A" Block was not refitted, it was used only occasionally to isolate troublemakers.

"Broadway"
The busiest hallway in the cellhouse, between "B" and "C" Blocks, was nicknamed "Broadway." Following a strip search, a first-time inmate on Alcatraz was led along this hall to the cell that would be his home for many years. He would leave the cell

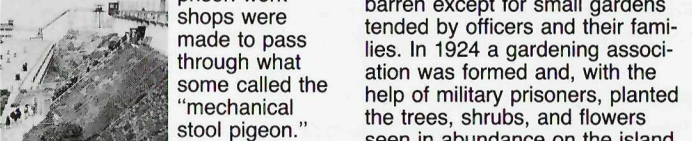
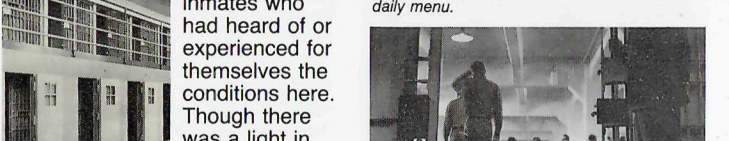
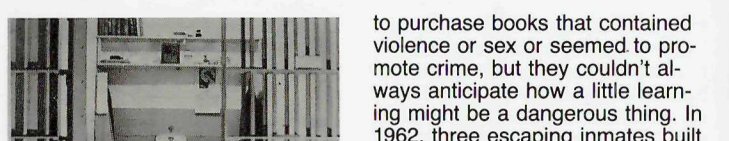
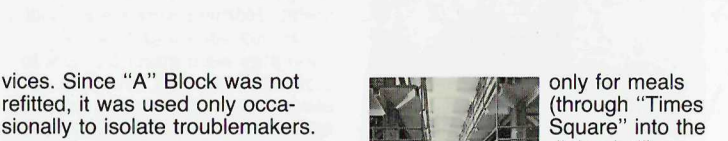
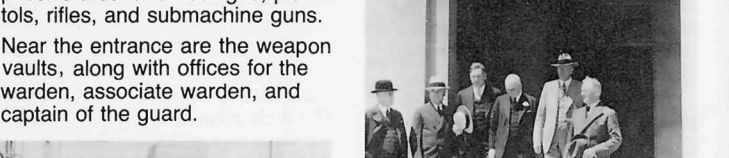
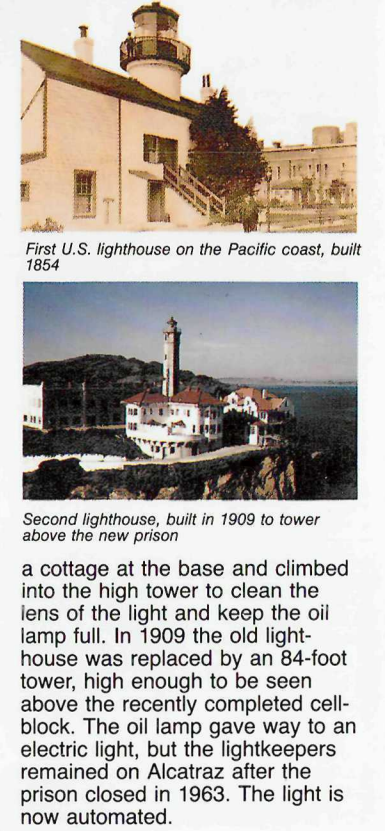
"D" Block: "Solitary"
"You are entitled to food, clothing, shelter, and medical attention. Anything else you get is a privilege." For any infraction of the rules, an inmate could lose his privileges. For a major infraction he was sent to solitary confinement in "D" Block. His sole human contact came when his two daily meals were served through a slot in the door and when he was led to the end of the block for a weekly shower. Most inmates spent no more than five days in "D" Block, but some were confined here for months or years. Cells 9 through 14 were called

Dining Hall/Kitchen
The dining hall was one of the most dangerous areas of the prison. The guards were unarmed, the inmates were gathered together, and the eating utensils could in a moment become lethal weapons. To keep the situation under control, the officials ran the dining hall strictly and made sure the meals were varied and well prepared. Of course, precautions weren't limited to keeping the diners in good

Shop and Industry Buildings
Work was a privilege, and inmates who earned that privilege might work anywhere on the island: in the kitchen, hospital, library, or gardens or on the dock. Many, however, worked inside the shop and industry buildings, where they

Recreation Yard
Another earned privilege was several hours in the recreation yard on weekends and holidays. Inmates could join in a game of baseball, shuffleboard, basketball, or horseshoes, or they could play chess or chat in a quiet corner. On the fenced walkways that ran along the wall, the ever-present armed guards kept watch.

Parade Ground
The military post's parade ground was carved out of rock by prisoners in the 1870s, and officers' quarters were later built along its perimeter. By 1940 guards and their families were living in new apartments there, and children rode bicycles and played baseball where once soldiers had snapped to attention. In 1971 government bulldozers leveled all the buildings.



might end up laundering prison clothes and linen, making gloves, building furniture, or working in the metal and carpentry shops. During World War II, the prisoners turned to defense work, making cargo nets for the U.S. Navy, manufacturing fatigues and khakis for the Army, and repairing the buoys that held the antisubmarine net across the mouth of the Bay. Today, these buildings, which were once a hub of prison activity, are considered unsafe and are closed to the public.

On weekdays, the inmates lined up in the recreation yard for their work assignments. As they mounted the steps above the yard, they could get a glimpse—beyond the concrete walls and barbed wire—of the outside world: the gray blue waters of the Bay, the City skyline, and the graceful span of the Golden Gate Bridge. After the head count, inmates descended the steep stairway to the prison shop and industry buildings.

Gardens
Windswept and forlorn, Alcatraz presented a harsh view to the first soldiers. For many years topsoil was imported from nearby Angel Island, but "the Rock" remained barren except for small gardens tended by officers and their families. In 1924 a gardening association was formed and, with the help of military prisoners, planted the trees, shrubs, and flowers seen in abundance on the island today.

Metal Detector
Inmates returning from the prison workshops were made to pass through what some called the "mechanical stool pigeon." Concealed iron or steel tools or knives would set the alarm buzzing. To receive the metal detector, inmates sometimes fashioned "shivs" (narrow blades) from brass or plastic which could not be detected by the machine. Guards often searched inmates at random for weapons or contraband that might have been slipped past the metal detector.

humor. Tear-gas canisters suspended from the ceiling could quell a riot in minutes, and on a walkway outside the main windows, an armed officer kept close watch on the hall. At the end of each 20-minute meal, the inmates' forks, spoons, and knives were laid out on the table and carefully counted.