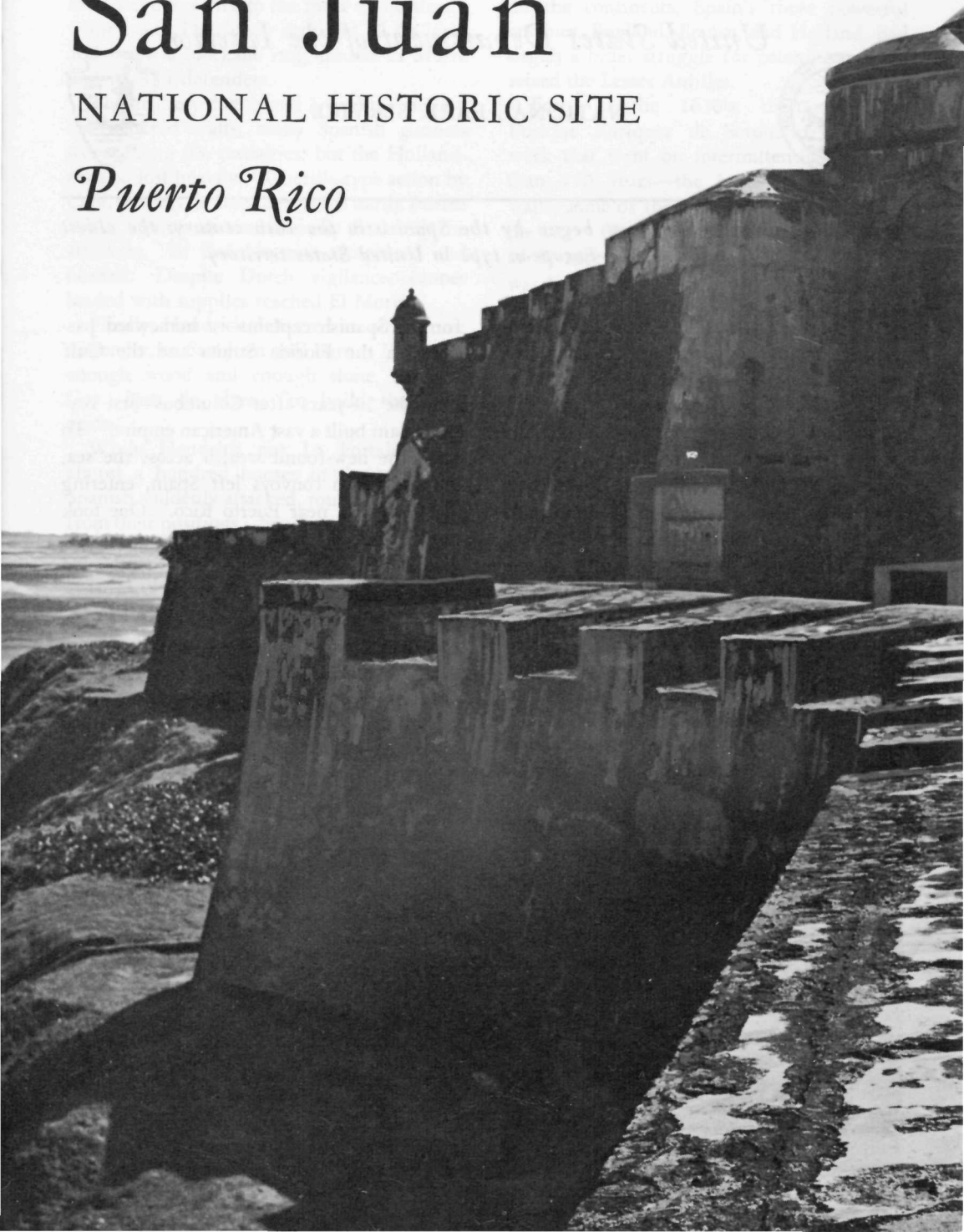


San Juan

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Puerto Rico



San Juan NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



Massive masonry fortifications begun by the Spanish in the 16th century; the oldest fortifications of European type in United States territory

SAN JUAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE, comprising major defenses of the fabulous Spanish Main, lies at the Caribbean gateway. Here Spaniards planted the first permanent colony in the present territory of the United States, and here, to protect this colony and their treasure fleets, they built mighty forts rising 140 feet and more above the sea. San Juan's great fortifications are a measure of Spain's ancient power in the New World, and its traditions form a historic bond between the Americas.

The Search for Riches

"GOLD in the rivers of Puerto Rico!" The word from the Indians brought Juan Ponce de León to the island in 1508 to found Caparra.

Gold there was indeed, but it was soon gone. And though commerce in sugar, coffee, and other products took its place, Puerto Rico was never a wealth-producing colony. It was important to Spain for other reasons. Puerto Rico was the base from which Ponce de León sailed to find the northern mainland—the 16th century "island" that he called Florida across the swift-flowing current of the Gulf Stream at which he marveled. Although he paid for them with his life, when mortally wounded by Florida Indians, his discoveries opened a new seaway

Cover: *The walls of El Morro*

for the Spanish captains—a homeward passage via the Florida Straits and the Gulf Stream.

In the 50 years after Columbus' first voyage, Spain built a vast American empire. To fetch the new-found wealth across the sea, each year two convoys left Spain, entering the Caribbean near Puerto Rico. One took on Mexican silver and Philippine merchandise at Vera Cruz, while the other loaded pearls at Cartagena and Peruvian treasure at Puerto Bello on the Isthmus. At Havana they met for the homeward voyage past the shores of Florida.

Roving corsairs seized what they could of Spanish goods. No ship or settlement was safe from attack. Puerto Rico, so near the Caribbean gateway, had to be kept free of enemies who would otherwise seize it for a home port in their forays against the treasure fleets. Florida's St. Augustine, at the other end of the American loop, was fortified for much the same reason.

The First Defenses of San Juan

IN 1521, the year of Ponce's death, the Puerto Rican colonists moved from Caparra to a better location—the present townsite on the little coastal island of San Juan. Sea rovers continually threatened the little settlement of some 300 people, and marauding



Casa Blanca (L) and La Fortaleza (R) tower above the city wall

Caribs from the southern islands ravaged their lands. For years the only stronghold was La Casa Blanca (The White House), built in 1525 as a home for the Ponce de León family. True, the walls of La Fortaleza (The Fortress) were finished in 1540, but of it Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo said, "only blind men could have chosen such a site for a fort."

Perhaps Morro Castle began with Fernández' suggestion that the 120-foot *morro*, or headland, at the west end of San Juan was the proper place to fortify. Defensive works were authorized there in 1539, and the first battery and tower were built about that time.

Corsairs had already sacked and burned Havana, and in the following years Spain suffered countless other losses on both land and sea. In 1586, Sir Francis Drake returned from Santo Domingo, Cartagena, and St. Augustine with booty worth £60,000. As part of a plan to improve Spanish defenses, Don Juan de Tejada went to survey the Antilles.

In company with the famed military engineer Juan Bautista Antonelli, Tejada landed precipitately in Puerto Rico when their ship was wrecked on the coast. Antonelli approved the Morro site and laid out a hornwork (so-called because its plan resembles the spreading horns of a bull) to stretch north-south across the headland as protection against land attack.

Loss of materials in the wreck held up construction until Capt. Pedro de Salazar arrived in 1591. As a labor crew, the town council assigned him 400 men—a number

equal to half the town's white population. Salazar watched the hornwork grow, with walls of *tapiería* (a substantial mix of earth, rock, and lime) and limestone. For the first time El Morro had the appearance of a citadel.

"The Corsair Drake"

WHILE the defenses were being built, curious English sea captains were unwelcome visitors. Then, in 1595, came "el corsario Drake," with full knowledge that San Juan harbored a storm-wracked galleon. Thirty-five tons of precious metal lay in La Fortaleza awaiting transport to Spain.

Drake's fleet of 23 sail, with a land army of 3,000 men, dropped anchor at the east end of the island of San Juan on November 22, 1595. A hundred Spanish cannon and 1,500 men were ready. A ball from a shore battery crashed through a cabin port, struck the stool from beneath Sir Francis Drake while he was at supper, and killed three officers. The squadron moved to the other end of the island.

At the new anchorage the next day, the English engaged El Morro's artillery, and that night a thousand of Drake's men manned pinnace and launch. Past El Morro they slipped, into the dark harbor to burn Spanish vessels. But, as the flames began to light the waters, Spanish cannon splintered the little boats crowded with Englishmen. Shattered and dismayed, the attackers withdrew. Drake then sailed toward Panama, where he hoped for better luck. But he died of a fever, and

his leaden coffin was buried in the American waters that had given him fame and fortune.

The Fall of El Morro

THE *Scourge of Malice*, one of the greatest ships of her day, lay with 19 other vessels a few miles east of San Juan on June 6, 1598. Aboard the great flagship was George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland, leading another formidable English attack on Spanish America.

Cumberland chose to approach by land. He brought 1,000 men ashore. And this time San Juan had less than 500 defenders, was short of food and weakened by an epidemic. A Negro led the Englishmen to the bridge that stretched across to San Juan Island. Before dawn, on June 8, Cumberland's men attacked the bridge gate, only to be thrown back after a 2-hour fight. Cumberland, who fell from the bridge in his armor, almost drowned.

The attack shifted to a Spanish battery guarding a narrow channel at the northeast point of the island. A warship sailed close in and silenced the shore guns, whereupon the men of England landed and moved on the town. Siege guns methodically breached the land wall of El Morro, and Gov. Antonio Mosquera formally presented the citadel keys to Cumberland on June 21. Cumberland saw his standard rise over the battered walls and dreamed of Puerto Rico—the Key to the Indies—as a permanent possession of His

El Cañuelo, rebuilt after the Dutch attack of 1625



Britannic Majesty. This vision of San Juan as an English outpost was shared by the ruling faction at home. For now, as the maritime powers of England, France, and Holland were growing in national unity and strength, they were seeking permanent rewards in the Americas—colonies and trading stations of their own.

Cumberland's dream soon ended. Dysentery so weakened his men that they had to leave Puerto Rico. But with them they hauled 80 Spanish cannon to the ships, and they tore down the land wall of El Morro.

The Dutch Burn San Juan

DURING the first quarter of the 1600's, 200 slaves were brought to San Juan and artisans from Spain arrived to work on the defenses. On tiny Cañuelo Island, opposite El Morro at the harbor entrance, work on a little square fort, called San Juan de la Cruz, was started about 1610, while at the other end of San Juan several outworks were improved. Most important, El Morro's hornwork was rebuilt stronger than ever, and behind its walls a broad new gun deck overlooked the harbor channel.

For Puerto Rico, the long conflict between Spain and the Netherlands came to a climax in 1625. On September 25, a Dutch fleet of 17 vessels under Gen. Bowdoin Hendrick coolly sailed into the harbor, suffering little damage from El Morro. Ship guns cleared

the way for landing 800 men, and the flag of the Prince of Orange was soon flying above La Fortaleza. Hendrick's engineers pushed their siege trenches to the moat of El Morro, while other Dutchmen captured El Cañuelo and threw a blockade ring around El Morro and its 330 defenders.

The artillery duel lasted 3 weeks. Behind the battered walls, many Spanish gunners were among the casualties; but the Hollanders also lost heavily. Guerrilla-type action by Capt. Andrés de Botello and his hardy Puerto Rican volunteers continuously harassed the attackers. El Cañuelo was recaptured and burned. Despite Dutch vigilance, canoes loaded with supplies reached El Morro.

Finally, Hendrick delivered an ultimatum: surrender, or San Juan will burn. "There is enough wood and enough stone," replied Gov. Juan de Haro, "to build the town again."

While Hendrick put La Fortaleza and almost a hundred houses to the torch, the Spanish suddenly attacked, routing the Dutch from their positions. Spanish cannon, moved swiftly into position, twice caused the enemy fleet to change anchorage. When at last, on November 2, the ships made a successful break for the sea, the guns of El Morro this time left many a mark on them.

Building the Walls Around the City

ALTHOUGH European losses had weakened Spain, another great defense project was

started in Puerto Rico. Despite expeditions against them, the buccaneers had grown bolder. Also, in the Caribbean, as well as on the continents, Spain's three powerful enemies, England, France, and Holland, had begun a bitter struggle for colonies and had seized the Lesser Antilles.

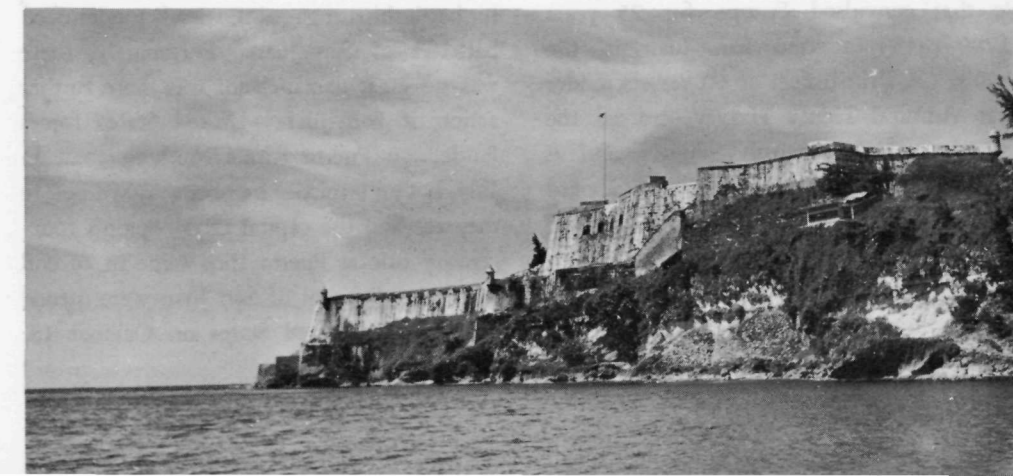
Early in the 1630's, therefore, Gov. Enrique Enriquez de Sotomayor began a work that went on intermittently for more than 150 years—the building of massive walls, some of them 50 feet high, to enclose the city. On a promontory a half mile east of El Morro, a redoubt called San Cristóbal was built about 1633. By 1678, as the city wall enclosed this redoubt, San Cristóbal took on something of its present design. El Morro, too, was strengthened.

San Juan—A Defense of "The First Order"

As Spain's power in the Caribbean was threatened by the British capture of Martinique, St. Lucia, Grenada, and Havana during the 1760's, the Spanish Crown listed Puerto Rico as a defense station of the "first order." Field Marshal Alejandro O'Reilly brought Engineer Tomás O'Daly to San Juan in 1765, and the two Irish Spaniards not only reformed the military organization, but also planned great additions to the fortifications.

In the decade from 1766, using 700 convicts from Spain, Venezuela, and Colombia,

El Morro from the bay





Fort San Cristóbal rises from the heart of the city



San Juan Island, showing El Morro and city walls

O'Daly made El Morro essentially what it is today. At San Cristóbal he built the great outworks.

By the last years of the 18th century the major fortifications included El Cañuelo and the citadel of El Morro for defense of the harbor entrance and the city walls and San Cristóbal for command of other approaches. Beyond San Cristóbal to the east were two other defense lines—an entrenchment stretching across the island and fortifications along the eastern shore. By the end of the century, these great works had cost Spain an estimated 6,000,000 pesos. They mounted over 400 guns, and spread over more than 200 acres of land. The town itself occupied only 62 acres.

The Revolutionary and Napoleonic struggle that convulsed Europe for 25 years (1789–1815) affected San Juan in the 1790's. A British fleet of 60 vessels, under Rear Admiral Henry Harvey, crossed the Atlantic to seize Spanish colonies, and at Barbados Sir Ralph Abercromby went aboard with an army of some 7,000 men. After capturing Trinidad, they moved on Puerto Rico. On April 18, 1797, despite a preliminary repulse, the troops landed east of San Juan Island. Abercromby marched toward

the city, but Gen. Ramon de Castro's eastern defense line held the British at bay and finally won a fierce artillery duel. After a strong Spanish attack, Abercromby withdrew on the night of April 30.

The End of an Era

WHILE San Juan defenses were refined during the 1800's, Spain's American colonies gained independence. By the time trouble in Cuba led the United States to declare war with Spain in 1898, Cuba and Puerto Rico were the only remnants of Spain's former American empire.

In search of the Spanish fleet, Admiral William Sampson brought his flotilla to Puerto Rico, and for 2½ hours, on May 12, his battleships engaged the newly modernized batteries of San Juan. Fortunately, there was no great damage, nor was there further action at San Juan. United States forces landed on Puerto Rico's southern coast in July, but an armistice had been signed before they reached the capital city. Spain's four-century rule at Puerto Rico came to an end when the defenses of San Juan were turned over to the United States on October 18, 1898.

The Fortifications Today

SAN JUAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE includes the Spanish-built forts of El Morro, San Cristóbal, and El Cañuelo, the city walls, and Casa Blanca.

Castillo de San Felipe del Morro (Fort St. Philip on the Headland) rises 140 feet above the sea at the west end of San Juan Island. A broad grassy slope is the land approach to the moated walls. Storerooms, gunrooms, quarters, chapel, and prison surround a large courtyard, or assembly plaza, and huge cisterns lie beneath. Ramps, tunnels, and stairways give access to the different parts of the fort, a tremendous, five-tiered pile of limestone which sweeps upward from the ancient gun platform washed by the Atlantic to the broad, windswept ramparts that crown the headland.

El Cañuelo, or San Juan de la Cruz (St. John of the Cross), is a 50-foot-square fort across the harbor entrance from El Morro. Its walls stand about 15 feet high. The flat roof was a platform for cannon, and beneath this deck are the ruins of a cistern and magazines.

Although part of the city wall was razed as the city grew during the latter 1800's, the bastioned ramparts still crown the precipitous ocean shore from El Morro to San Cristóbal.

On the harbor side, the wall rises sharply from the water's edge and here, at historic San Juan Gate, colonial officials were greeted with traditional ceremony as they stepped ashore. Nearby is Casa Blanca, property of the heirs of Ponce de León until 1779. Now occupied by the Commanding General of the Antilles Command, it is not open to the public.

Castillo de San Cristóbal (Fort St. Christopher) looms grimly above Old San Juan. As at El Morro, there is a courtyard, or *plaza de armas*, surrounded by gunrooms and barracks. Tunnels lead up to a main gun deck; higher still is the Caballero de San Miguel, a massive two-tiered gun platform 150 feet above the sea.

Administration

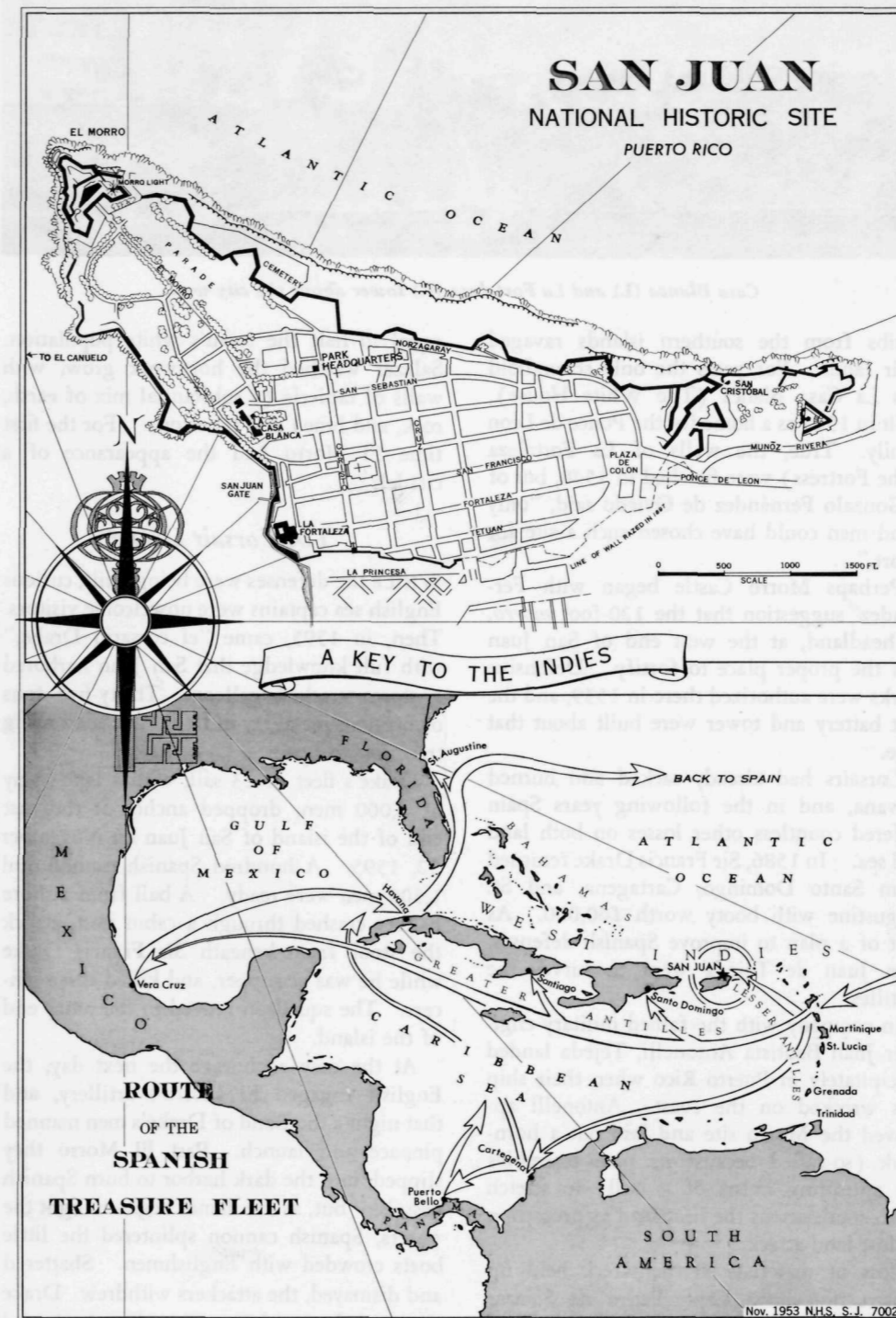
SAN JUAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE was established by order of the Secretary of the Interior on February 14, 1949. Under the terms of a cooperative agreement between the Department of the Army and the Department of the Interior, Army use of the forts will continue. Regulated public access, under the supervision of the National Park Service, is permitted. Correspondence relating to the historic site should be addressed to the Superintendent, San Juan National Historic Site, National Park Service, Box 712, San Juan, P.R.

Service to the Public

GUIDED tours are available from the National Park Service headquarters, near the entrance of Fort Brooke. Information concerning the site and the scheduled tours may be obtained here.

Mission 66

MISSION 66 is a 10-year program of conservation, development, and improvement of the National Park System. It is scheduled for completion in 1966, the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the National Park Service.



Photographic credits: El Cañuelo, courtesy U. S. Army

All others, courtesy Government of Puerto Rico

Reprint 1961

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1961—O-616887

San Juan

NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

Puerto Rico

