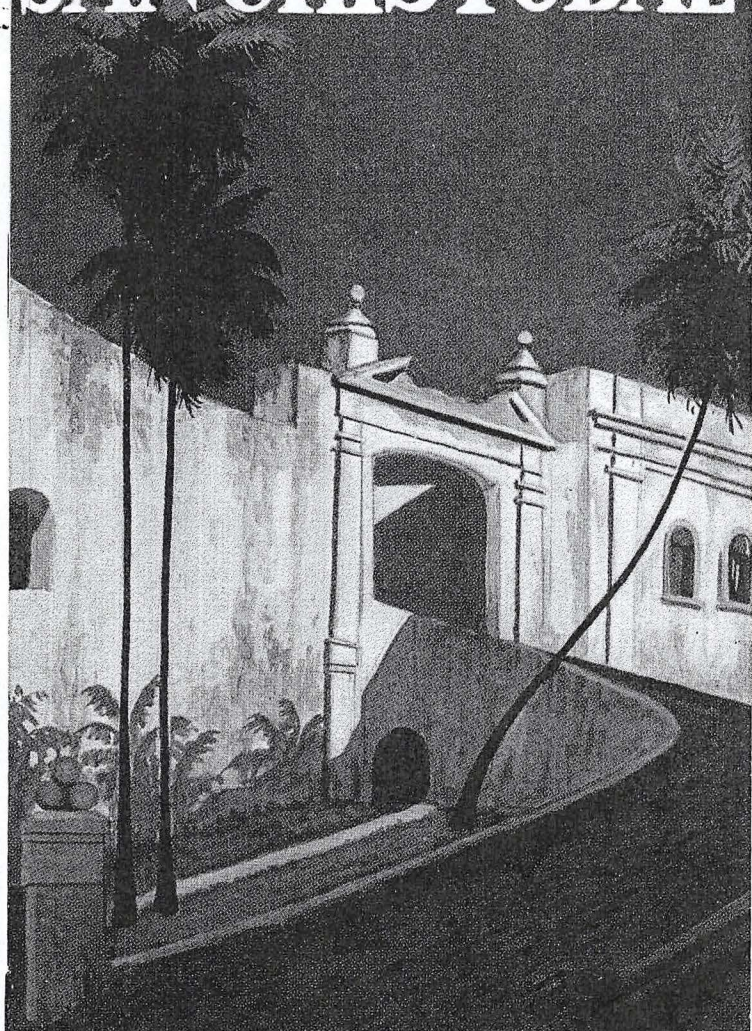
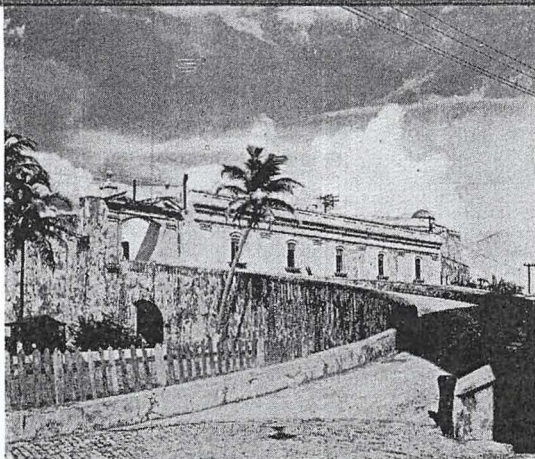


FORT SAN CRISTOBAL



Puerto Rico

U.S.A.



Entrance ramp to San Cristóbal

AMONG the shrines and monuments that abound in the capital city of Puerto Rico to interest the visitor, few can offer so much historical background, steeped in traditional fact and fancy, as *Fort San Cristóbal*, located in the northeastern part of town, commanding the wide expanse of the Atlantic Ocean. For centuries it has been a bulwark of defense against the predatory raids of sea-rovers, as well as against the attacks of foreign fleets in search of territorial conquests, and, in 1898, it was from one of its batteries that the first shot was fired against the bombardment of Admiral Sampson's squadron in the Spanish-American war.

Old records mention San Cristóbal Castle as early as 1521, though actual construction of it was not started until 1631. The sacking of the city by the Dutch in 1622 had demonstrated the inadequacy of the defenses provided for it, and Fort San Cristóbal and the City Wall were built to remedy the situation.

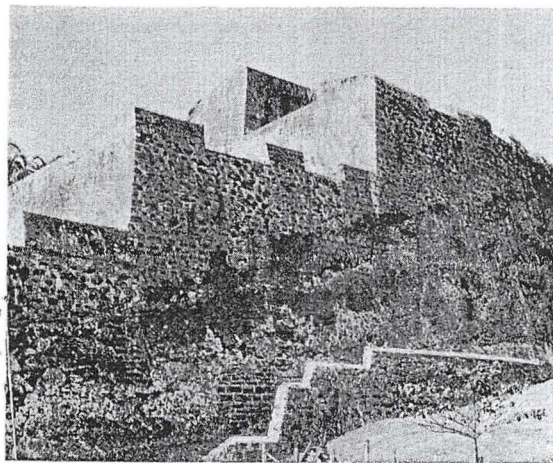
Late in the eighteenth century, Spain being at war with England and attacks on the capital being expected, Colonel Thomas O'Daly, of the Royal Engineers, was ordered to proceed to San Juan and carry out the necessary improvements in the fortifications of the city. Colonel O'Daly directed the reconstruction and enlargement of Fort San Cristóbal during the period from 1776 to 1783, but the English did not

attack until 1797, when the troops of the Fort aided greatly in successfully repulsing the enemy forces after a two-weeks' siege.

With few changes, Fort San Cristóbal remains today in the same condition as it was many, many years ago. The City Wall, which formerly ran from the fort to the bay, was torn down in 1897, with great festivities to mark the expansion of the city. A gate in this wall, named "La Puerta de Santiago," was located just about to the east of the present Casino de Puerto Rico, near the Plaza de Colon (Columbus Square). The series of tunnels connecting Fort San Cristóbal with El Morro, La Fortaleza, the Escambron and La Marina, having outlived their usefulness, were, shortly before the Spanish-American war, filled with debris to serve as foundations for the necessary construction called for by modern warfare.

The tunnels now used for the storage of ammunition in the Fort were used for similar purposes during the Spanish occupation and called "Santa Bárbara," after the patroness saint of soldiery against explosive catastrophes. Smaller tunnels leading throughout San Cristóbal and the Princesa Battery served also for the storage of ammunition and as mine galleries. At the end of these galleries there were planted barrels of powder covered with tar and connected by fuses to a

Bulwarks of defense

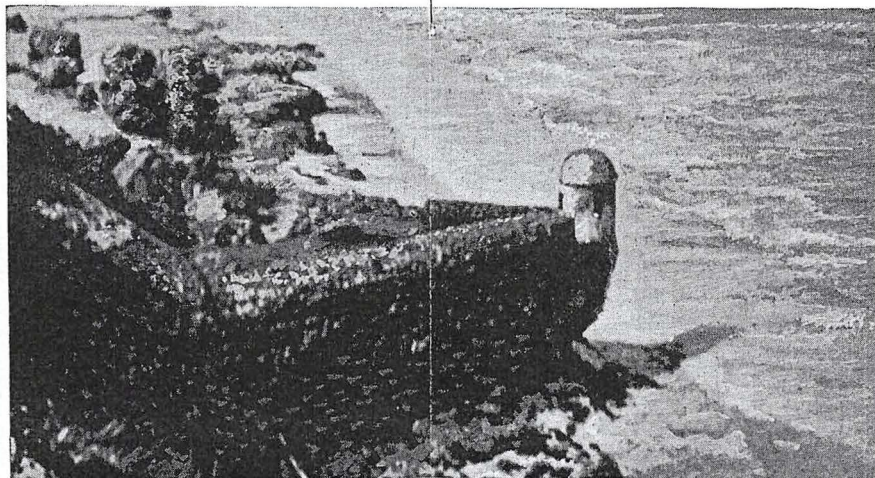


central point, for emergency purposes. It is possible that some of these "mines" are still in place, though no longer a menace.

One of the rooms in the main tunnel was used, in Spanish days, as a death cell for those whose mortal existence was soon to cease by royal decree. It is related that in this cell, some ninety years ago, there was confined a certain Captain of artillery, a *sevillano* by birth, condemned to death for mutiny. While awaiting "the day" for the carrying-out of the sentence, the officer, who possessed artistic inclinations, undertook to paint on the walls of the prison the likeness of seven Spanish galleons. A small ventilating shaft at the end of the room provided the only

the entire garrison mutinied, firing upon the city until their ammunition was exhausted. The Commanding General, foreseeing an attempt by the mutineers to replenish their supply of ammunition through the tunnel from the Escambron magazines (at present used as a museum), stationed loyal troops at the end of said tunnel where they, indeed, captured the ammunition detail of the mutineers and then, going back with their prisoners, they gained access to the Fort and quickly quelled the uprising.

Possibly the most interesting of subjects in connection with San Cristóbal has to do with the legend of the "Haunted Sentry Box." Jutting out over the Atlantic Ocean from the walls of the Fort, this fabled



The legendary "Haunted Sentry Box"

light for the artist-soldier. These paintings are well preserved to this day and are quite creditable; and though better pictures may have been painted, it is doubtful whether a work of art of equal value has ever been produced under circumstances such as those surrounding the unfortunate officer.

The mutiny for which he had been condemned to death involved the entire garrison of Fort San Cristóbal. It seems that a son having been born to the King of Spain, the soldiers had requested that one year of their service be remitted as a token of jubilation. While there must have been some precedent for their petition, the request was not granted, whereupon

spot has been material for novelists and writers, as well as for the canvas of artists. The story goes that, over a hundred years ago, on a certain dark and stormy night, the sentinel assigned to duty in this stern sentry-box disappeared without cause or warning, leaving his uniform behind. A sheer drop of 100 feet to the water below made escape impossible in that direction. Unable to reach an explanation, the disappearance was considered to be the work of his Satanic Majesty. The true, but less poetic yarn, as told by the late Captain Angel Rivero—last Spanish Commander of the Fort—is that the soldier deserted his post, leaving uniform and equipment behind to





Rocks of Ages

avoid detection, and he was located years later in a farm near Caguas.

Another interesting story connected with the Fort is that which recounts the Miracle of San Cristóbal. On going down the steps into the immense cistern under the fortification, one may, with the aid of a strong flashlight, discern high up on the opposite side of the cistern what appears to be a print of Saint Christopher. This picture has played a most important part in the history of San Juan. In the early Spanish days, Fort San Cristóbal furnished a considerable part of the city's water supply. The picture of the good Saint Christopher was hung in the cistern and there was never a shortage of water. But a new priest came with new ideas. He thought Saint Christopher's picture should properly hang in the chapel of the fortress. And there it was hung. Immediately the rains stopped. The spring dried up. The cistern became empty. The devout people of San Juan fasted and prayed for rain but none came. Suddenly one night, the heavens opened and the rain fell in torrents. The next morning the soldiers, in going to their chapel, found the picture of Saint Christopher missing. A long search followed. It was at last found high up in its accustomed place on the wall of the cistern. Since then neither priest nor infidel has had the courage to remove it from its chosen place.



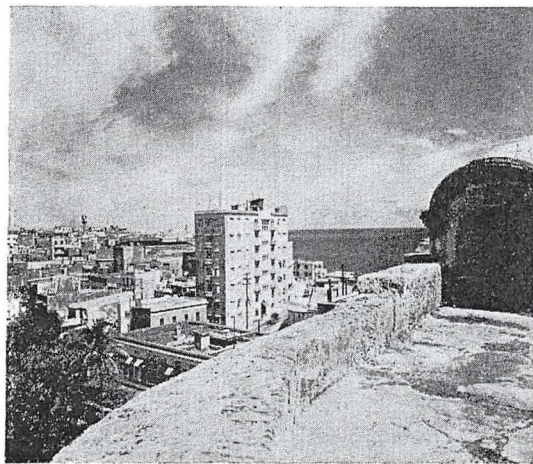
One other "miracle" surrounds the history of Fort San Cristóbal, it being recounted as follows:

The ancient chapel of the Fort, now the barber shop of Company "D," 65th Infantry, U.S.A., was used during Sampson's bombardment of the city as a temporary storage-room for a million rounds of Mauser rifle ammunition. A shell from Sampson's fleet entered the chapel and exploded at the foot of the statue of the Virgin. The million rounds of ammunition into which the bursting shell fell were not detonated. The Spaniards believed that the watchful care of the Virgin prevented a great catastrophe.

A red X painted on the wall of the upper ramparts marks the spot where five members of the Spanish garrison were killed by a shell from Sampson's fleet.

An amusing incident of this engagement was told by Captain Rivero. During the evening prior to the bombardment of Fort San Cristóbal, the American fleet anchored off San Cristóbal. A sentinel posted on the upper ramparts watched their mooring rather nervously. Suddenly a great ball of light struck him. Thinking he was hit by a shell, he proceeded to fall off the wall into the moat one hundred feet below. A broken leg was the price he paid to learn the power of a modern searchlight.

Under the shades of the old, modern skyscrapers loom high



Visit

Puerto Rico



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