**Doing Time at Leavenworth**



The U.S. Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

*Official Army Photo*

There are two kinds of Soldiers at the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. — the ones with no rank or pay, and those with keys.

Handcuffs and steel doors keep the inmates confined, but it’s the tenacity of corrections specialists that cramps inmates’ potential for trouble.

The USDB, unofficially called "The Castle," is the only maximum-security prison within the Department of Defense. Of 440 male inmates, six are currently on death row and 10 are serving life without parole. Female felons are locked away at the Naval Consolidated Brig in San Diego, Calif.

Unless something unusual happens, this is a very calm environment. But these are bad guys, and in several cases they committed some pretty hideous crimes.

**Confinement**

Prisoners’ lives are molded by the degree of supervision needed to minimize risk to others. Custody grades include installation trusty, minimum, minimum inside only, medium and maximum.

The special-housing unit is reserved for inmates who could be locked up 23 hours a day. Food is slid into cells through narrow slots, and a small window at the foot of each door lets the guards, known within the USDB as correctional specialists, chain inmates’ ankles before they’re escorted out for showers or fresh air.

Every time one of these inmates moves, two or three staff members are with them. The correctional specialists actually have more contact with maximum-security inmates than those who pose fewer risks.

Small liberties are granted to inmates who toe the line. They get TV-time and meals served from a food cart in a common area instead of on a tray in their locked cells.

Despite prospects of moving to a lower-custody grade for good behavior, some inmates remain in maximum security for most of their stay.

The staff’s intent is for all inmates to join the general population. Medium- and minimum-security areas contain large open spaces where inmates may spend free time.

Even so, security cameras capture every action in every cell and corner of the prison.

**Rehab**

Prison isn’t forever for most inmates. While counting off the days and years until their release, inmates can participate in as many as 13 treatment programs that focus on self-growth.

Inmates also have access to traditional education programs and vocational-work details. Apprenticeship programs include carpentry, dental assistance, graphic design, screen printing and welding.

Work details are offered in embroidery, textile repair, graphic arts and woodwork. The state of Kansas also offers licensing in barbering, and some details allow inmates to pocket 14 to 80 cents an hour.

**On Watch**

Mature, analytical, firm, observant — all required traits for Soldiers standing guard at the USDB.

Reason and unarmed self-defense are guards’ sole weapons, as guns aren’t allowed inside prison walls.

All Soldiers assigned to the USDB receive additional training before taking charge of security. Among the lessons they learn are techniques for observing prisoner behaviors that may indicate potential problems.

Correctional specialists must know how to de-escalate any situation an inmate could provoke, whether it’s directed toward the staff or another inmate.

Talk in maximum security isn’t always direct. To discern inmates’ moods, guards usually ask open-ended questions, read body language and sometimes decipher through colorful metaphors blurted by inmates.

Someone who is incarcerated is not going to act the same as a person who isn’t. There are little nuances we show the correctional specialists to help them identify behavior changes and, ultimately, provide a safe environment for everyone.

While guards aren’t fill-ins for psychiatric experts, they’re observant enough to provide details to mental-health specialists who arrive on site to help disturbed inmates.

Compared to civilian prisons, the USDB could be among the safest places for criminals to carry out their sentences, according to officials

The prison benefits from the fact that every inmate has had some military discipline before he arrives. With the rare exception, they aren’t career criminals.

The Leavenworth community is no stranger to prisons. In addition to the USDB, the city hosts a federal maximum-security penitentiary, the Lansing Correctional Facility, and a privately operated prison called the Corrections Corporation of America.

Leavenworth is so familiar with prisons that its tourism bureau borrowed “Doin’ Time in Leavenworth” as the city’s slogan.

The USDB has operated since 1875. Sexual offenses currently account for more than half of inmates’ crimes. The last execution was conducted April 13, 1961.

*Much of the above information courtesy of the Army News Service.*