**Fort Leavenworth - United States Penitentiary**

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Prison from the southwest

The **United States Penitentiary (USP), Leavenworth** was the largest [maximum security federal prison](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Incarceration_in_the_United_States#Security_levels) in the United States from 1903 until 2005. It became a medium security prison in 2005.

It is located in [Leavenworth, Kansas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leavenworth,_Kansas). It is an all-male, medium-security facility committed to carrying out the judgments of the [Federal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_government_of_the_United_States) Courts.

**Background**

The civilian USP Leavenworth is the oldest of three major prisons built on the grounds of [Fort Leavenworth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Leavenworth). The [United States Disciplinary Barracks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Disciplinary_Barracks) (USDB) is four miles (6 km) north and is the sole maximum-security penal facility of the [United States Military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Military). The original USDB opened in 1874 with the current facility opening in 2002. Prisoners from the original USDB were used to build the civilian prison. In addition, the military's medium security [Midwest Joint Regional Correctional Facility](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midwest_Joint_Regional_Correctional_Facility), located southwest of the new USDB, opened in 2010. The three prisons operate independently of each other.

In September 2009, the prison population consisted of 1,899 inmates in the main building and 407 in the adjoining minimum security camp.

The prison was extensively described by [Pete Earley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pete_Earley), the only writer at that time who had ever been granted unlimited access to the prison, in his book, *The Hot House*. The prison's history has also been covered extensively in the pictorial history titled *U.S. Penitentiary Leavenworth* by Kenneth M. LaMaster. Mr. LaMaster is the retired Institution Historian.

**Design**

Leavenworth is one of three first generation United States Penitentiaries built in the early 1900s. Prior to its construction federal prisoners were held at state prisons. In 1895 Congress authorized the construction of the federal prison system.

The other two were Atlanta and [McNeil Island](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/McNeil_Island) (although McNeil dates to the 1870s the major expansion did not occur until the early 1900s).

The prison follows a format popularized at the [Auburn Correctional Facility](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Auburn_Correctional_Facility) in New York where the cell blocks were in a large rectangular building. The rectangular building was focused on indoor group labor with a staff continually patrolling.

The Auburn system was a marked difference from the earlier Pennsylvania plan popularized at [Eastern State Penitentiary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eastern_State_Penitentiary) in which cell blocks radiated out from a central building (and was the original design for the nearby Disciplinary Barracks before it was torn down and replaced by a totally new prison).

The [St. Louis, Missouri](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Louis,_Missouri) architecture firm of [Eames and Young](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eames_and_Young) designed both Leavenworth and the [United States Penitentiary, Atlanta](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Penitentiary,_Atlanta).

Leavenworth's prison cells are back to back in the middle of the structure facing the walls. The prison's walls are 40 feet (12 m) high, 40 feet (12 m) below the surface and 3,030 feet (920 m) long and enclose 22.8 acres (92,000 m2).

Its domed main building was nicknamed the "Big Top" or "Big House." The domed Disciplinary Barracks two miles (3 km) to the north was nicknamed the "Little Top" until it was torn down in 2004 and replaced with a newer structure.

The large central structure created various maintenance problems. It was nicknamed the "Hot House" because of its poor ventilation even when air conditioning is running. Extensive research by Prison Historian and author Kenneth M. LaMaster has shown that the institution has never been referred to as the "Hot House". Books such as *Tom White: The Life of a Lawman* and other publications show that the institution has been referred to as "The Big House", "The Big Top", and "The Big L", but never the "Hot House". The latter was popularized after a book of the same title was released by Pete Early in the late 1980s.

The next generation was characterized by the [Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lewisburg_Federal_Penitentiary) built in 1931 which started a move away from a huge central castle like structure. Cell blocks are arranged in a "telephone pole" format extending out from the central building. This eliminated the mixing of prisoners of all types in the same building.

Modern federal prisons such as [ADX Florence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ADX_Florence) have gone to smaller buildings spread out over a compound and depend more upon electronic surveillance.

**Historical timeline**

* 1827: Colonel [Henry Leavenworth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Leavenworth) chose site for new fort.
* 1875: Fort chosen as the site for a military prison. Within a year, Fort Leavenworth housed more than 300 prisoners in a remodeled, supply-depot building.
* 1894: Secretary of War conceded to the House Appropriations Committee that War Department could do without the military prison.
* 1895 July 1: Congress transferred the military prison from the War Department to the [US Department of Justice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/US_Department_of_Justice). The Department of Justice took over the plant and inaugurated the United States Penitentiary. Commandant of the military prison, James V. Pope. Warden of the USP, James W. French.
* 1896: House Judiciary Committee recommended that the facility be replaced.
* 1896 June 10: the Congress authorized a new federal penitentiary.
* 1897 March: Warden French marched prisoners every morning two and one-half miles (4 km) from Ft. Leavenworth to the new site of the federal penitentiary. Work went on for two and one-half decades.
* 1899 July 1: Robert W. McClaughry was appointed Leavenworth's second Warden.
* 1901 November 10: Joseph Waldrupe was the first correctional officer to be killed (records dating back to 1901) in the line of duty at Leavenworth.
* 1903: Enough space was under roof to permit the first 418 prisoners to move into the new federal penitentiary.
* 1904: First Cell house completed
* 1906 February 1: All prisoners had been transferred to the new facility, and the War Department appreciatively accepted the return of its prison.
* 1910 May: The Attorney General approved construction of a separate cellblock for females on the penitentiary grounds—this plan was later abandoned.
* 1913 June: T. W. Morgan, editor of a newspaper in the small Kansas town of Ottawa, was appointed Leavenworth's 3rd Warden.
* 1919: Construction of the cellblocks completed.
* 1926: Construction of the shoe shops completed.
* 1928: Construction of the brush and broom factory completed.
* 1929: Construction of the barber shop and first intraprison murder.
* 1930 May: the [Bureau of Prisons](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bureau_of_Prisons) became a federal agency within the Department of Justice.
* 1930 September 5: [Carl Panzram](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Panzram) becomes the first to be executed (records dating back to 1927) by hanging at Leavenworth.
* 1934 December 11: President Franklin Roosevelt authorized the first [federal prison](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_prison) industries as a public corporation.
* 1938 August 12: Robert Suhay and Glenn Applegate the first double execution (records dating back to 1927) by [hanging](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanging) at Leavenworth.
* 1980s & 1990s: The institution undergoes major renovations to three of its four cellhouses: A, B, and C. D-Cellhouse today remains the only cellblock true to its original design.
* 2005: Federal Bureau of Prisons changes USP Leavenworth's mission. The BOP decided to change the custody level of USP Leavenworth from High / Maximum to Medium while retaining the USP designation for historical reasons.
* 2011: The Federal Bureau of Prisons takes comments on a proposed new 1,500 medium security and 300 minimum security facility on the current prison grounds on 144 acres to the west of the current prison and a 238 acre area to the east.

**Notable inmates**

| **Name** | **Number** | **Status** | **Details** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| [Samuel R. Caldwell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_R._Caldwell) |  |  | First man in America to be arrested for selling marijuana in violation of the Marijuana Tax Act of 1937 |
| [Frederick Cook](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Cook) |  | In 1922, plead guilty to mail fraud and imprisoned until 1930. | Famous explorer whose claims to be the first to reach the summit of Mt. McKinley and the North Pole turned out to be fraudulent. |
| [Jimmy Burke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmy_Burke_(gangster)) |  | who was sent to the prison for the first time at the age of eighteen in 1949 and once again in 1972 for extortion | Gangster |
| [James J. Bulger](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_J._Bulger) |  | He was shipped to Leavenworth out of [Alcatraz](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcatraz). | Irish-American gangster sent to Leavenworth for [hijacking](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carjacking) and bank robbing. |
| [Troy Deon Reddick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Da%27_Unda%27_Dogg) | 87145-011 |  | Bank robber and rapper known as [Da' Unda' Dogg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Da%27_Unda%27_Dogg) |
| [Phillip Garrido](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phillip_Craig_Garrido) |  |  | Sent to Leavenworth for the kidnap of Katherine Callaway, later kidnapped [Jaycee Dugard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jaycee_Dugard) |
| [Fritz Joubert Duquesne](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fritz_Joubert_Duquesne) |  |  | [Nazi](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi) spy and leader of the [*Duquesne Spy Ring*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duquesne_Spy_Ring), the largest convicted [espionage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Espionage) case in United States history. |
| [Victor Feguer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Victor_Feguer) |  |  | last federal fugitive executed before [Timothy McVeigh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timothy_McVeigh) |
| [John "Sonny" Franzese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_%22Sonny%22_Franzese) | 70022-158 |  | A legendary New York gangster and a high ranking member of the [Colombo crime family](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colombo_crime_family). |
| Antonio Fernandez |  |  | aka King Tone and current Inca of the [Latin Kings (gang)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Almighty_Latin_King_and_Queen_Nation). |
| [Gus Hall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gus_Hall) |  |  | former leader of the [Communist Party USA](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Party_USA), indicted under the [Smith Act](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smith_Act) |
| [Thomas James Holden](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_James_Holden) |  |  | murderer and escapee, [FBI Ten Most Wanted Fugitive #1, 1950](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FBI_Ten_Most_Wanted_Fugitives_by_year,_1950) |
| [Michael Nunn](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Nunn) |  |  | Former IBF Middleweight and the WBA Super Middleweight Boxing Champion |
| [Orba Elmer Jackson](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Orba_Elmer_Jackson&action=edit&redlink=1) |  |  | escapee and post office robber, [FBI Ten Most Wanted Fugitive #7, 1950](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FBI_Ten_Most_Wanted_Fugitives_by_year,_1950) |
| [George "Machine Gun" Kelly](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_%22Machine_Gun%22_Kelly) |  |  | Depression era gangster. |
| [Randy Lanier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Randy_Lanier) | 04961-069 | Transferred | [1986](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1986_Indianapolis_500) [Indianapolis 500](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indianapolis_500) rookie of the year. Guilty of engaging in a [Continuing Criminal Enterprise](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Continuing_Criminal_Enterprise) and conspiring to distribute more than 1,000 pounds of marijuana. |
| [Felix Mitchell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felix_Mitchell) |  | Stabbed to death in 1986, just months into his prison term | notorious drug kingpin from [Oakland, California](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oakland,_California). |
| [Byron "Bam" Morris](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bam_Morris) |  |  | former [NFL](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NFL) player, played in [Super Bowl XXX](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Super_Bowl_XXX) |
| ["Boss" Tom Pendergast](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Pendergast) |  |  | Kansas City politician who handpicked [Harry Truman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harry_Truman) for the U.S. Senate |
| [Tom Petters](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Petters) | 14170-041 | As of 2010, held in USP, Leavenworth | Former Minnesota CEO convicted in a $3.6 billion Ponzi scheme, the largest fraud case in state history |
| [George "Bugs" Moran](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_%22Bugs%22_Moran) |  |  | Irish gangster who battled [Al Capone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Capone) for the control of Chicago's criminal underworld, who died one month into his sentence from lung cancer and is buried in the institution cemetery |
| [Richard Case Nagell](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Case_Nagell) |  |  | the so-called "Man Who Knew Too Much" |
| [Carl Panzram](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carl_Panzram) |  |  | serial killer. Executed for the murder of Institution Laundry Foreman Robert G. Warnke |
| [John Paul, Sr.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Paul,_Sr.) | 06818-018 | released in 1999 | racecar driver, Importing marijuana, tax evasion, possession of false passport and attempted [first-degree murder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First-degree_murder) of a federal witness |
| [Leonard Peltier](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonard_Peltier) | 89637-132 | As of 1999 serving his time at USP Lewisburg | American Indian Movement leader, convicted of murdering two FBI agents, [FBI Ten Most Wanted Fugitive #335, 1975](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FBI_Ten_Most_Wanted_Fugitives,_1970s) |
| [James Earl Ray](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Earl_Ray) |  | 1955-58 | Charged with forging documents - later assassin of [Martin Luther King](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther_King) |
| [Leslie Isben Rogge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leslie_Isben_Rogge) |  |  | Bank robber, [FBI Ten Most Wanted Fugitive #430, 1990](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FBI_Ten_Most_Wanted_Fugitives,_1990s) |
| [Robert Stroud](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Stroud) |  |  | became famous as the "Bird Man of Alcatraz" |
| [Thomas Silverstein](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Silverstein) |  | Regarded as one of the prison Bureau's most dangerous prisoners; was held in Leavenworth's basement in a "No Human Contact" Status; transferred to [ADX Florence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/ADX_Florence) [supermax](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Supermax) in [Florence, Colorado](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florence,_Colorado) | Murder |
| [Michael Vick](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Vick) |  | Released in 2009. | NFL quarterback formerly with the Atlanta Falcons, pleaded guilty to operating an unlawful six-year-long interstate dog fighting venture known as "[Bad Newz Kennels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bad_Newz_Kennels_dog_fighting_investigation)". |
| [Ricardo Flores Magón](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ricardo_Flores_Mag%C3%B3n) |  | He became equally at odds with US authorities and eventually died in Leavenworth in 1922, probably dying from long-standing health impairments. | Mexican anarcho-syndicalist intellectual who was in the US during the Mexican Revolution. |
| [Anthony Corallo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthony_Corallo) |  | Deceased. | Boss of the [Lucchese crime family](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucchese_crime_family) and convicted in the [Mafia Commission Trial](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mafia_Commission_Trial). |

**Famous escapees**

[Basil Banghart](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basil_Banghart) escaped from Leavenworth a total of three times. He escaped federal custody a fourth time while awaiting return to Leavenworth.

**Executions**

On September 5, 1930, Carl Panzram, under a federal death sentence for murder, was hanged at USP Leavenworth. On August 12, 1938, two men under the sentence of death for murder, Robert Suhay and Glenn Applegate, were hanged at USP Leavenworth.

**Officer deaths**

Five officers were killed in the line of duty at Leavenworth.

* Joseph B. Waldrupe, November 10, 1901, from injuries received during institution mutiny and mass escape on November 7, 1901.
* Andrew F. Turner, March 26, 1916. Murdered by inmate Robert Stroud aka the Birdman of Alcatraz.
* Edgar A. Barr, March 19, 1917. Murdered during an altercation with an inmate.
* John W. Johnson,, September 29, 1974. Murdered during an altercation with an inmate.
* Wayne L. Selle, July 31, 1973. Murdered by inmates during an institution riot.

In addition, two non-officers were killed in the line of duty between 1922 and 1929:

* Andrew H. Leonard, Captain, November 14, 1922. Murdered during an altercation with an inmate in which six other officers received life-threatening injuries.
* Robert G. Warnke, Laundry Foreman, June 20, 1929. Murdered in institution laundry building by serial killer Carl Panzram.

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