History of Crime and Criminal Justice
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Prison Work

A Tale of Thirty Years in the California Department of Corrections

William Richard Wilkinson

Edited by
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EDITORS’ INTRODUCTION

This is a unique work: an oral memoir describing how someone—William Richard Wilkinson—did the actual work of keeping custody of inmates in a large state prison system.

Dick Wilkinson served in the California Department of Corrections from 1951 to 1981, and it is his narrative that follows. He began as a correctional officer and then advanced to sergeant and lieutenant. Here, then, is the nuanced account of someone who had a sustained, successful career on the front lines in penal institutions.

His voice is of course the voice of a single individual. These are memories and impressions, and other witnesses to the same events may have differing memories and impressions. Much time has passed since the events described in this memoir occurred, and human recall is always flawed to some extent. Wilkinson’s own evaluation is very modest:

I have been out of the business for twenty years. So everything I am telling you is at least twenty years old, or more than twenty years. But you have to include the factor of my memory, and, also, I have nothing to compare with today—other than the few things I hear from the people I still know in the business. That is not very substantial. However, I am continuously told that I could not work in the business today. And I do not dispute that. I don’t think I could work today, either.

These are, therefore, honest memories, presented as Dick Wilkinson presented them. He has been able to verify some basic details from his own personal records, and the editors have tried to verify others.

The Right Places, the Right Times

Dick Wilkinson’s career spans one of the most important periods in American correctional history. Much has already been written on post–World War II corrections in America. A large and useful social
science literature came of age during these decades. Influential prison administrators, writing in the language of progressive reform, also left historians a substantial written record. Finally, during the latter half of Wilkinson's tenure in the California Department of Corrections, there was a flourishing market in prison writing by prisoners, perhaps the most active and important period of inmate publication in the modern history of corrections.

Rarely, though, was the voice of the correctional officer heard directly, especially that of the successful career correctional worker. This memoir offers such a voice, and one is tempted to conclude that no historian could have invented a career in corrections that captures so many important developments.

Wilkinson's tenure began in 1951 at the height of the influence of what Francis Allen called “the rehabilitative ideal.” Although this ideal has no precise definition, the ideal generally emphasized the quasi-therapeutic role of the criminal justice system in identifying and treating the causes of criminal behavior.

Few states embodied this ideal more fully than did California, where commitment to, and implementation of, progressive penology was rivaled...
only by New York and the federal Bureau of Prisons. Although California had been the site of reform experiments since the nineteenth century, its modern “rehabilitative regime” was relatively new when Wilkinson began his career. Governor Culbert B. Olson had removed the old state prison board in 1940 and appointed Clinton Duffy as the reform warden of San Quentin Prison. Olson’s successor, Governor Earl Warren, completed the

process in 1944 with the appointment of Richard A. McGee as the director of a new California Department of Corrections. The Prison Reorganization Act of 1944 also established the California Adult Authority. The responsibility of the Adult Authority under the act highlights the characteristics of progressive corrections. It operated a Guidance Center to which all prisoners were sent for diagnosis and classification. After several weeks, they were assigned to a specific California prison that matched their security and rehabilitative needs. After an inmate had served six months, the Adult Authority was to fix the term of duration of imprisonment. Finally, the Adult Authority functioned as the California parole board, determining when inmates would be released. California’s indeterminate sentencing structure gave the Adult Authority almost unlimited discretion in fixing terms of imprisonment and setting release dates.

No individual institution embodied the spirit of reform better than the place where Wilkinson began his career, the California Institution for Men at Chino (usually referred to simply as Chino). Intended for younger, first-time offenders, or for those convicted of less serious criminal violations, Chino already boasted a nationally known program when Wilkinson came on staff in 1951. The institution featured a range of not-for-profit industrial shops, vocational training, basic education, and an institutional farm, and each inmate was expected to take on regular work and school assignments.

Wilkinson’s first boss was Kenyon Scudder, superintendent of Chino since it opened in 1940. Often overlooked today, Scudder’s 1952 book, Prisoners Are People, established him as one of most notable exponents of the rehabilitative orientation. Sociologist Stanton Wheeler worked at Chino as a summer intern in the classification department in 1949, and he recalled the homely lessons in personal responsibility that constituted Scudder’s vision. Wheeler described “the simple principles of Chino” as

9. For a good early description, see California Adult Authority, Philosophy, Principles, and Program of the California Adult Authority (Sacramento: California Department of Corrections, 1945).
“everyday, common sense decency.” Wilkinson’s memoir offers the first glimpse of Scudder at work and evocatively highlights the extent to which the reform regime was the product of—and probably dependent on—the force of Scudder’s own dynamic personality.

In 1955, Wilkinson, now a sergeant, moved on to the California Medical Facility at Vacaville when it opened that year. Indeed, he helped open up the new facility and provides a fascinating glimpse of what that process meant.

The opening of CMF marks, in some respects, both the high-water mark for the rehabilitative ideal in California and a new direction for that ideal. Scudder’s Chino focused on providing education and work for those young men “who seem to offer the best prospects.” In contrast, CMF was built on a medical rather than punishment model. It was a highly specialized institution designed to treat and cure mentally disturbed inmates, and its programs focused on psychotherapy. Wilkinson shows the reader the day-to-day life of a penal institution more often described through assessments of specialized treatment programs, not the function of incarceration.

Wilkinson spent more of his career at CMF than anywhere, and his account reveals some of the virtues, and some of the limitations, of the medical model. Above all, this account reminds the reader that CMF was always a prison, whatever the loftier ambitions of its medical personnel. The contradictions between treatment and prison custody became fodder for an aggressive critique of the therapeutic prison that was already well developed when Wilkinson left in 1977.

Wilkinson’s final institution, Soledad Prison, brought him to the other

12. The only extended treatment of Scudder’s work may be found in sections of Joseph W. Eaton’s Stone Walls Not a Prison Make: The Anatomy of Planned Administrative Change (Springfield, IL: C. C. Thomas, 1962).
13. California Adult Authority, Philosophy, Principles, and Program.
14. Glaser observes that the growing influence of Norman Fenton and J. Douglas Grant, leading advocates of group therapy and psychotherapy, in the Department of Corrections led to most of the research and evaluation efforts being devoted to psychotherapeutic programs. The result is that we have a much better sense of how these programs functioned than of Chino’s work and education programs, and our sense of what rehabilitation meant in California is similarly skewed in the psychotherapeutic direction. Glaser, Preparing Convicts for Law-Abiding Lives, 127. One recent reconsideration of the rehabilitative period in California corrections is Volker Janssen, “Democratic Visions behind Bars: California’s Experiments in Therapeutic Penology, 1945 to 1968,” paper presented to the 119th Annual Meeting, American Historical Association, Seattle, 2005.
15. The critique of the psychotherapeutic model played a large part in the attack on the “rehabilitative” prison. Representative examples include: American Friends Service Committee, Struggle for Justice (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971); Jessica Mitford, Kind and
end of the California postwar prison experience. Like Chino and CMF, Soledad started out as part of California’s midcentury commitment to the rehabilitative ideal. Soledad was self-consciously designed to avoid the negative aspects of “Big House” prison architecture. Instead of a grim, castlelike design, Soledad featured a more modern design. Soledad Prison was actually three distinct institutions, reflecting the prevailing view in corrections that smaller institutions would create a more rehabilitative environment.

John Irwin remembers that, in its first years, Soledad “was a very peaceful and orderly institution . . . the general mood among prisoners was tolerance and relative friendliness.” By the time Wilkinson arrived at Soledad in 1977, any mood of enthusiasm or hope had long since dissipated. Instead, the prison and the entire Department of Corrections were still feeling the effects of the tumultuous previous decade. The year 1970 was Soledad’s meltdown year, with the killings of a correctional officer and three inmates, prosecution of the “Soledad Brothers” for killing the officer, racial hostilities, an inmate strike, outside investigations, and the publication of George Jackson’s Soledad Brother.

The prison had been in crisis for some time before 1970, torn by racial strife and violence, and under ineffective leadership. Wilkinson’s memoir makes clear that Soledad remained a troubled place in the late 1970s. Wilkinson recalls, “At Soledad we felt we had a riot a month and a stabbing a week.” Indeed, official reports indicated that Soledad had an “incident” rate nearly three times that of a comparable security-level facility, the California Men’s Colony.

All American prisons experienced tremendous change between the


16. John Irwin, Prisons in Turmoil (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980). Kenneth Lamott, on the other hand, visited Soledad just after it opened and “came away . . . in a state of profound depression. I had only to walk for 50 yards or so along the great central corridor, watching the faces of the passing prisoners, to know here was another failure of well-meaning men.” Kenneth Lamott, “Cruel and Usual,” Washington Post, Book World, 18 November 1973, 3.


mid-1960s and the mid-1970s. The most enduring published works on prisons and prisoners from this period all highlight rapid change as their central theme. So, too, with Wilkinson's account. Chapters 4 and 5 offer an officer's-eye view of some of the most important developments in corrections: growing politicization, inmate gangs, the presence of outside interest and advocacy groups, and the prisoner-rights revolution. A theme common to Wilkinson's account and many others is the sense that the formerly closed prison system was being overwhelmed by outside influences.

Finally, Wilkinson's memoir takes the reader through the end of California's rehabilitative regime. This story has been told before, and the broad outlines are clear. Richard McGee stepped down as the director of the Department of Corrections in 1961 to take the helm of the California Youth and Adult Correctional Agency, a move that removed him from the practical governance of the prison system. His successors were unable to sustain the same kind of system that McGee ran, and Ronald Reagan's gubernatorial election victory in 1966 indicated a shift away from political support for the rehabilitative regime.

California prisons were in turmoil during Raymond Procunier's tenure (1966–1972) as director of the Department of Corrections—and for some years after. From all sides of the political spectrum, the foundations of the rehabilitative approach were under attack. After sixty years, the


20. A typical summary is Harold E. Williamson, The Corrections Profession (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990), 41: "For better or worse, the closed-system nature of corrections has changed forever. Correctional agencies could, prior to the 1960s, function largely as they desired with little or no influence from external sources. Politicians and the public were content to leave agency activity to the administrators. However, with the radical changes that began in the 1960s and which related to every area of society, that autonomy was lost. Social reformers, professionals from other areas, the courts, and the public became very concerned about what happened in America's correctional agencies. Inmates, once considered to have no rights, were granted many rights as a result of new laws, reinterpretation of old laws, and new policies and procedures specified by courts."

21. The most comprehensive introduction to the critique of rehabilitation is Francis T. Cullen and Karen E. Gilbert, Reaffirming Rehabilitation (Cincinnati, OH: Anderson
indeterminate sentence was eliminated in 1977. In its place, the legislature adopted a scheme of largely fixed sentences. The next year, the official mission of the Department of Corrections changed from rehabilitation to punishment. This was perhaps a mostly symbolic move, but it marked the end of the era of optimism.

Prison Work

While many well-known figures appear in these pages, this is not their story. Likewise, although riots and other extraordinary events are documented here, this is not a history of the spectacular. Instead, the central actors in this account are the prison workers whose daily routines defined and continue to define the institutions in which they worked and work. These are people with no particular sense of making or having made history, but this history is theirs.

There is no attempt here to paint the work of the correctional officers and middle managers in glorious terms. Indeed, Wilkinson shows little patience for what he calls the “macho” posture of the California Correctional Peace Officers Association’s (CCPOA) slogan, “We walk the toughest beat in the world.” Instead, we see routine work interrupted by moments of grave danger (and some moments of humor).

We cannot pretend that Wilkinson is somehow representative of correctional officers and middle management generally, or even in California during his thirty years of service. The mere fact that his somewhat casual decision to take up prison work turned into a thirty-year career sets Wilkinson apart from many of his fellow officers. Wilkinson himself calls the reader’s attention time and again to the ways in which he differed from his colleagues, such as the criticism—or at least wonderment—from fellow officers regarding his interactions with Black Muslims at CMF and Soledad.

The prison guard/correctional officer remains one of the least-understood figures in the literature on corrections. Not until the 1970s was

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23. To our knowledge, no comparable account by a career correctional officer from this
there any sustained effort to examine the correctional officer and sort out the reality of prison work from enduring cultural images and stereotypes. These studies emphasized the variety in officer behavior and experience. Wilkinson’s account reminds us once again of the truth in Ted Conover’s recent observation about the correctional officer’s job: “it took time (and confrontations) to decide (or to discover) what kind of person was going to be wearing your uniform.”

The history of prison work has, for the most part, tended to emphasize the prison more than the work. The correctional officer becomes for the social scientist just another device by which the prison may be usefully studied. But the story of prison work also belongs to labor history. To be sure, labor historians have not rushed to embrace this particular occupational category, perhaps because of the nature of the work.

This “labor history” of prison work has many important elements, all of which appear frequently in Wilkinson’s recollections. The correctional officers serve not simply as an extension of state authority and power, but as figures who can exercise their own judgment, set their own priorities, and negotiate their own understandings with inmates. These memoirs further remind us that while the officer-inmate relationship is important, the officer-supervisor relationship may be the more critical one in terms of work experience and job satisfaction.
We also see Wilkinson's adjustment to one of the most important changes in the prison workplace in recent decades—the opening of prison employment to minorities and to women. When Wilkinson began at Chino, black correctional officers were rare, and no women worked in a custodial capacity in a men's prison. The opening to minorities happened first, and by the time Wilkinson arrived at Soledad, minorities made up nearly 30 percent of correctional officers in the state. Wilkinson's long friendships with black officers and his relationship with Black Muslim inmates at times set his racial views apart from those of his fellow correctional officers. At the same time, he also voices the unease among older officers with the rapid expansion of minority recruitment, a tension reflected in many studies of prison work and in labor histories of this period. Women entered men's prisons as officers somewhat later than minorities. Wilkinson's resistance to and discomfort with the idea of female officers in a male prison is similar to that described in many studies of male correctional officers, and, as in society in general, it is to some extent still prevalent today. One of the most important elements of this labor history is the comparatively recent organization of correctional officers. When Wilkinson began his career, most correctional officers worked as they always had—at the discretion of their warden or superintendent. Prison administrators might govern through fear or, like Kenyon Scudder, through loyalty, but their word was the final one.

The labor revolutions of the 1930s had no immediate impact on prison workers. Gradually, however, the system of authoritarian governance of individual prisons gave way to a more centralized, bureaucratized govern-


nance. With this change came the opening for correctional officers to unionize. Even then, it was not until the 1970s that collective bargaining became commonplace in state correctional systems.30

When officers did finally organize, the impact was considerable. Leo Carroll referred to it as the “rebellion of the hacks” in his 1974 study.31 Forms of organized activity, from sick-outs to political lobbying, became more commonplace. In general, these labor activities had the effect of pushing officers further from the rehabilitative regimes and stressed the primacy of controlling inmates.32 Wilkinson’s own account describes the new and aggressive posture of the CCPOA at the start of the 1980s. For better or worse, the reorganizations of prison workforces added one more nail in the coffin of the rehabilitative era.

Prison History, Prison Sociology

There is a remarkably constant theme in Dick Wilkinson’s recollections: the power of people to make institutions. His experiences at three very different institutions—Chino, CMF, and Soledad—convinced him that each place had a distinct character stamped upon it by those who lived and worked there. As he commented reflectively, “You could not have found three institutions any different than the three where I worked.”

Wilkinson compares institutional flaws to viruses, perpetuated by the staff over time. His account of Chino suggests that positive institutional qualities, not just the negative, were maintained in the same fashion. The variations from prison to prison, in Wilkinson’s view, were not the products of general changes over time in all prisons, but of institution-specific characteristics.33


31. Carroll, *Hacks, Blacks, and Cons.* Carroll used the phrase “rebellion of the hacks” as a chapter title, and he tied the rebellion to long-simmering frustrations over inmate rights and administrative conflicts and the short-term issue of inmate disturbances.

32. James B. Jacobs and Norma Meacham Crotty, in “Implications of Collective Bargaining in Prisons,” in *The Keepers,* ed. Crouch, 323–35, argued that collective bargaining did not necessarily imply one direction or another for penal policy. In the quarter-century since they made this argument, developments suggest that if there is not only one direction, officers’ organizations have tended to support control models and the expansion of the prison system. A similar early conclusion can be found in Paul D. Staudohar, “Prison Guard Labor Relations in Ohio,” *Industrial Relations* 15 (May 1976): 177–90.

33. To take one illustration from outside this memoir: E. J. Oberhauser, Scudder’s assistant and successor at Chino, recalled the moment when group therapy came to Chino as part of a system-wide mandate. Custodial staff were supposed to help lead the sessions, and Oberhauser says that his officers quickly got used to the idea because “Scudder had trained them to chat with prisoners in a friendly manner.” Officers at San Quentin and Folsom, on the other hand, strongly opposed group counseling. Glaser, *Preparing Convicts for Law-Abiding Lives,* 75.
This comparative dimension is important, for it challenges a historical literature that treats “the prison” as a singular phenomenon. The idea of a single prison with universal characteristics—independent of the keepers or the kept—was largely the brainchild of postwar American scholarship (although it arguably could also be drawn back somewhat further to the Marxist scholarship of Georg Rusche and Otto Kirchheimer). Rooted in influential work by Donald Clemmer, Erving Goffman, and Gresham Sykes, the search for the universal prison involved exposing a single set of institutional imperatives and influences that shaped the behavior of inmates and officers. Where advocates of the rehabilitative regime (and progressive penology generally) had celebrated the importance of individual weakness or virtue, postwar social scientists emphasized the structural limitations on individual agency. In The Society of Captives, Sykes acknowledged that some would point to the California Department of Corrections or the federal Bureau of Prisons as proof that some prisons could be better. Sykes discounted this possibility. He contended that whatever differences existed were superficial.

The gap between the universal prison and the progressive prison became the basis upon which the rehabilitative regime was attacked. The essays collected in Eric Olin Wright’s The Politics of Punishment: A Critical Analysis of Prisons in America (1973) exemplify this critique. As Wright himself observed, “the ‘correctional facility’ is still a prison.” Talk of rehabilitation was merely a façade, for custody and rehabilitation were, simply put, incompatible. The “totalitarian regime” described by Sykes meant that programs were of little value, and cooperation by inmates indicated only submission and docility.

The sociology of the universal prison, in turn, gave birth to the history of the universal prison. Michel Foucault took this historical bent in one direction with his remarkable work, Discipline and Punish. Here Foucault laid out a vision of the prison as modern control technology, one part of a largely unidirectional expansion of disciplinary practices. Like the sociologists, but unlike the earlier Marxist history of Rusche and Kirchheimer,
Foucault was interested in actual mechanisms of control. These mechanisms, though, for him were mere dimensions of a singular “prison form.”

Historian David Rothman took the universal prison in a different direction with his 1980 book, *Conscience and Convenience.* In this work, Rothman tried to document the fruits of progressive social control in the fields of criminal justice, juvenile justice, and mental health. In his synthesis, Rothman devoted a great deal of time to the sort of documentation irrelevant to Foucault. Rothman also decisively severed the history of prison ideas and ideologies from prison practices, just as the prison sociologists had done. To explain why prisons failed to turn out the way reformers hoped, Rothman also adopted the universal prison model. The demands of institutions, particularly custody, determined the fate of everything else.

The idea of a pluralistic prison history, if that is the correct term, was no stranger to Progressive-era prison scholars and reformers. Their world was marked by very different visions of what the prison could be like. Progressive-era prisoner writings illustrate this point of view well. In the 1920s, Kate Richards O’Hare wrote of the vile and desperate conditions of her confinement—not to describe the universal prison experience, but to expose a corrupt regime. In this sense, the term “rehabilitative ideal” is incomplete, for prison reform was more than reducing recidivism. Reform also meant treating people well, offering a measure of human dignity and respect, bringing order where there had been disorder. These latter dimensions of reform, it must be emphasized, were very much dependent on individual agency and action.


Some scholars have returned to this essential progressive observation. Ann Chih Lin in her important recent work stresses what she calls “the day-to-day imposition of local ideals—order, professionalism, communication, self-respect—upon programs that must absorb or resist them.” For such an approach as Lin’s, emphasizing that individual staff members’ actions collectively constitute agency actions, Dick Wilkinson’s reminiscences contain very rich resources indeed. The inmates who came to Chino from San Quentin, to take but one example, simply could not comprehend the differences between the two institutions.

His narrative renders the story of twentieth-century prison reform much more multidimensional than previously understood. The California Medical Facility was not merely a more fully realized or complicated version of Scudder’s Chino. Rather, the two institutions differed in important ways—differences that reveal the important changes in the twentieth-century rehabilitative regime. Unlike Chino, CMF was born in the heat of postwar America’s romance with psychology and psychiatry. Organizing CMF on a quasi-medical model marked a real departure from the Chino model, with its emphasis on education and dynamic/paternalistic leadership.

The third reform institution, Soledad, appears to have had its reform character entirely submerged by a hostile administration and fragmented officer corps. As Wilkinson himself observes: “At Soledad, I could never see the program—just keep them from hurting one another. That was about it.” His clashes with both the administration and the officer culture at Soledad offer further evidence that prisons can develop a persisting identity that is the product of individual and collective action.

**A History from Which to Learn**

All of these theoretical and historical issues are presented here as a way of orienting the reader to the tale that will follow. These memoirs elucidate an individual life that was intersecting with historical change, and the general setting takes on greater meaning as the details and continuity of this career unfold. Indeed, a recurring theme is the shifts between generations in the second half of the twentieth century.

The careful reader will doubtless encounter many points at which...
Wilkinson’s account raises questions that are not answered in the narrative or the annotations. Some questions will be general, about the broader patterns of the twentieth-century prison experience. His memoir implicitly and sometimes explicitly does speak to why we have penal institutions, as well as to how they developed the way they did. Many of the substantive questions that come out of his observations do not yet have good answers. Perhaps the policy questions never will. Regardless, we believe that this unique account and the many specific experiences described in it will stimulate further research and investigation.

It is only fair to add that, however important are the general issues that Wilkinson’s tale raises, we have discovered that astonishingly few records are available (if they are in existence at all) to document what actually happened in the pacesetting correctional institutions in California from the 1950s to the 1980s.\footnote{The holdings of the California State Archives and the individual penal institutions are particularly disappointing and surprising. Even published evidence is often episodic and fragmentary. The Department of Corrections did not issue regular annual or biennial reports such as were customary for many agencies in many states. We are nevertheless very grateful to officials of the three institutions, the California State Archives, the California State Library, and especially Eric Owens and Russ Heimerich of the California Department of Corrections Communications Office.} Wilkinson’s memoir therefore constitutes a major eyewitness source through which we can try to understand some very important history.

The witness who offers the candid observations below also passes on the wisdom that came from his decades doing the work of confinement. It is wisdom that is not necessarily limited to any period. Prisons are likely to be with us for a long time. For those who ordain and especially for those who implement and work with imprisonment, Wilkinson’s is clearly an impressive “voice of experience.”

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NOTE TO THE READER

The recollections and observations that follow are based on amended transcripts of recorded conversations held over a period of several days. A substantial attempt has been made to preserve that conversational flavor. Colloquial expression has often been preserved, along with informalities like use of the second person and interjected sentence fragments. Nevertheless the sense should be easy to follow even as the personal touches of the narrator come through.
Portray of Wilkinson as a young man in his Navy uniform
Source: Viola Wilkinson.
INTRODUCING
DICK WILKINSON

William Richard Wilkinson served as a correctional employee in the California Department of Corrections from 1951 to 1981. He worked at three locations: California Institution for Men, Chino (1951 to 1955), the California Medical Facility in Vacaville (1955 to 1977), and Soledad State Prison (1977 to 1981).

Dick Wilkinson is a member of the World War II generation. He was born in 1925, and he entered the Navy in 1943 at the age of eighteen. The service experience was for him, as it was for millions in his generation, a formative experience. He served in the Pacific Theater, and he was one of the survivors of the sinking of the aircraft carrier Bismarck Sea. When he got back home, he married, held a couple of jobs, and went to school. He was twenty-five when he became a correctional officer. He and his wife, Viola Spencer Wilkinson, had two children, a boy and a girl, who now have their own children and even grandchildren.

But this book is about Wilkinson’s experience as an employee. A brief personal chronology and work history provides a framework within which to understand his recollections of his service with the California Department of Corrections.

Chronology

8 August 1925 Born Grandfield, OK
Schools in Grandfield, OK
   in Oklahoma City
   in Silverton, TX
   in San Diego, CA
Pomona, CA, High School (graduated 1943)
April 1943–March 1946 U.S. Navy
   Aviation Radioman Second Class
1948–1951 Mt. San Antonio College (with an A.A. in Industrial Arts awarded in 1950)
April 1946–February 1947 Western Geophysical Company
  Surveyor’s rod man
February 1947–April 1951 H. W. Loud Machine Works
  Turret Lathe Operator
1 May 1951 Joined California Department of Corrections
1951–1955 California Institution for Men, Chino, CA, Correctional Officer
  Housing Unit, Control, Farm, Engineering Crew
April 1955 Promoted to Correctional Sergeant
1955–1962 California Medical Facility, Vacaville, CA, Correctional Sergeant
  Watch Sergeant, Control, Culinary, Mail and Visiting
1962–1977 California Medical Facility, Vacaville, CA, Correctional Lieutenant
  September 1961–April 1962 Second Watch Lieutenant and Captain Relief
  April 1962–October 1963 Watch Lieutenant—Third Watch
  October 1963–March 1967 Program Lieutenant, Psychiatric Unit
    Case work for 85–95 inmates
    General supervision, 225 psychotic patients
March 1967–May 1969 Assignment Lieutenant
  Inmate classification and assignment
May 1969–January 1971 Program Lieutenant, Psychotherapy Unit
  Supervision and casework
  Group co-therapist with unit psychiatrist
January 1971–February 1972 Correctional Counselor
  Assistant Classification and Parole Representative
  Program Unit Counselor
February 1972–November 1973 Inmate Activities Coordinator
November 1973–September 1974 Program Lieutenant
  General supervision of 80 special housing inmates
1974–1977 Watch Lieutenant and Program Lieutenant
  Classification and Parole Representative
  Acting Associate Warden for Appeals
  Correctional Program Supervisor
Men’s Prisons in California in 1953

The narrative refers frequently to several institutions that in 1953 were described as:

California State Prison at Folsom—
Older recidivists and habitual criminals. Serious problem cases including some younger men.

California State Prison at San Quentin—
More serious trainable cases. Industrial program; vocational training and academic education; religious and medical programs. Segregation unit for disturbed younger men.

California Institution for Men at Chino—
Younger first or less severe offenders trainable in agriculture and trades.

California State Prison at Soledad—
Inmates trainable in agriculture and trades. Unit for homosexuals.

Deuel Vocational Institution at Lancaster—
More serious and difficult younger offenders committed to the Director of Corrections or Youth Authority. (Temporary location at Lancaster. Permanent facilities now under construction near Tracy.)

California Medical Facility at Terminal Island—
Specialized treatment facility for psychotic, epileptic, low-grade feebleminded, sex psychopaths, tubercular and other chronic illnesses. Unit for ambulant aged inmates. (Temporary location, Terminal Island, California. This facility will be located at Vacaville when the institution for 1,800 prisoner patients has been completed.)

(Abridged from Norman Fenton, An Introduction to Classification and Treatment in State Correctional Service [Sacramento: California Department of Corrections, 1953], 21.)
How This Memoir Was Produced

In May 1999, William Richard Wilkinson agreed to permit John C. Burnham to record what Mr. Wilkinson could remember of his career with the California Department of Corrections. Although the conversations between the two were informal, Mr. Wilkinson’s sense of how events proceeded shaped the overall narrative. The interviewer assisted occasionally with questions of two kinds: questions to prompt continuation of the narrative, and questions to prompt recall of material and comment relevant to the scant sociological material then available concerning correctional officers (most of which is cited in notes to this book). Mr. Wilkinson responded as he could and as he wished.

No question or subject was considered out of bounds at any stage, as is obvious from the many sensitive issues covered, but relevant memories often did not exist.

The conversations were then transcribed. Mr. Wilkinson has the notable capacity to tell stories, in a style that shows clearly in the preceding chapters. Indeed, the transcribers found that he tends to talk in paragraphs, and so the job of transcribing was relatively easy.

The transcriptions were edited in two ways. First, where necessary, they were rearranged by chronology and subject matter, a task that after a preliminary draft also involved the second editor, Joseph F. Spillane. Second, the conversational language was modified for clarity when necessary, and facts were checked. Some further brief conversations took place for the purpose of filling in a few gaps and clarifying points that were unclear. These further conversations soon became unproductive.

At that point, the manuscript was returned to Mr. Wilkinson for review. He was not inclined to change much except to request that in several places the names of some people be deleted and a more general identity be used instead. After further revision by both editors, including much shortening, Mr. Wilkinson was given the manuscript to review again.

The introduction was drafted primarily by Joseph F. Spillane, with contributions and revisions offered by John C. Burnham, but all of the editing was very much a collaborative effort.

1. We thank Steven McGann, who did most of the original transcription.
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