The Red Hat, a stark cellblock in an isolated section of the Louisiana State Penitentiary, was used from 1933 until 1971 when Corrections Secretary Elayn Hunt ordered it closed. The four decades of its existence produced many of Angola's legends.

The building got its name from its early days when prisoners were stripped grog and habs. The hats were dyed red so they were easily identifiable when working in the fields. The building still stands, a mute monument to how inhumane people can be to other people in the name of justice and to how far Louisiana's prison system has progressed.

Warden Ross Maggio remembered visiting the Red Hat when he arrived at Angola in 1957. "You'd walk through there and hear the men asking to get out," Maggio recalled 15 years after this first visit.

The 30 cramped cells and the harsh conditions of the Red Hat seem so far removed from our modern society that it's hard to imagine that the facility was closed only 11 years ago.

The Red Hat was the final stop in the disciplinary process, says Angola Farm Manager W.J. Carmouche. People who didn't work might spend a night or two there. Real troublemakers" might spend weeks, months and even years behind its walls.

Carmouche compared it to the modern Camp 2, a maximum-security disciplinary facility at the penitentiary, but quickly added that there are vast differences.

"I remember watching them put 'em in there," says Carmouche. "They were shook down as they came in the front door. They'd leave their clothes there, and they were issued white coveralls. That's all they had.

"Tobacco, anything else they had, was taken away," Carmouche added. "They didn't have anything but those white coveralls.

A Red Hat cell was disheartening. With less than 25 square feet per cell, it would have been impossible for one man. The cells often housed two or more. Veteran Ilave been uncomfortable less than 25 square feet per cell, it would coveralls."

"I know they had to be cold in the winter," Carmouche says. "They were sent there. All their water came from a faucet in the wall."

"I know they had to be cold in the winter," Carmouche said. "There was a little bit of heat in the winter, but never really enough. And in the summer there was no kind of fan - just that little window on the wall and the little window on the door inside."

Recently retired Assistant Warden Herbert Byargeon knows the Red Hat well. He worked there. But Byargeon says one has to consider the time and place being brought to the Red Hat.

"You had to work with what was available to you," he observed. "What went on there was the thing to do in the '50s. It wouldn't be tolerated now, but there's been a lot of changes in corrections and in the very mode of life."

The Red Hat stayed in existence so long, because of frequent budget cuts which cut prison staffing.

The Red Hat was a "good, solid building, well built with thick walls and a solid concrete foundation," Byargeon added, but now, he says, "it's useless for anything. It's being let to rot down."

"At one time the old death house was right on the side of the Red Hat," Byargeon said. "It's been torn down, done away with, but some of the first electrocutions were there."

Byargeon says he never personally sent anyone to the Red Hat, but recalls those sent there. It was designed as the ultimate disciplinary facility and was deliberately placed in a remote location.

"People were sent there for various reasons in the 1960s," he added, "for escape, fighting, cutting people. We had a whole lot of people go through there, and the best you could say for it was that it was a dismal place.

"It was hot in the summer and cold in the winter," Byargeon went on, "but it did have its corrective use, and it served its purpose.

"It held a lot of people. We had a lot of bad dudes in there," the veteran security officer continued. "Some of the worst we had in Angola spent time in there, and I guess to some inmates it was a status symbol that they'd done time in the Red Hat."

Among Red Hat convicts, two names stand out - "Red" Weeks and "Iron Man" Charlie Frazier.

"Mr. Charlie Frazier was part of that escape," says Weeks. "We always knew where to go to get him," Carmouche said. "He'd be at his mama's house. I think he swam the river two or three times."

On one occasion - Carmouche believes it was December of 1954 - Weeks told the warden he was going to eat dinner with his mother. Fearing an escape, the warden decided to put Weeks in the Red Hat.

"Either he cut his way out or somebody else cut him out," Carmouche says. Weeks was found having dinner with his mother and was returned to Angola, now more than ever a part of its folklore.

Warden B.R. Himes ordered the infamous cellblock constructed after a bloody escape in which a prison official was killed.

Flogging was still legal when the Red Hat was built, and it was practiced. No courts guaranteed exercise periods, medical treatment or forbade "sensory deprivation."

The cells, three to four feet wide and six feet long, had only a small window on the outside and a small window on the door. Meals were passed through the door window, and wastes were passed out in a stop bucket. It was the worst kind of life one could imagine, but it endured from the days of Huey Long until the Edwin Edwards administration ordered it closed.

In recent years it had remained as almost a museum piece, reminding all of what prison life was once like.

Four years ago LSU football player Charlie Alexander went to Angola to speak. The man who gained a reputation among Southeastern Conference defenders as a fearless running back and who now plays professional football, was given a tour of the prison. He was well-received and talked freely with the convicts.

But Alexander waited outside while others toured the Red Hat, not even wanting to enter its gloomy hallway.

The Red Hat was created to be the most severe of disciplinary facilities, and it retains that spirit of harshness in a remote, isolated section of a remote and isolated prison.

A bleak spirit still walks its halls.

**By ROY PITCHFORD**

Suburban editor

ANGOLA - The Red Hat is the kind of place one remembers. The memories may be different, but no one forgets it.

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Among Red Hat convicts, two names stand out - "Red" Weeks and "Iron Man" Charlie Frazier.

"He didn't feel bound by Angola or even the Red Hat.

"When he got ready to go home he'd go home," Byargeon said. "He escaped from the Red Hat, and he's the only one I know who ever did."

Weeks was from Fort Adams, Miss., Carmouche said, and he "went to visit his mother" often. "I don't know how many times," Carmouche says.

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Warden B.R. Himes ordered the infamous cellblock constructed after a bloody escape in which a prison official was killed.

Charlie Frazier was part of that escape, and in the years that followed he would be placed in a Red Hat cell with the door welded shut and windows blocked to prevent escape. He would spend the bulk of seven years in isolation, able to talk to only one other prisoner. He left only for a succession of trials.

A small window looking out to the sky was the only source of fresh air for Red Hat convicts.