

Ex-City Man Alcatraz Guard, Tells of 'Rock' Life on Visit

Emil Rychner Once Played Semi-Pro Ball Here

Maybe you think the life of a guard at Alcatraz gets monotonous. It does. But every so often something happens to relieve that monotony, explained Emil Rychner, lieutenant of the guards at the famed West Coast federal prison which handles only the toughest of prisoners.

A former Rochesterian, who gave up his electrician's job here in 1935 to take a guard post at Alcatraz, Rychner is vacationing here with his wife at the home of Mrs. George Spalty, 1811 Culver Rd. Rychner and Mr. Spalty, now deceased, were lifetime close friends and the three Spalty boys, who have taken over their father's business, refer to him as "uncle."

Played Semi-pro Ball

Rychner played semi-pro baseball here in pre-World War I days, and served during that war with the 57th Coast Guard Regiment, which was composed of 500 Rochester men. He was doing electrical work at Auburn Prison in the 1930s when he took a Civil Service examination for prison guard without any thought of abandoning his electrical work. But when he received the appointment to Alcatraz, he said, he was so fascinated by the name and the prospects that he decided to try it out. He's been there ever since.

Rychner was in charge of the dock gateway to the island institution on that May day last year when the bullets began to fly at the start of the prisoner uprising. His part in helping to quell the disturbance earned him a citation for bravery.

Early one morning recently, Rychner recounted, one of the patrolmen heard someone whistling at the water's edge. Investigation disclosed a young man in the water, and Rychner and the patrolman lifted him up over the precipitous rocky shore.

Man Swims to Island

Viewing the layout with amazement, the man asked, "Where am I?" When told he was on Alcatraz, he gasped, "This is the place anyone would swim away from and I had to swim 2 miles to it."

The swimmer, Rychner said turned out to be a deserting seaman who thought he had reached the mainland. But, most of the time, says Rychner, things are pretty quiet on The Rock.

Besides, that he'd rather reminisce with some of his old pals of the days when he played baseball on the old teams the late Frank Rutz squired.



EMIL RYCHNER