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Old Woman Mountains Wilderness, BLM Needles Field Office.  
Photo by Bob Wick, BLM.



Bureau of  
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# Desert Training Center

## California-Arizona Maneuver Area



Photograph Courtesy of  
U.S. Army Signal Corps.

By the fall of 1941, the world had been at war for two years. Nazi forces occupied most of Europe, and in North Africa, German troops threatened to capture the critical Suez Canal. Later that year, Japanese pilots attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor. Congress declared war on Japan.

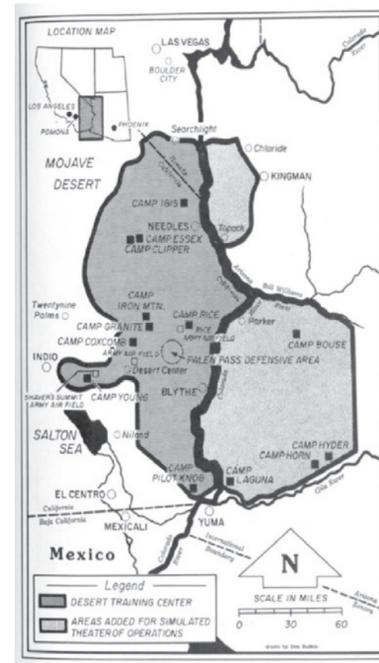
British Prime Minister Winston Churchill urged President Franklin D. Roosevelt to send the U.S. Army to support Allied troops in North Africa. However, America's soldiers were not prepared for combat in the deserts of North Africa.

## Ideal Desert Training Sites

In February 1942, the U.S. Army assigned General George S. Patton Jr. to advance desert tank warfare and train U.S. soldiers for combat under the harshest desert conditions possible.

In early March General Patton and his staff surveyed the southwestern United States and established the boundary of the Desert Training Center. It encompassed 18,000 square miles of rugged, desolate and largely uninhabited lands within the Mojave and Colorado Deserts in California, Arizona and Southern Nevada.

Patton established the headquarters for his base camp near Shavers Summit (now Chiriaco Summit), 25 miles east of Indio. The Army named his headquarters Camp Young, after Lt. General S.B.M. Young, the Army's first Chief of Staff. He identified sites for 12 divisional



camps within the Desert Training Center: Camps Essex, Clipper, Coxcomb, Iron Mountain, Ibis, Granite, Rice and Pilot Knob in California; and Camps Bouse, Horn, Hyder and Laguna in Arizona. He established auxiliary camps that provided logistical support for the divisional camps, including hospitals, medical units and supply depots, and arranged communication logistics with local and regional telephone companies. Patton located the camps near major roads such as Route 66 and railroad communities to transport troops, equipment



Tanks are unloaded at the Indio rail yards in December 1942. U.S. Army photograph. Courtesy of the General Patton Memorial Museum.

and supplies. He also coordinated with the Union Pacific Railroad in the north, the Santa Fe Railroad in the center, and the Santa Fe and Southern Pacific Railroads in the south to build additional spurs and lines to facilitate shipment of troops and supplies.

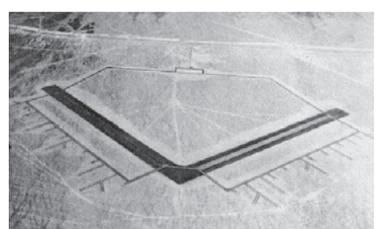
Where possible, Patton located camps near the Metropolitan Water District (MWD) aqueduct to provide his troops water. For camps Ibis and Essex located away from the aqueduct, the Army built 500,000 gallon reservoirs. Other water sources included the Colorado River, private wells and municipal water sources.



Camp Ibis Reservoir

He also used MWD power lines to provide electricity to the camps. To acclimate soldiers to the severe conditions of the North African desert, their tents did not have electricity.

Patton established five major airfields where America's young pilots would learn to fly. Landing strips also were built near each camp to bring in supplies.



Camp Rice  
Airfield

The first troops arrived in early April. Most of these soldiers had already completed months of training at Army camps throughout the mid-west and east coast. During the following weeks and months, the Desert Training Center would expand to become the largest military installation maneuver area in the world.

Conditions were primitive—no barracks or running water. Winter temperatures could vary from 100 °F at noon to below freezing at night. Summer temperatures could reach 130 °F in the shade and could average 150–160 °F inside the tanks. The perils of flash floods, sand storms, snakes, and scorpions would further push soldiers to their limits of endurance.

The vast majority of soldiers who trained at the Desert Training Center were not accustomed to the blistering hot, dry desert climate. The 773rd Tank Destroyer Battalion described the Desert Training Center in their official journal as “18,000 square miles of nothing, in a desert designed for hell”.

Water was strictly rationed. Upon arrival and when out on maneuvers, soldiers received only one canteen of water per day for all their drinking and bathing needs. The original thought was soldiers could be trained to survive on less water, which would prepare them for the harsh desert conditions in North Africa.

As a result, many soldiers collapsed from severe heat exhaustion during training. They were issued salt pills and water rations were increased to a gallon a day. The soldiers learned to survive with the bare essentials.

Patton said the desert is a killer, and we must acclimate our soldiers to the climate. Training at the Desert Training Center turned young men into strong, hardened soldiers.

## General George S. Patton Jr.



General Patton served as the Desert Training Center's first Commanding General, but his tenure was short. In July 1942, he was called to Washington to help plan Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa. He then led U.S. troops in some of the most decisive Allied victories in World War II.

He built a reputation as a brilliant commander and took pride in leading his men into battle. He set a personal example of courage and ability and left an indelible impression on all those who served under him. Patton's legacy survives in the methods and rigors of desert training, still valued by today's military. More than half a century later, he is considered one of the most successful, flamboyant and controversial leaders in American military history.

## General Patton Memorial Museum

The Museum is a tribute to General Patton, the soldiers who trained at the Desert Training Center, and all U.S. soldiers and veterans. It is located at Chiriaco Summit off Interstate 10, 25 miles east of Indio, California. For more information visit [generalpattonmuseum.com](http://generalpattonmuseum.com).



## Military Explosives



The Desert Training Center was a theater of war where battles were fought using live munitions—bullets, bombs, mortars, grenades, mines, etc. Unexploded

ordnance can be found throughout the desert and can cause serious injury or death. Do not touch, handle or transport anything resembling a shell/explosive—report it to the local BLM and law enforcement offices as soon as possible.

## Honoring the DTC/C-AMA

To protect and conserve these public lands as a living memorial where the public can learn about this extraordinary chapter in America's history, the use of metal detectors/ removal of artifacts is prohibited. The BLM is working to have the Desert Training Center listed on the National Register of Historical Places.

## Desert Safety

- Visiting most camps requires 4-wheel drive.
- The camps are isolated—never travel alone.
- Many desert areas do not have phone coverage. Carry a GPS, compass, maps and satellite phone.
- Pack adequate food, water, fuel, clothing, first aid kit, flashlight, shovel and camp gear.
- Plan for extreme desert temperatures.
- Watch for snakes, spiders and scorpions.

# Desert Training Center/California-Arizona Maneuver Area

## California-Arizona Maneuver Area



By mid-1943, the primary mission of the DTC changed. Troops originally trained for desert warfare were deployed worldwide. In October 1943, the Army changed the name of the DTC to the California-Arizona Maneuver Area (DTC/C-AMA).

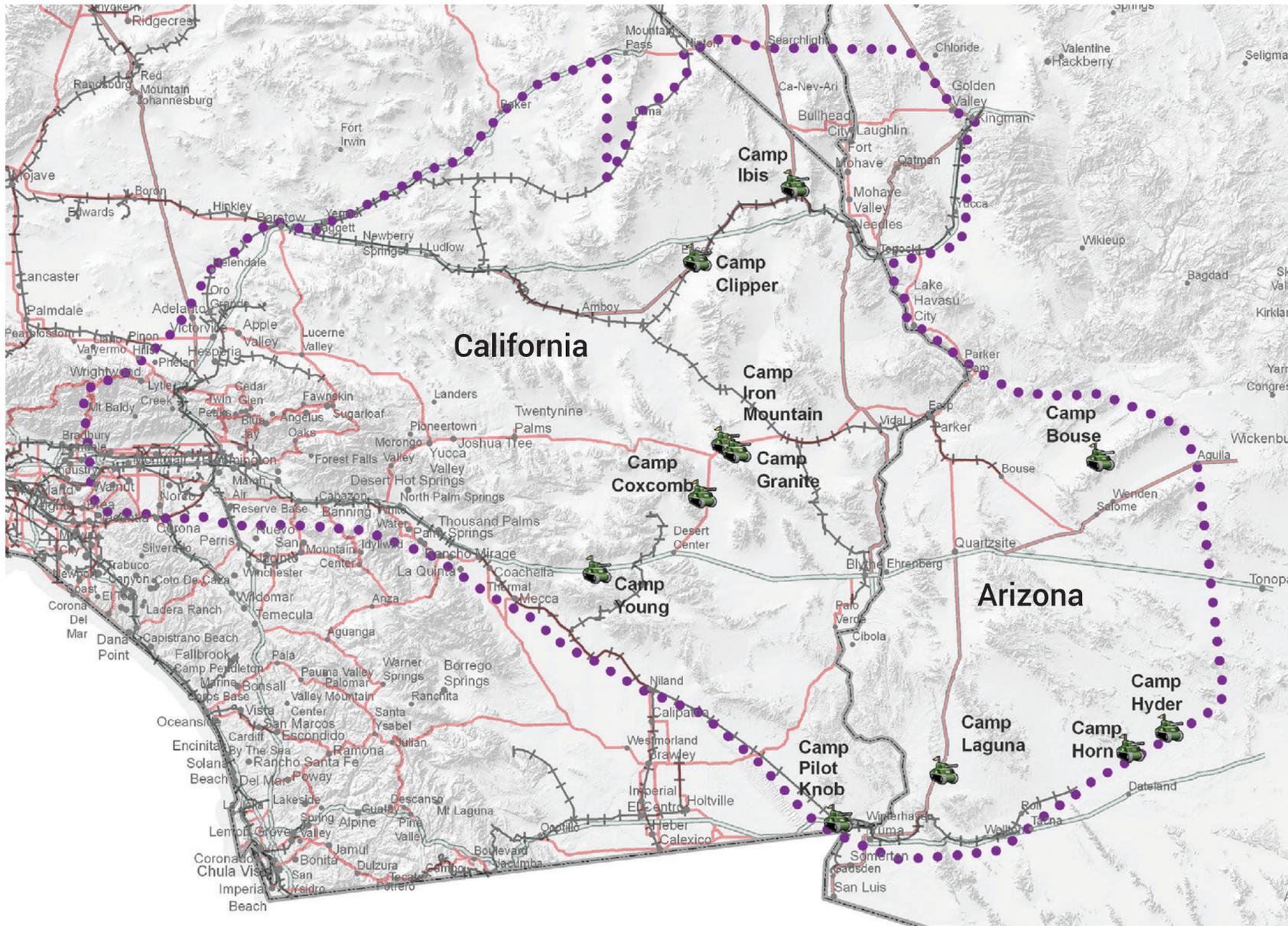
With the surrender of Germany, the U.S. Army decommissioned the DTC/C-AMA in April 1944, ending the largest simulated operations in the history of military maneuvers.

In January 1947, the U.S. Army returned most of the C-AMA withdrawn lands to the Department of the Interior, the majority now managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

## America's Military Heritage

Between April 1942 and April 1944, more than one million soldiers and 60 armored, infantry and artillery divisions, and fighter pilot and heavy bomber squadrons trained at the DTC/C-AMA. They participated in what is considered some of the most realistic war games ever conducted under the harshest conditions imaginable. In a very real sense, many battles of World War II were won on these desert lands.

The DTC/C-AMA signifies one the most extraordinary achievements in U.S. military history and honors the vision and leadership of General Patton, the more than one million U.S. soldiers who trained there, and the contributions of the public lands that more than 70 years ago helped Allied forces win World War II.



## Camp Life

The divisional camps were massive tent cities, measuring up to three miles long and a mile wide and could house more than 15,000 soldiers at a time. Patton lived with his troops and oversaw every aspect of daily training and battle maneuver exercises.

Camps were laid out in grids. Streets and boulevards were bulldozed and rows of tents were set up on each side of assembly areas.

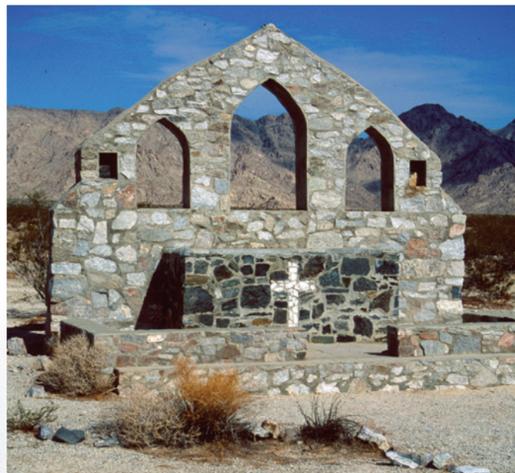
The camps became homes to the soldiers and they took pride in their specific areas. They built religious altars, created unit symbols out of rocks with exacting detail, swept streets and reveille areas, and created extensive rock alignments along roads, streets, walkways and around living quarters and plants.



Living quarter tents housed multiple soldiers and contained only a cot (no sheets), foot locker and a musette bag/back pack for each man. Camp Young 1942—Courtesy General Patton Museum.



Camp Young 1942—Courtesy General Patton Museum.



Iron Mountain Chapel. Photograph by Doran Sanchez, BLM.

## Serious Training



Troops on a desert march while training at the California Desert Training Center. Courtesy of the General Patton Memorial Museum.



Tank gunners practice firing 30-caliber machine guns at attacking aircraft in a mock battle. Courtesy General Patton Memorial Museum.

Training was tough. Soldiers underwent daily physical exercises, hand-to-hand combat, live-fire exercises, grueling day and night marches, and at least one 24-hour exercise with little food and water. The average tour for desert training was 14 weeks.

Camps were strategically located so each unit could train without impacting the other. Entire divisions could conduct mock and live-fire air, tank, infantry and artillery exercises.

These maneuvers could involve as many as 30,000 troops battling against each other at one time.



Star signifying command headquarters, Camp Ibis Divisional Camp. Photograph by Doran Sanchez, BLM.



Rock lined walkway, Iron Mountain Divisional Camp. Photograph by Doran Sanchez, BLM.



Protestant Chapel, Iron Mountain Divisional Camp. Photograph by Doran Sanchez, BLM.



Photograph Courtesy of Charles C. Dike, 607 Tank Destroyer Battalion