THE DTC SKY TRAIL

DOCENT NARRATIVE GUIDE

To be read aloud by a passenger between waypoints.

Prologue: The Forging of Iron

MANDATORY PRE-FLIGHT BRIEFING

Passenger: Read this aloud before the first waypoint.

The year is 1942. The free world is shrinking.

Nazi Germany controls Europe. The Japanese Empire dominates the Pacific. The United States Army is inexperienced, untested, and desperate to catch up. To avoid slaughter overseas, General George S. Patton Jr. decides that American boys must first face hell at home.

He chooses this desert—the harshest landscape in North America—to build the **Desert Training Center**. It is not merely a base; it is a factory for war covering **18,000 square miles** (an area larger than Switzerland). It is the largest military training ground in the history of the world.

Below you lies a landscape that broke men to save them. A million soldiers lived in the dirt here, enduring 120°F heat, rattlesnakes, and limited water. They learned that sweat saves blood, and brains save both.

> ***"If you can work successfully here, in this country, it will be no difficulty at all to kill the assorted sons-of-bitches you will meet in any other country."***
>
> ***— General George S. Patton Jr.***

As we fly the "Sky Trail," look down. Those faint grids in the scrub are not just ruins. They are the footprints of the Great Generation, hardened here in the fire of the Mojave so they could liberate the world.

1 Camp Young

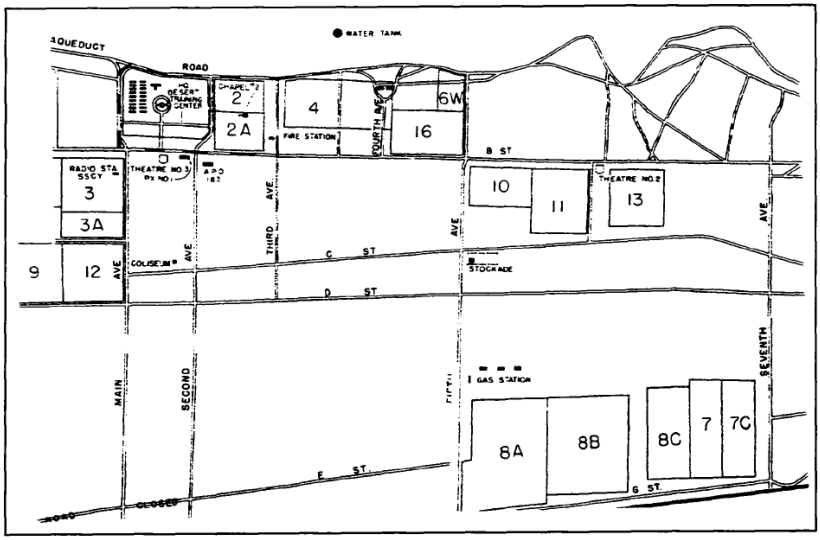


Figure 101. Map of Camp Young showing the locations of certain facilities, ca. 1942. Courtesy General Patton Memorial Museum, Chiriaco Summit, California.

Camp Young was the first to be inhabited, and served as the headquarters for the DTC/C-AMA. The camp was established north of Highway 60-70 (bypassed by I-10), about three miles west of an abandoned general store. The first units to arrive were required to set up their individual areas by erecting their tents, digging latrines, and otherwise organizing their space. Soon other units began to arrive, along with their tanks and vehicles.

The Army was so short on Signal Corps troops that the local phone company in Blythe actually provided the communications backbone for the General's headquarters.

Mr. Doran Sauers was with the I Armored Signal Battalion when it was assigned to provide communications for the newly activated I Armored Corps. In April 1942, the Battalion boarded a train for the DTC.

The train trip took four days from Columbus, Georgia to Indio where they arrived on April 30, at 5:00 AM. The trains were unloaded and the jeeps and light trucks were taken up to the campsite. The highway to Camp Young from Indio was a two-lane black top road. A water supply company had arrived first, and had tapped into the aqueduct. A Staff Sergeant with this company pointed out to the Battalion their 4 acres of land for their camp site. Then, the 6x6 trucks carried the rest of the men to the campsite, which took the rest of the day and into the night (personal communication Doran Sauers 2001).

The campsite was then prepared by clearing vegetation for rows of pup tents, organized by company. Two-man tents were set-up for officers and pyramidal squad tents were set-up for the Battalion Headquarters and Company Headquarters offices. An engineer battalion then arrived and bulldozed their area and set-up pyramidal tents, 6 men per tent. These had folding cots. They were arranged by company, on company streets.

Unlike the other tent cities, Camp Young was the administrative brain. It had asphalt streets (to prevent washout on the slope), wooden floors in the tents (luxury!), and above-ground sewer pipes.

While officers at other posts sought comfort, Patton lived in a simple wooden building or tent just like his men. He did, however, have a radio station that played music—which he would famously interrupt to bark orders directly to the troops.

Then, tarpaper buildings were constructed for battalion and company headquarters offices as well as mess halls and kitchens. These buildings had double roofs for protection from the heat. The mess halls and kitchens used gasoline-fired field stoves. Then, wooden floors and frames for the pyramidal tents were constructed for each company and on Officers' Row.

Patton, forever disdainful of officers commanding from the rear echelons, lived at Camp Young in a simple, temporary wooden building. Unlike the flat camps you will see later, Camp Young was built on a 10-12% grade. To keep the city from washing away in flash floods, the Army laid down asphalt streets—a rarity in the desert. Today, those blacktop roads are broken and overgrown, but they still trace the grid of the Headquarters.

The camp included a variety of facilities: 3,217 wood frame tents, 126 shower buildings, 151 latrines, 231 administration buildings, 93 mess halls, 4 amphitheaters, 5 open sheds, 3 heating plants, 2 fire stations, 2 station hospitals, stockade, laundry, and radio station.

> ***To command across this vast expanse, Patton established his own radio station. He kept a microphone by his bed and would frequently cut the music feed to bark orders or commendations directly to the troops. When the music stopped, every soldier knew to listen for the gravelly voice announcing, "This is General Patton..." [*]***

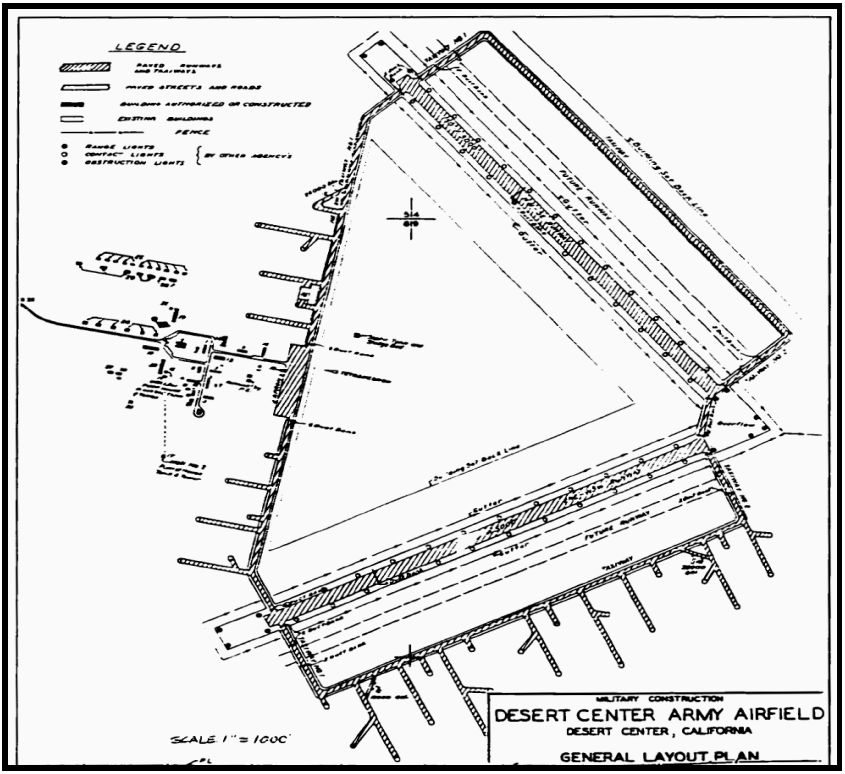
2 Shaver's (Chiriaco) Summit

A small air facility was constructed immediately adjacent to Camp Young, with a 5,500 by 300 feet landing strip. The runway was paved, and several temporary buildings were constructed at the strip.

The land was owned by Joseph Chiriaco, who had arrived in the area with his family in 1933, and had built a small store and restaurant. The little community was known as Shaver's Summit. Patton purchased 28 acres from Chiriaco for five dollars per acre. Soldiers occasionally frequented the small settlement at Shaver's Summit (now known as Chiriaco Summit), one of the few places where they could purchase beer.

Today, the strip is operated by Riverside County, and the property is leased to a private historical preservation group called the General Patton Army Airfield.

3 Desert Center



Although referred to as Desert Center Divisional Camp, there never was a full division assigned to Desert Center. Instead, several support facilities were established near the small town.

DESERT CENTER ARMY AIRFIELD

Unlike the primitive dirt strips elsewhere, this facility (a sub-base of Thermal AAF) featured two paved 5,000-foot runways, hangars, and extensive support structures to house 3,000 men.

DESERT CENTER OBSERVER'S CAMP

A medium-sized camp was established immediately north of the small town of Desert Center, along the road to Camp Coxcomb and Iron Mountain. The installation consisted of an encampment complete with temporary housing structures. It was here that the maneuvers were evaluated, and deficiencies pointed out. The camp contained 112 tents, 5 shower buildings, and 8 latrines.

This wasn't just another camp; it was the "grade school" for generals. High-ranking observers from Washington and Allied nations (including British officers) stayed here to watch the massive maneuvers. They evaluated the tactics, graded the generals, and decided who was fit for combat command.

18TH ORDNANCE BATTALION CAMPSITE

Located 5 miles east of Desert Center, this camp appeared to encompass a watering point. The only structures reported included a capped well, a 50,000-gallon water tank, and a wooden tower.

DESERT CENTER EVACUATION HOSPITAL

An evacuation hospital was established near the town of Desert Center, adjacent to the road to Eagle Mountain. The hospital site remains in good condition today, and retains the same basic design and layout of divisional camps, although it is much smaller. Many rock-lined walkways, roads, symbols, tent sites, and other activity areas remain in place. Doctors operated in tents with dirt floors. Surgeons performed operations while battling dust storms that would coat their sterile instruments in fine grit.

QUARTERMASTER TRUCK SITE

A quartermaster truck site was established near Desert Center. A rock alignment for the 496th Medium Ordnance Company spells out "496 MEDCO."

4 Camp Coxcomb

Located between California Highway 177 and the MWD aqueduct, Camp Coxcomb was originally constructed in the summer of 1942. Among units known to have been stationed at Camp Coxcomb were the 6th and 7th Armored, and the 93rd and 95th Infantry Divisions. Camp Coxcomb was apparently more permanent than other camps, with wooden floors and screens in the post exchanges.

Facilities at the camp included 39 shower buildings, 165 latrines, 284 pyramidal wooden tent frames, one 40,000-gallon water tank, and one combination observation and flag tower.

> ***Veterans of the 773rd Tank Destroyer Battalion reported that temperatures inside the open-top turrets reached 152 degrees Fahrenheit. Mechanics learned quickly that a wrench left on a canvas tarp in the sun would sear the skin off a hand if picked up without gloves. Even the water in the canvas "Lyster bags" would reach 90 degrees—warm, but liquid gold to dehydrated men. [*]***

A show was put on by Rosalind Russell, Red Skelton, Pat O’Brien, and other stars. About 250 women were brought along and danced with the troops on a portable dance floor surrounded by tanks.

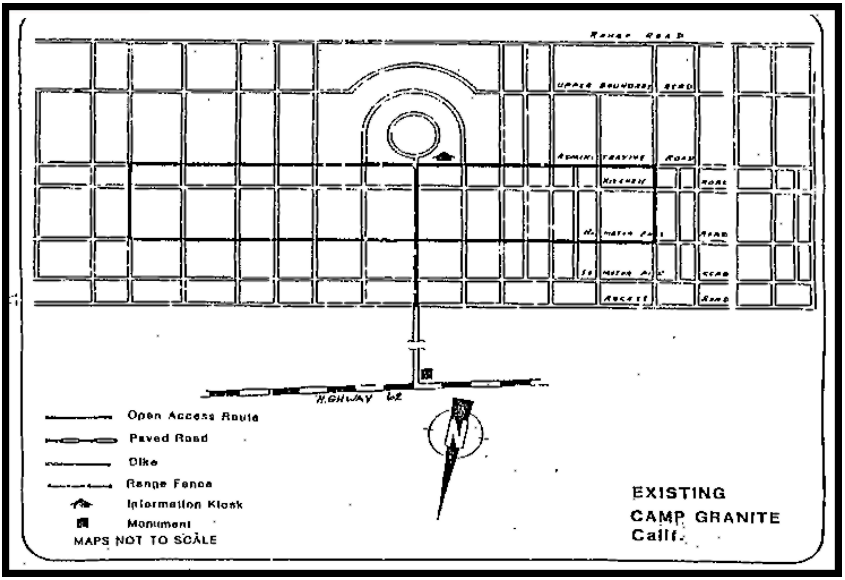
Among the ruins lies a personal testament to the men who built this place. Captain Frank Lovejoy of the 33rd Armored Engineers carved his name and unit into a wet concrete slab in 1943—a permanent signature left in the stone long after the tanks departed. It’s a literal "kilroy was here" from the men who built the place.

North of the aqueduct, the training turned deadly serious. Here lay the "Infiltration Course," where the 95th Infantry learned to crawl through the sand under a web of barbed wire. To simulate the chaos of combat, machine guns fired live ammunition inches above their heads while explosives were detonated nearby, conditioning the men to the deafening roar of war.

The 7th Armored Division was stationed at Camp Coxcomb during the expansion to a theater of operation in June 1943. The 85th Infantry was transferred from Camp Pilot Knob to Camp Coxcomb in August 1943. In October 1943, the 95th Infantry Division arrived. The 95th, for the first time, was able to use live ammunition during its training problems. They trained in the use of Bangalore torpedoes to blast gaps in field obstructions and conducted rolling barrage artillery demonstrations.

By December, the division departed Camp Coxcomb. Seven ranges had been constructed on the north side of the MWD aqueduct at the foot of the Coxcomb Mountains, including the machine gun, rifle, and pistol ranges used for the live-fire exercises described above.

5 Camp Granite

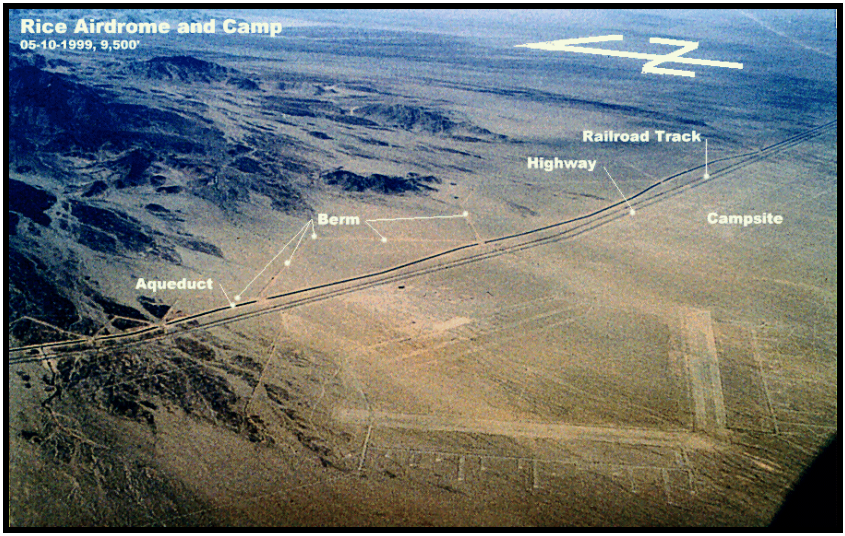


Camp Granite was established in the spring and summer of 1943, named for the nearby mountains. The original camp was closer to the highway, but, because of flooding, was moved closer to the mountains. The 90th and 104th Infantry Divisions were both assigned to Camp Granite, at different times. Among the smaller units known to have been stationed at Camp Granite were the 76th Field Artillery Brigade and the 413th Infantry Regiment.

Facilities constructed at the camp include 40 shower buildings, 157 latrines, 191 pyramidal wooden tent frames, and one 50,000-gallon water tank. There were a total of nine ranges south of the camp, all of which faced into the Granite Mountains. When the C-AMA closed in spring 1944, the 1135th Engineer C Group was assigned the task of closing the target ranges at Camp Granite, and removing salvageable equipment.

Because of its later construction and isolation, Granite contains some of the best-preserved rock art in the DTC. If you walk the ground today, you can still find the intricate stone insignia of the 413th Infantry Regiment embedded in the desert floor.

6 Rice Army Airfield



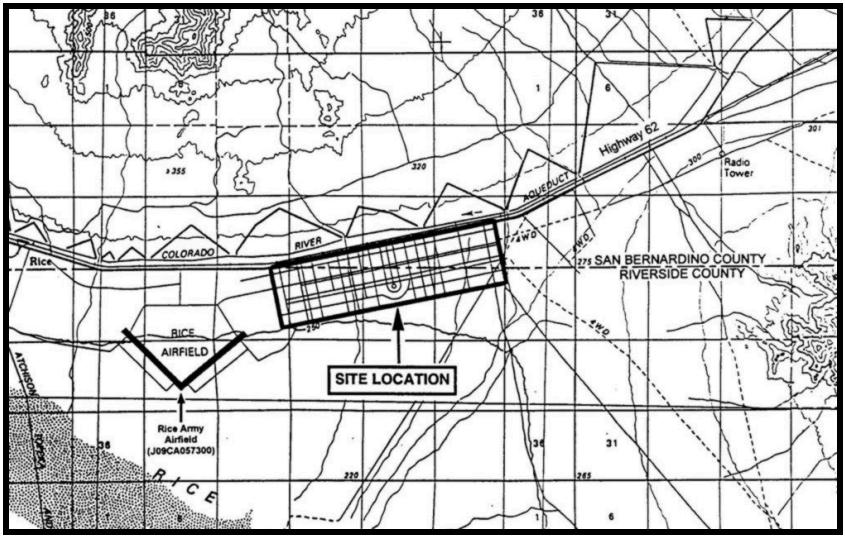
Rice Municipal Airport was acquired by the IV Air Support Command on September 29, 1942, and was operational by October 26, 1942. Rice Army Airfield, like Desert Center, was a sub-base of Thermal Army Airfield. The facility was in the heart of DTC/C-AMA operations, close to Camps Iron Mountain, Coxcomb, and Granite.

In order to house more than 3,000 men, the army constructed barracks, recreation and mess halls, power houses, hangars, and dormitories. Two paved runways also existed, each measuring 5,000 by 150 feet. During the construction of the camp, a 900-foot-deep well was dug to obtain water for the troops. Unfortunately, the well hit hot mineral water that was unfit to drink.

> ***The relationship between the airmen and the infantry was often tense. Bored pilots were known to "buzz" the ground troops against regulations, flying so low that the infantrymen would retaliate by throwing rocks at the aluminum bombers as they roared overhead. [*]***

By May 1944, the airfield was assigned as a sub-base to March Field. Rice Army Airfield was closed on August 2, 1944. Although the buildings are gone today, their foundations remain.

7 Camp Rice



A short-lived divisional camp was constructed in early 1942 adjacent to Rice Army Air Field. The camp was occupied by the 5th Armored Division, the first unit to train here, between August and October 1942. They later spearheaded the Normandy breakout and were the first division to reach the Seine River.

The 6th Armored Division replaced the 5th at Camp Rice on October 10, 1942, making their home here for the next five months.

Here, they conducted "overnight problems" (night maneuvers) to master navigation by starlight—a skill that proved critical later during the Battle of the Bulge.

Most troops destined for Camp Rice didn't arrive at a station; they were dumped at the **Freda Siding**, a lonely stretch of track just west of here. When the 6th Armored detrained there, they stepped into "face-powder thin" dust and astronomical heat, beginning a hardening process that would eventually lead them to the relief of Bastogne.

Charles Barbour, who was with the 86th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, described the arrival of his unit:

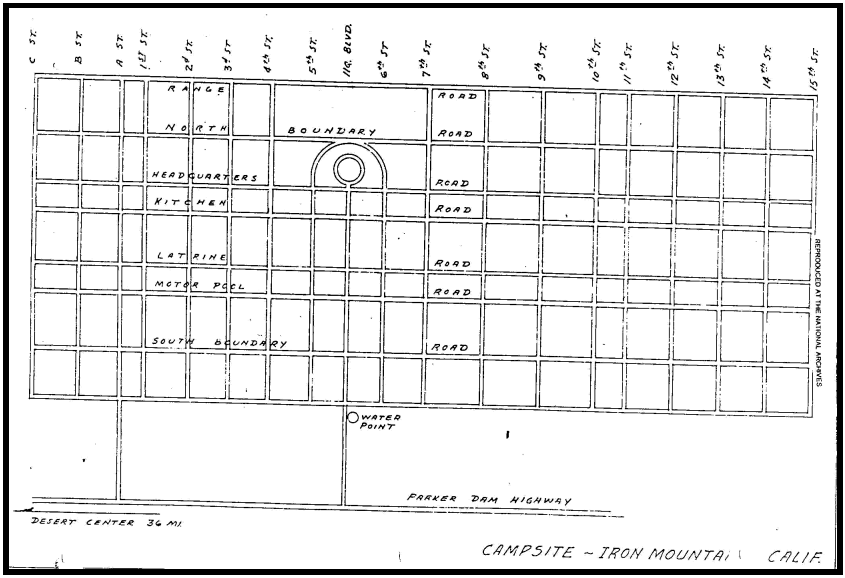
> *“Open space was quickly transformed into the usual orderly, military array of canvas. Sand, of course, was everywhere. After some weeks truckload after truckload of plasterboard materialized from a gypsum processing plant some miles away; laid on smooth-out sand, it floored the tents after a fashion.”*

> *“It was hot when we arrived, and for a few weeks thereafter, and the burlap-screened Quartermaster-serviced open air shower facility a few miles from camp enjoyed great patronage — but only for a few weeks. October, we found, brought its own brand of dry but freezing weather. A No. 10 can of water set on top of a stove sufficed for washcloth bath. Canvas water bags hung on a peg outside the tent became solid ice overnight.”*

> *“We learned to punch nail holes in empty cartridge cans, set them in holes scooped in the desert’s surface, pour a little gasoline into the hole and light a flickering fire that would warm a can of C ration (the K was yet to come) or brew a canteen full of instant coffee on the home-made stove.”*

Camp Rice’s relief map was approximately 50 by 40 feet originally. The relief map did not fare as well as that located at Camp Iron Mountain. Its location was re-discovered in 1996 (Blake), but little remained.

8 Camp Iron Mountain



Established in the spring of 1942, Camp Iron Mountain was first occupied by the 2nd Armored Division. Sometime thereafter, the 3rd Armored Division was stationed at the camp, its 23rd Armored Engineer Battalion constructing 40 miles of camp roads, along with firing ranges. By late in the summer of 1942, the entire division took over the camp. Camp Iron Mountain was also home to the 183rd Artillery Group, the X Corps Artillery, and the 941st FA Battalion between mid-1942 and mid-1944.

The 941st FA Battalion, which arrived in August 1943, was responsible for the construction of one of the chapels at the camp. According to one veteran of the battalion, each battery was required to establish their camp area. To do this an area large enough to encompass two rows of tents and a battery street in the middle had to be cleared.

The men were required to re-plant every bush that had been up-rooted (personal communication Robert W. Hains 2000). The 54th Evacuation Hospital was at Camp Iron Mountain from October 15 to November 27, 1943.

Near the headquarters stood a massive 200 x 175-foot relief map of the entire training center, sculpted from earth and rock. A wooden bridge once spanned over it, allowing General Patton and his staff to walk above the "terrain" like giants, planning division-sized maneuvers across 18,000 square miles.

During maneuvers conducted between August 29 and September 13, 1942, the Director Headquarters and Advisor’s Camp was located at Camp Iron Mountain. These maneuvers involved the 3rd Armored Division, 7th Motorized Division, 5th Armored Division, 75th Field Artillery Brigade, and elements of the VII Corps (BLM 1984). It is likely that many maneuvers were planned at Camp Iron Mountain, with the benefit of its large relief map.

Iron Mountain is unique for its two surviving open-air chapels—one Catholic, one Protestant. Built by hand from local stone, the Catholic altar was originally landscaped with transplanted smoke trees and lined with cactus, offering a surreal moment of grace in a landscape designed for war.

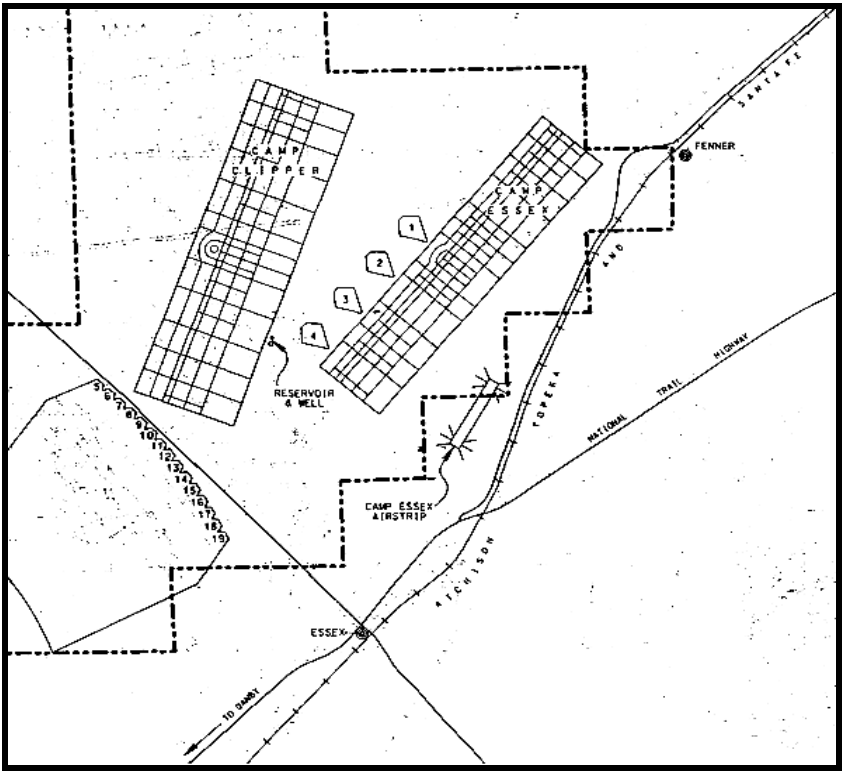
9 Cadiz

THE SITE

Cadiz was a Santa Fe Railroad siding, where the army leased 600 feet of track. Supplies and equipment were unloaded for the Army at Goffs, or sent further down the line at Rice. Here at Cadiz, trains were switched southbound from Goffs onto tracks leading to Rice. There are several foundations present at Cadiz, as is an abandoned siding.

Cadiz was the junction point where the Santa Fe line split. One branch went east to Goffs/Needles (main line), and the other branch went south to Rice and Parker (the "Parker Cutoff"). This made Cadiz the "traffic cop" for the entire Desert Training Center rail network. Trains carrying tanks and troops to Camp Rice or Camp Iron Mountain had to switch tracks here. If Cadiz jammed, the whole southern sector of the DTC choked.

10 Camp Clipper



Camp Clipper was apparently a temporary camp, occupied by infantry divisions only. Reports indicate that the 33rd Infantry Division occupied it after its construction in 1942, followed by the 93rd Infantry Division. The temporary facility was used as a transition camp for the more permanent Camp Essex to the west. Camp Clipper was used when one division was moving out and another was moving in, so that both units could be accommodated. When Camp Essex was completed, Camp Clipper was closed. (Meller 1946:41).

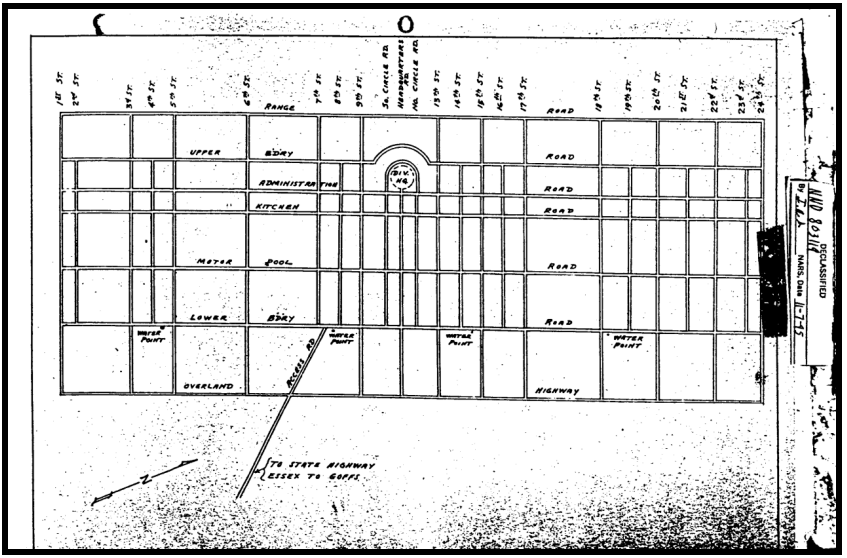
Camp Clipper was located east of Camp Essex, north of the Essex airfield. While Camp Essex had a predominantly north-south trend, Camp Clipper had a northeast-southwest orientation.

11 Essex Airfield

Although a less permanent airfield than those of Rice or Desert Center, the facility adjacent to Camp Essex consisted of several runways, taxiways, and parking areas. This tactical airdrome was constructed by the 835th Engineer Battalion, Aviation. The field was largely a natural surface. Some of the taxiways were constructed with a sand and cement mix, but most of the runways were simply cleared and compacted by watering. The main runway measured 4,000 by 150 feet.

Today, any buildings that may have existed have all been removed or destroyed. The only remnants of the facility include roads, cement foundations, airplane taxiways, tie-down areas, and runways. The airfield retains its distinctive shape, clearly visible from the air.

12 Camp Essex



Established in 1942, Camp Essex used the nearby Camp Clipper as a temporary staging area for divisions when one was moving in and another was moving out. The 33rd Infantry Division was first assigned to the camp, followed by the 93rd Infantry Division. The 93rd was an all-Black division, at a time when segregation was still in effect in the U.S. Army. Following the departure of the 93rd Division in January 1944, the camp was occupied by Italian POWs in May. By October, the POWs were gone, and the camp was closed (Mitchell 1964:126–127).

Camp Essex was located close to the small railroad towns of Essex and Fenner, and was bordered on the southwest by Essex Road. Facilities at the camp included 36 shower buildings, 191 latrine buildings, 149 pyramidal wooden tent frames, an outdoor theater, and a 500,000-gallon water reservoir. The camp was equipped, as many were, with elevated water tanks. There were apparently several ranges southwest across Essex Road from the camp, although no traces of them are currently apparent.

The "Blue Helmets": The 93rd Infantry Division was the first segregated African-American division activated during WWII. They wore French-style Adrian helmet patches (a nod to WWI service).

Unlike white divisions, the 93rd faced unique challenges. Their training at Essex (July–Oct 1943) was critical, as they were being prepared for the Pacific (Bougainville, New Guinea). They weren't just "training"; they were proving that African-American combat units were viable in modern war, a point of contention in the 1940s Army.

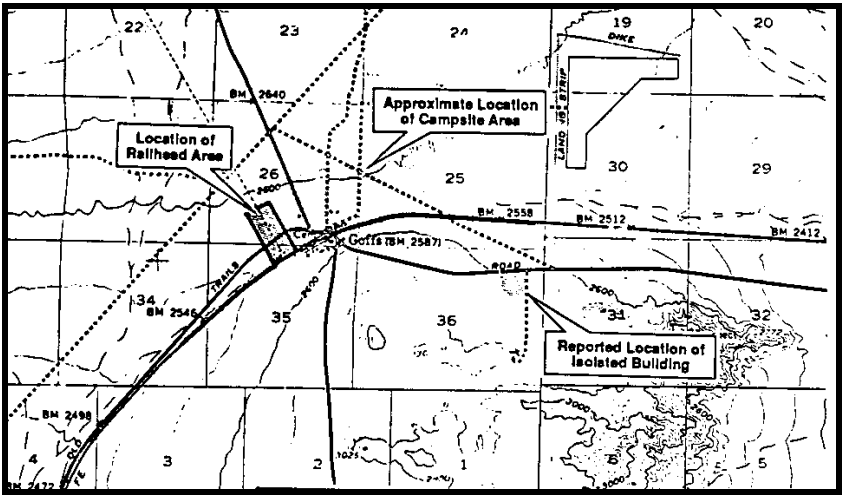
As with Camp Ibis, the Italians at Essex in 1944 weren't standard POWs behind wire. After Italy's surrender in '43, ~90% of Italian POWs joined Italian Service Units (ISU).

Their Role: They wore US uniforms with "ITALY" patches and were tasked with salvage and demolition. They were the ones who dismantled the very camp you are flying over.

The Irony: Former enemies were paid wages to clean up the American war machine's footprint. The camp was closed by the 827th Tank Destroyer Battalion, which left in February 1944.

[NOTES]

13 Goffs



The siding of Goffs was established in 1883 by the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad. Soon thereafter, a station and turntable were built. During the war, the War Department leased an area of track from the Santa Fe Railroad (which had acquired the line), and constructed 2,675 feet of tracks branching off the leased track. Military facilities at Goffs also consisted of an ammunition storage area and a campsite. Three administration buildings (100'x20'), two warehouse buildings (96'x40'), two sheds (96'x40'), and a temporary building (100'x20') were constructed in and around Goffs. The foundations of several of these buildings exist immediately east of town.

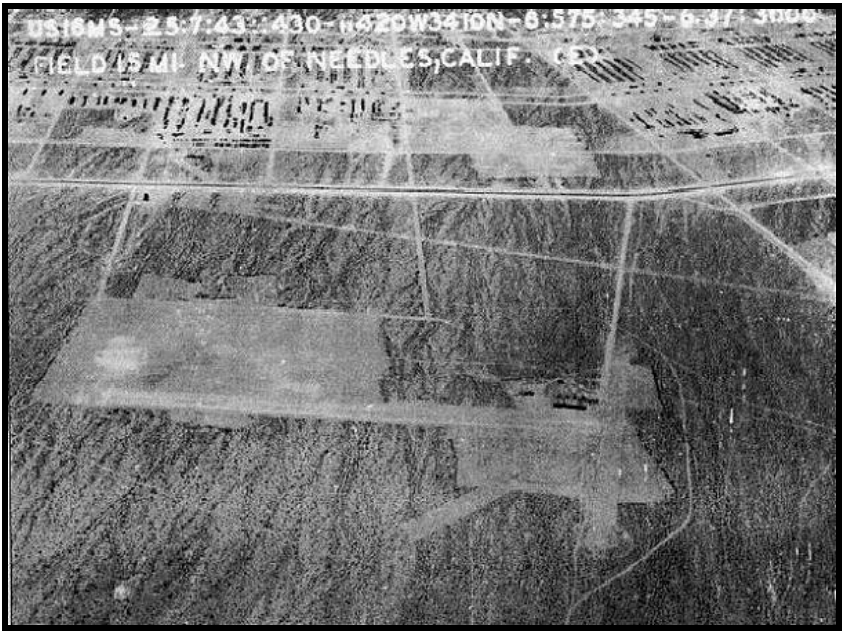
The campsite at Goffs was apparently the temporary location of the 7th Infantry Division, which was housed approximately one mile from the small community. Goffs was also the location of the 58th Quartermaster Regiment beginning sometime in 1942. The 58th, like other units, was stationed in pup tents. Goffs was primarily a logistical hub and Depot rather than a standard maneuver camp.

The sand/gravel liaison strip was located approximately 1 mile north of the Goffs Schoolhouse (which served as a PX). Today, several rock-lined walkways and other features from this camp remain a short distance from the railroad siding.

For a brief but intense period (August 14 – October 18, 1942), Goffs served as the Division Headquarters for the 7th Infantry Division. The "Lucky 7th": This unit is significant because they went on to fight in the Aleutians (Attu) and the Pacific (Kwajalein, Leyte, Okinawa). They essentially learned their mobile warfare doctrine right here in the dirt at Goffs.

The ammunition storage facility, consisting of 10 ammunition storage igloos was located 3 miles south of Goffs. An explosives dump was located at the base of Goffs Butte, on the southwest side. The ordnance consisted of 80 tons of materials, including rockets, grenades, and land mines. Some rock alignments can still be seen in this area as well.

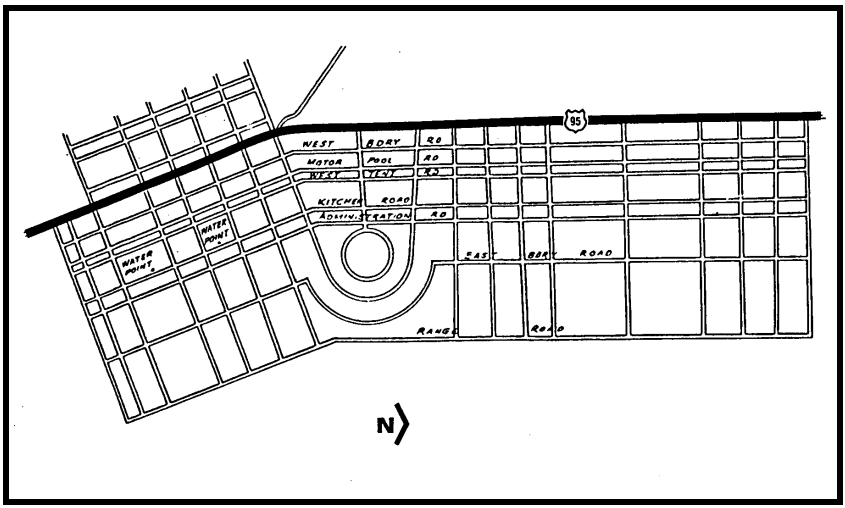
14 Ibis Airstrip



Located across Highway 95 from the camp proper was a Divisional Liaison Strip, consisting of a patch of scraped earth. It was designed primarily for L-4 Piper Cubs ("Grasshoppers") and L-5 Sentinels. These small, unarmed planes were attached directly to the Armored Division's artillery units for spotting and courier duties. The pilots and mechanics lived here in pup tents, separated from the main garrison. Numerous rock-lined walkways, refuse, and a few roads can be found in this area today.

Finally, an Italian POW camp was reported to have existed near Searchlight Junction, 1 mile south of Camp Ibis. Italian POWs were brought to the DTC in 1944 (after the US combat divisions left) specifically to dismantle the camps. Many pledged allegiance to the Allies and were formed into service units.

15 Camp Ibis



Camp Ibis was located along U.S. Highway 95, stretching nearly three miles north to south. Camp Ibis was constructed in winter 1942–1943. Temporary facilities consisted of 28 shower buildings for enlisted men, and 14 for officers; 173 latrine buildings; 97 single, 127 double, and 100 triple wooden tent frames; a 50,000-gallon, concrete water reservoir; and a 50,000-gallon, wooden, elevated storage tank. In addition, the camp contained 23 ranges, including ones for moving targets, pistols, rifles, and .50-caliber machine guns.

> ***At twilight, this vast grid of streets transformed into a haunting soundscape. General Patton ordered every unit bugler to sound 'Taps' simultaneously. As the melody rang across the valley, veterans recalled it being answered by the howls of coyotes from the surrounding desert lairs—a nightly reminder that they were far from home. [*]***

Camp Ibis was first occupied by the 4th Armored Division. In November 1942, the 4th arrived in the DTC, detraining at the Freda siding. Their headquarters was established at Camp Ibis.

16 Laughlin

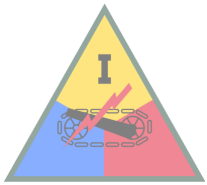
Things to do near Laughlin, NV

Don Laughlin's Classic Car Museum
Located at the Riverside Resort, this collection showcases over 80 rare and historic automobiles across two separate exhibit halls. Admission is often free or nominal.

Colorado River Museum (Bullhead City)
Just across the river at 1239 Highway 95. This museum preserves the history of the steamboats, mining, and the construction of the Davis Dam.
Note: Hours vary seasonally; check local listings.

Davis Dam
Located 8 miles north of Laughlin. Construction began in 1942 but was halted due to the war, resuming in 1946. It is a massive earthen-fill dam that created Lake Mohave. While the roadway over the dam is closed to traffic, the views from the nearby parks are spectacular.

Las Vegas
Harry Reid International Airport (KLAS) is approximately 73 air-miles to the northwest.



Historical anecdotes marked [*] are excerpted from the memoirs of Lt. Col. John S. Lynch, USAF (Ret.), "Patton's Desert Training Center", Council on America's Military Past.