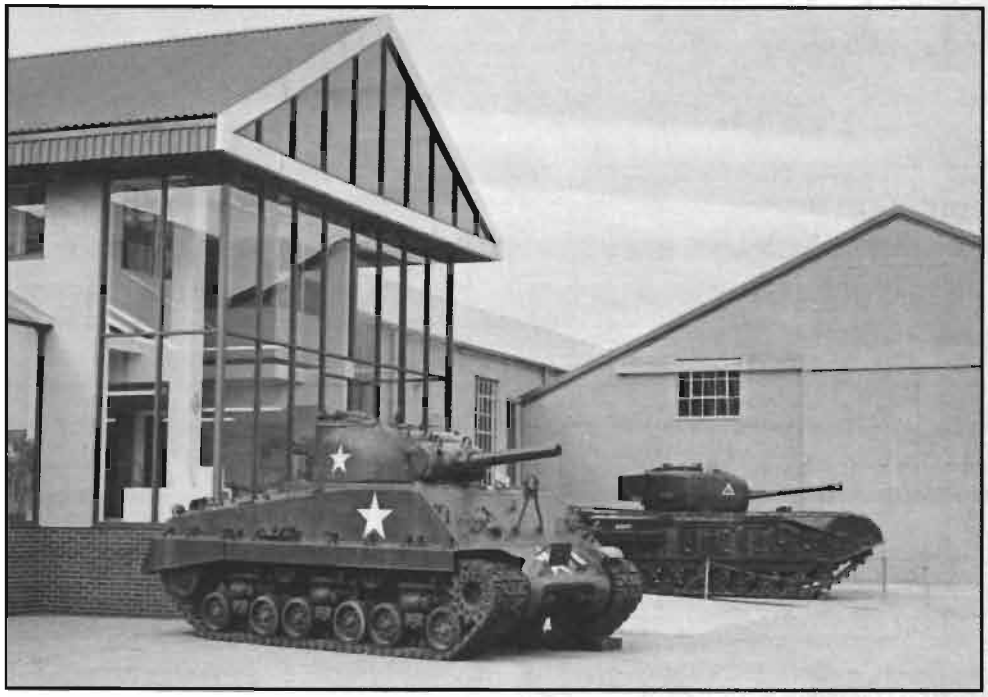
An M4 Sherman (105 mm. howitzer) and a British Churchill infantry tank guard the new entrance to Britain's Royal Armoured Corps Tank Museum at Bovington Camp. Many of the vehicles previously on display outdoors have been moved inside since the completion of new buildings.

(Photos by permission of RAC Tank Museum.)



ers Medium, which was the most numerous tank built anywhere in the world during the 1920s. The Royal Tank Corps used this tank in its pioneer experiments in mobile armored warfare.

Another interesting tank on display is the *Independent*, an experimental heavy tank with five turrets. This represents the most extreme example of a between-the-wars craze for multi-turreted tanks.

The WWII tanks and armored vehicles have been assembled in a new exhibit that includes not only British, but U.S., German, and Russian tanks, as well as French, Italian, Japanese, and Swedish armored vehicles. There are now more than 180 vehicles in this exhibit, and it continues to grow as newer models are donated by the British Army, or through exchanges of duplicate machines with other museums.

In addition to the collection of the earliest tanks and armored vehicles, the RAC Tank Museum houses a very comprehensive collection of WWII tanks, including the famous *Tiger II*, which, at 76 tons, was the heaviest tank to see action in that war.

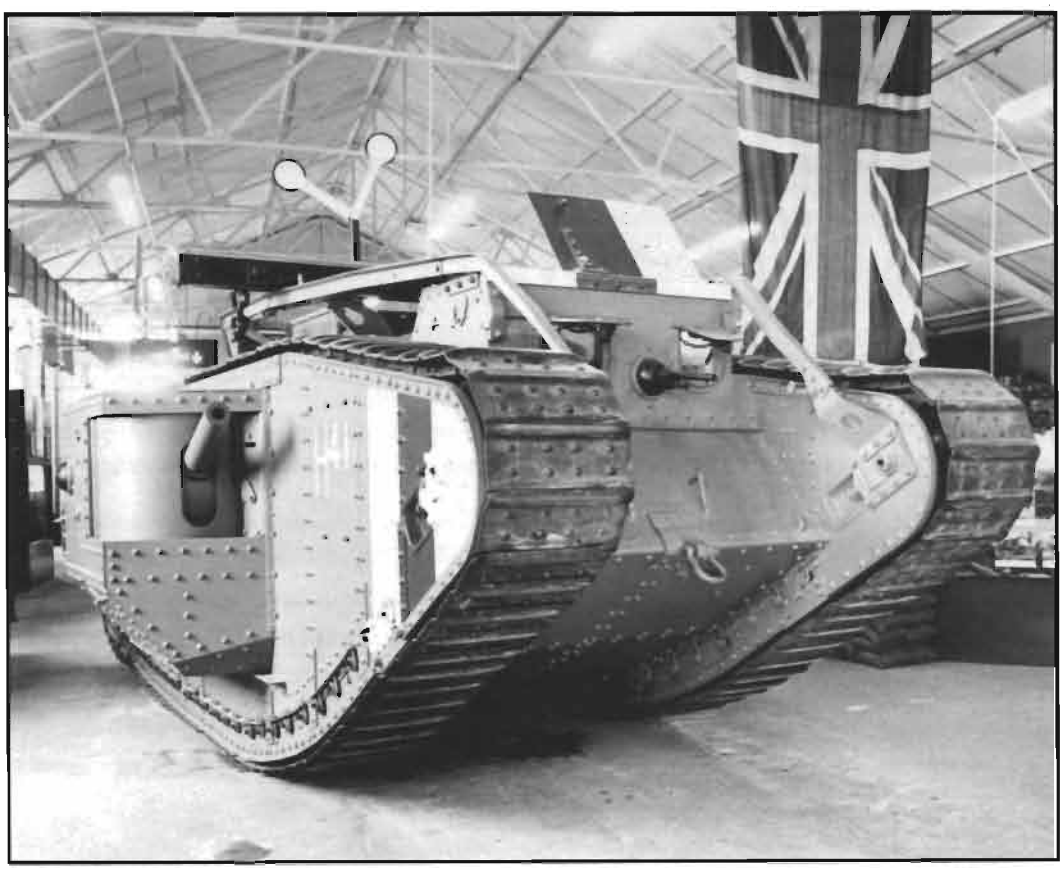
The museum's comprehensive collection of post-WWI tanks and armored vehicles includes the British *Conqueror* of the 1960s, the heaviest post-WII tank to see service, and the *Chieftan*, still the most numerous tank in the British Army. Among the newer acquisitions is a French-built Panhard *AML 90* armored car captured by the British in the Falkland Islands, and a Brazilian-built Engesa *EE-9 Cascavel* armored car, used in the recent Iraq-Iran war.

The inclusion of such vehicles in the museum makes it not only of historical but of current military and technical interest. As such, the museum is a source of general information about the development of armored vehicles and is visited regularly by Royal Armoured Corps Centre personnel, as well as those from other military establishments. Students from the Royal Military College of Science (See "Graduate Studies in Combat Vehicle Technology," Sept-Oct 1987 ARMOR) are also frequent visitors.

Such visits uphold the original purpose of the museum, to provide a basis of instruction for members of the Royal Tank Corps and other components of British forces. In 1947, the museum opened to the public and has become one of the most popular British museums, with more than 200,000 visitors each year.

During the past few years, the museum has undergone a considerable expansion. Now, most of its vehicles are under cover. As far as possible, each vehicle is displayed against a contemporary background, which helps visitors acquire a better appreciation of its capabilities and characteristics.

The museum owes much of its military and public success to a succession of dedicated curators, all of whom have been retired officers of the Royal Tank Regiment. The



Mark V heavy tank fought with the 8th Bn. of the Tank Corps in WWI. This vehicle is still in running order.

museum has recognized the present curator, LTC George Forty, by naming one of the new display halls after him.

In addition to its great array of tanks and armored vehicles, the museum also contains other historical and technical materials. These include medals won by tankers in action, uniforms of different periods of the Royal Armoured Corps, and the first gas turbine engine designed and built for tank use in 1954. The museum also has an extensive reference library and a book shop, which contains what is probably the most extensive stock of books on armor.

For the past five years, the Society of Friends of the Tank Museum, a voluntary organization, has backed the expansion of the museum. The society's several hundred members assist in vehicle restoration and in their operation on special occasions. The society is also instrumental in fund-raising activities for the museum.

Among the museum's operational tanks is a Mark V of 1918 vintage, as well as several WWII tanks. These vehicles frequently participate in demonstrations of armored equipment, and provide a valuable historical perspective with later models. Other uses for these operable tanks, especially the later models, include support of such current defense technology activities as the study of tank seismic (sound) signatures.

The Royal Armoured Corps Tank Museum more than meets its dual role of providing historical and technical instruction on armor to the British forces and educational recreation to the general public. It is a prime point of interest to visiting tankers and one well worth seeing when you come to England.

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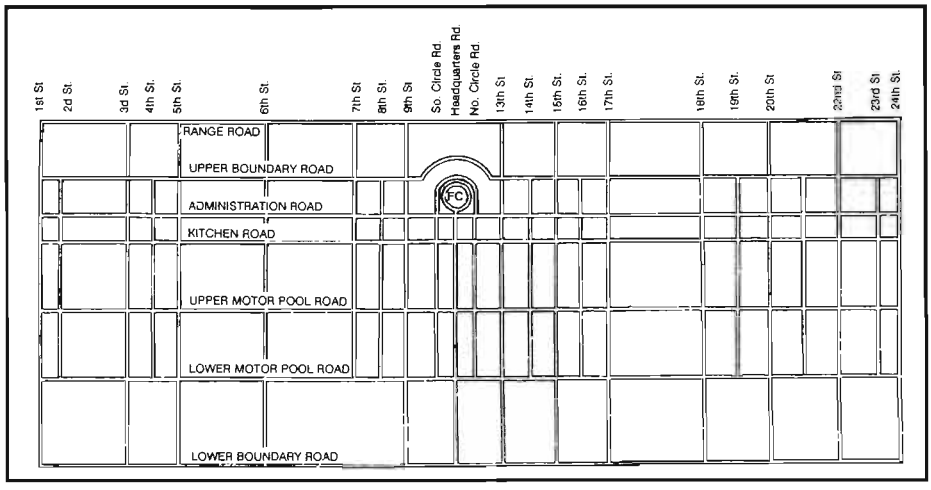
IT WAS THE NTC - 40 YEARS
BEFORE THERE WAS AN NTC

The Desert Training Center: Yesterday and Today

by Francis G. Blake

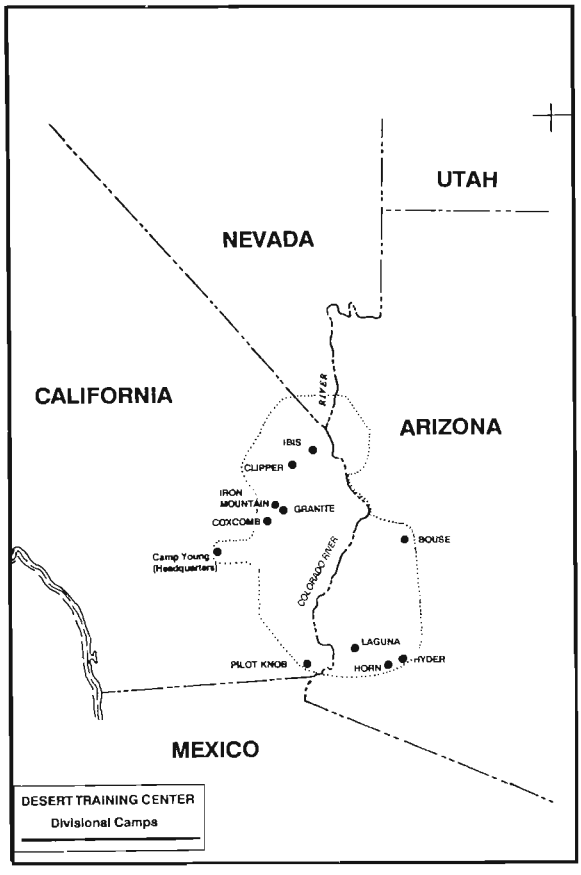
Above, the Freda QM Depot site is abandoned today, with only tank tracks to recall its history. The same scene in the 1940s included lines of Shermans, Lees, and Stuarts prepared for railroad loading. At right, MG Patton and MG Walton Walker observe an exercise.



Typical layout of DTC's tent camps is shown above. Each was about one by two miles in area. "FC" is the flag circle, the center of the camp.

Below, the camps were spread over a vast area of the Mojave Desert.

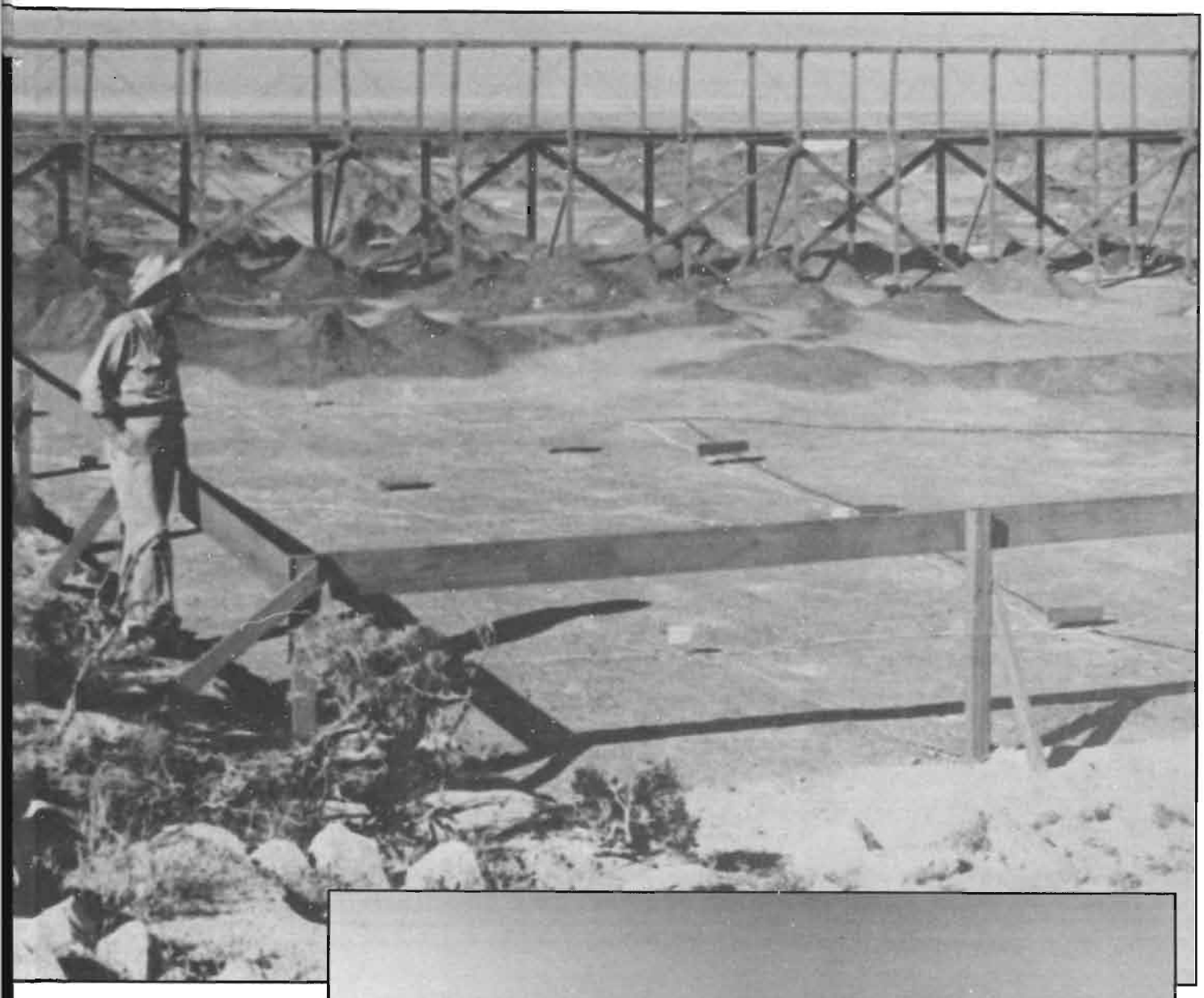
"Seven armored divisions and 13 infantry divisions trained there, but not one of them ever fought in the deserts of North Africa."



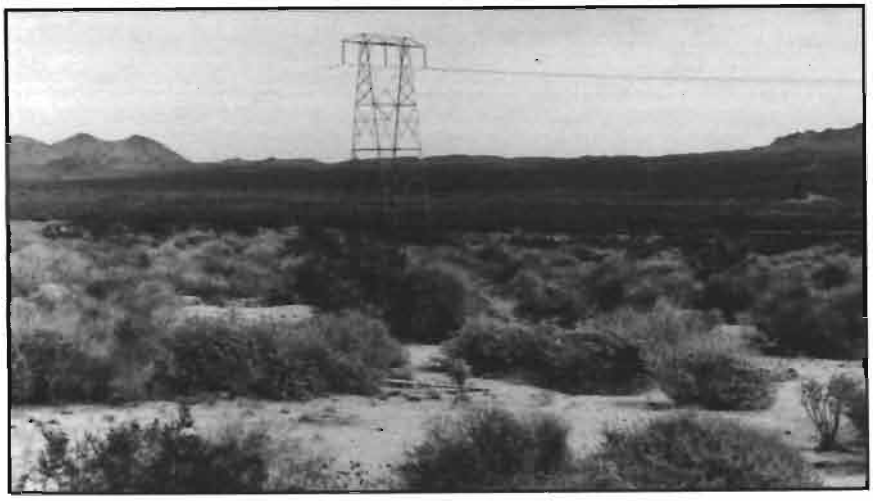
With an eye on the major armor battles in the deserts of North Africa in the early years of WWII, the War Plans Division of the War Department concluded that specially trained and equipped troops were needed to fight in desert and other extreme climatic conditions. The Army chose MG George S. Patton, Jr., commanding general, I Armored Corps, to survey, establish, organize and operate a training center where U.S. armor troops and their support elements could learn and practice desert fighting. The site Patton selected in southern California became the U.S. Army Desert Training Center (DTC) Mojave Desert, California. Seven armored and 13 infantry divisions trained there, but not one of them ever fought in the deserts of North Africa. All went to Europe and the Pacific theaters, including Alaska, because none of them completed their training in time for the North African invasion. The DTC became the Army's largest maneuver area, unhindered by civilians and unrestricted as to property damage.

Although Patton remained in command of the DTC for only five months (Mar-Aug 1942), the center has always been "Patton's Training Ground." In 1943, the name officially became the California-Arizona Maneuver Area (CAMA), but the Patton connection remained.

Ten or more tent camps (see Figures 1 & 2) were built, at least six of them in California and as many as four in Arizona. Six major combined maneuvers were held on DTC-CAMA environs from mid-



A 1942 visitor to Camp Iron Mountain looks at the huge relief map of the maneuver area, a map so large a foot bridge was needed to see it all. Earth was shaped to duplicate topography and tar was sprayed on it for permanence. At right, only a few fence post stubs remain and desert scrub covers the map's "mountains."



The garrison flag flies over Headquarters, Desert Training Center in photo above. Camp Young is in the background of this photo, taken in 1942.

Today, the headquarters site is eroded and overgrown. The power lines were postwar additions to the landscape.

"...The combined DTC-CAMA enclosed 17,750 acres in California and Nevada and up to 190,000 men served there..."

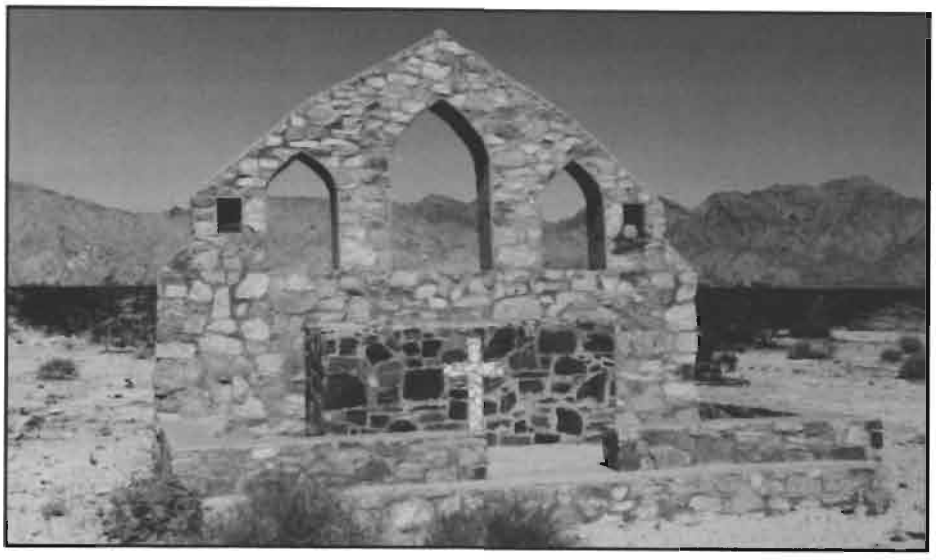
1942 to early 1944, when CAMA ceased operations and was dismantled. Opposing "red" and "blue" armies consisting of armor, infantry, mechanized cavalry, tank destroyers, artillery, air units, and support units thrashed out the basics of armor doctrine in the desert wastes. They stressed operations with restricted water supplies, sustained operations remote from railheads, speed in combat supply, supply in darkness, desert navigation, laying and lifting minefields, maintenance and evacuation of vehicles, hygiene, sanitation, and medical training.

The DTC site was ideal for its purpose; the terrain varied from mountains to canyons, from dry lakes to sand dunes. Cactus and low bushes gave no cover, and summertime daytime temperatures zoomed to 130 degrees, while winter saw the mercury plummet to freezing. Occasional flash floods in the canyons taught troops to be aware of such occurrences. Nearby towns were small and ill-equipped to handle the masses of troops, which made life doubly hard for the sand-chewing trainees. Army Air Force planes, based at Rice Army Airfield, provided close-support--and attack, for the ground forces.

Seven general officers commanded the DTC-CAMA during its brief existence: MG Patton, MG Alvan Gillem, Jr., MG Walton H. Walker, MG Charles H. White, MG Wade H. Haislip, MG Alexander M. Patch, and MG Jonathan W. Anderson. The combined DTC-CAMA enclosed 17,750 acres in California and Arizona and up to 190,000 men served there in all capacities from combat training to messing to medical to maintenance.

All that remains of these camps and training sites are some scattered camp name signs, a few paved bits of road, some wrecks of buildings, gravel paths, foxholes--and memories.

Above, ranks of M3 medium tanks of the 33d Armored Regt., 3d Armored Division, as seen in 1942 at Camp Iron Mountain. (Note relatively rare cast-hull version at left, front row.) View is to the east and the Turtle Mountain range, with the Colorado River aqueduct crossing the desert to rear of the tank park.. Today, little more than the tank tracks remain.



This outdoor stone altar, erected by the 183d FA Group at Camp Iron Mountain, is one of the few surviving landmarks from the DTC days.

Francis G. Blake is a paleontologist - a scientist who studies fossils and ancient life forms - and an amateur historian with particular interests in motor vehicles. He is a regular contributor to Wheels and Tracks and Army Motors, the quarterly journal of the International Military Vehicle Collectors Club. He has been studying the Desert Training Center sites since 1983.