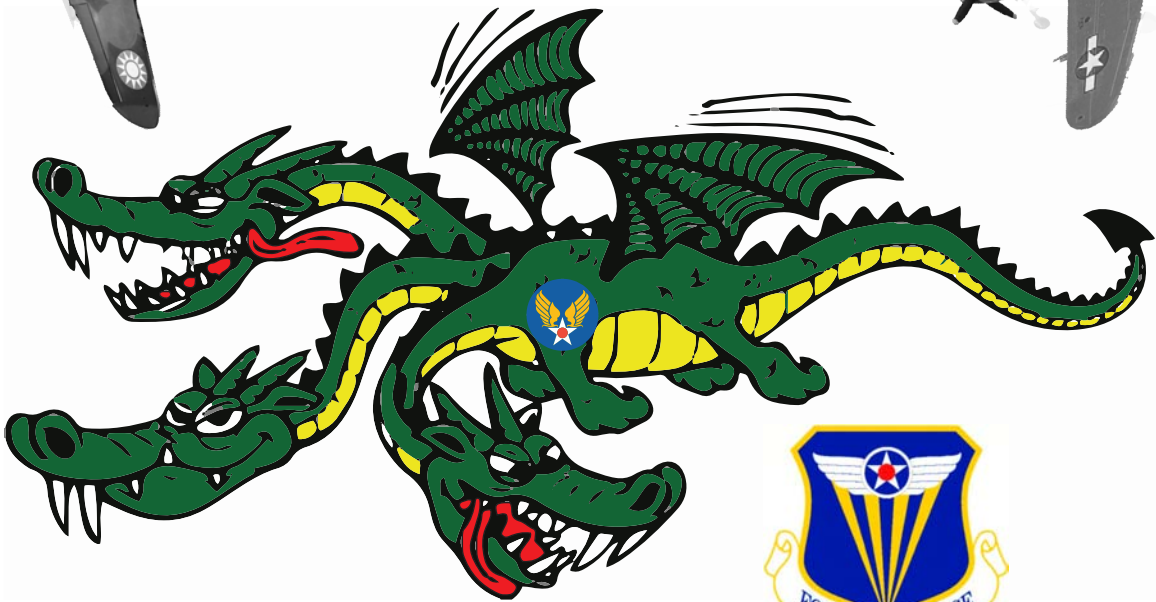


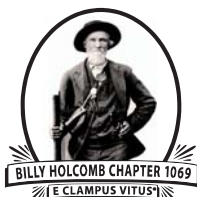
Rice Airfield 3-way



6029 Year of the Dragon

Queho Posse #1919

Lost Dutchman #5917



Billy Holcomb #1069

The Desert Training Center and Rice Army Airfield

Conception

March 1942 was a bleak time for Americans. Only a few months before, the Japanese had succeeded in delivering a near knock-out punch to the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor, leaving nearly 3000 sailors, soldiers, and airmen dead. American forces in the Philippines were barely holding on, Wake Island had surrendered, and the Japanese Empire continued to expand its territory. In Europe, France and the low countries had fallen, and only England stood against the German war machine. The English Army squared off against its German opponents in the Balkans and Greece, but was pushed out of each. In North Africa, the German Army recaptured the Libyan port of Benghazi and was heading toward Egypt, threatening the entire Middle East with Nazi domination. Facing this threat, the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of England agreed that U.S. troops must be made ready to help the British oppose the German Africa Corps in North Africa.

By February, 1942, a plan was developed to bring the fight to the Germans. However, its author, Army Chief of Staff Lt. General Lesley McNair, knew that American soldiers had never trained in conditions even remotely similar to those in North Africa.

Therefore, he directed General George S. Patton, commander of the newly formed First Armored Corps, to establish a training facility that would prepare U.S. soldiers for the kind of fighting they would face in their first encounter with the Germans.

Born in the San Gabriel Valley in 1885, George Smith Patton, Jr. graduated from West Point in 1909. He served as General John J. Pershing's aid in the expeditions against Poncho Villa seven years later, and was wounded fighting the Germans in 1918. He

served in the tank corps until World War I ended, and then transferred to the cavalry. By 1940, as the German Army was once again preparing to invade France, Patton was promoted to Brigadier General, and given command of the 2nd Armored Division, stationed at Fort Benning, Georgia. When McNair gave Patton the task of locating a training facility for desert warfare, Patton understood the importance of the assignment: “Our first chance to get at the enemy will be in North Africa. We cannot train troops to fight in the deserts of North Africa by training in the swamps of Georgia....I want every officer and section to start planning on moving troops by rail to California.” (Williamson 1979/Bischoff 2000).

Patton knew he needed a vast, remote desert area that was similar in as many ways as possible to the deserts of Libya, Tunisia, and Egypt. The site for his training center had to be sparsely populated and large enough to accommodate thousands (later hundreds of thousands) of men as well as their equipment, tanks, supplies, hospitals, and other support units. Patton found what he was looking for in early March, 1942. What would soon become the Desert Training Center suited Patton’s needs: remote and rugged, yet accessible by highway and rail; arid and sandy, yet well supplied with water. The Desert Training Center, as established in March 1942, originally encompassed an area that stretched from just east of Indio, California to the Arizona border, and from Yuma, Arizona north to the vicinity of Searchlight, Nevada. Two major U.S. highways ran through it from east to west (U.S. 66 and U.S. 60). It was served by three railroads: the Union Pacific, the Santa Fe, and the Southern Pacific. Water was supplied by the Colorado River Aqueduct, which essentially bisected the Training Center on its route from Blythe to Los Angeles.

Patton and his officers selected a location near Shaver's Summit as the primary headquarters camp for the Desert Training Center. Named Camp Young for the Army's first Chief of Staff, General Samuel Young, this camp was located about a mile north of U.S. Highway 60, and just west of Joseph Chiriaco's store and restaurant at the summit. As per Patton's wishes, Camp Young was constructed of simple materials: tents for officers and enlisted men, and a few wooden structures, temporary in nature, for headquarters, administration, and hospital buildings. At first, creosote and other desert vegetation was cleared with machetes, and company streets were staked out. Soon, however, the engineers arrived and graded the streets, and brought in electrical power and water (supplied by the Los Angeles Metropolitan Water District). The following story is told about Patton's acquisition of MWD water:

"One legend was born when he (Patton) appeared before the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California in early 1942 regarding (the use of) water from their aqueduct to serve some of the camps. After hearing about his anticipated needs, the MWD announced that they would consider his request and could probably render a decision in a few months. General Patton politely informed them that he had started using water that very day and just wanted the MWD to know that he had done so; his schedule for training troops did not allow for bureaucratic delay!" (Casebier 1990)

Attached to the Desert Training Center was the Desert Warfare Board (DWB). The mission of the DWB was to test equipment, clothing, weapons and vehicles in conditions that were as close to real desert combat as possible. The DWB then made recommendations based on its testing to the General Headquarters of the Army Ground Forces. The DWB recommended many of the improvements that were made in combat boots, weapon lubricants, vehicle cooling systems, and vehicle tires. The Board also received and considered complaints regarding supplies and equipment. (Bischoff 2000)

On April 30, 1942, Camp Young was officially activated by General Patton and elements of the I Armored Corps. At first, the Center was under-manned, as most of the I Armored Corps was still at Fort Benning. Between April 30 and the end of May, the balance of I Armored arrived by rail, detraining at Indio, Rice, and Freda. Rice and Freda, just sidings at that point, would become important parts of the DTC. By May 30, there were about 4800 enlisted men at Camp Young. Within a few weeks of the opening of the DTC, Patton established two other camps, one at Iron Mountain, and the other near Needles.

Patton's first training regimen lasted about six weeks. Small unit training was emphasized in the first weeks. Particular emphasis was placed on leadership training for junior officers. Platoon leaders were given problems that encouraged them to become self-reliant and self-sufficient. These problems involved land navigation, small unit tactics, and intelligence gathering. Patrols often lasted well over a day, and troops were forced to conserve water and food. (Physical strength was the order of the day; according to Henley (1992), Patton demanded that all men at the training center, including officers, be able to run one mile each day with rifle and pack in ten minutes). In the final weeks the emphasis shifted to larger unit operations. In a seven-day period, more than 10,000 men covered 300 miles, testing vehicles and equipment, and finding their limitations. For Patton, realism was paramount. He emphasized rapid movement and concentrated firepower, while at the same time presenting as low a target profile as possible to air attack.

The primary purpose of the Desert Training Center was to offer a realistic setting for the training of the fighting men. There is no doubt that the DTC lived up to its potential

in this regard. It also offered a realistic exercise in the problem of supply. As the Chief of Staff of the IV Corps wrote, “We do not have to simulate the problems of supply in the desert. They already exist.” (Bischoff 2000) One of the biggest problems was the lack of spare parts. Vehicles were heavily used during training exercises—Jeeps, tanks, and trucks were usually driven at fairly high speeds directly across country rather than on roads (these were few and far between anyway) and were often overloaded. The scarcity of parts to make repairs left many vehicles useless. Bischoff (2000) states that when Patton left the DTC in August, 1942, more than 230 armored vehicles and 270 general purpose vehicles were disabled.

Although General Patton maintained a residence in Indio, he spent most of his time at Camp Young, living in temporary tar-paper quarters. He would often fly his own plane to remote airstrips to observe and oversee his men in the training cycle. He even used the radio at Camp Young to encourage, and sometimes correct, his men. Then, on July 30, 1942, Patton was called to Washington. It was there that he received orders to command the western task force of Operation TORCH in North Africa. He did not return to the Desert Training Center, but he sent a message to the I Corps, praising the men for their hard work and toughness, and congratulating them on a job well done. I Corps then followed Patton to North Africa.

A New Concept

Patton and the I Corps were succeeded in August 1942 by Major General Alvan Gillem and the II Armored Corps. As Patton and the I Corps had left in rather a hurry, things were somewhat disorganized when II Corps arrived. Trouble with supplies, mentioned above, continued to plague the newcomers to the Desert Training Center.

Manpower shortages were evident as well, with some support units at only half strength. Gillem conducted maneuvers for the II Corps in late September and early October. Originally planned for Patton's I Corps in the summer, the maneuvers were not quite as realistic as had been hoped.

In order to increase the realism of the training at the Desert Training Center, a "Theater of Operations" model was created. In this model, command, supply, and support units were pushed to a perimeter "communications zone" that encircled a "combat zone." It was in the combat zone that the actual maneuvers and live fire exercises took place (Bishoff 2000). Later, in July 1943, the communications zone was relocated farther from the Desert Training Center, west of a line that stretched from Nipton to Kelso, then south through Cadiz and Desert Center, then southwest to Niland. No supply points were to be located within twenty miles of a combat unit. The resulting theatre of operations concept not only added greatly to the realism of the training, it had the added effect of creating a much more organized facility.

Day-to-Day Life

Most of the men who trained at the Desert Training Center were completely unprepared for life on the desert. In fact, it is a fair bet to say that most had never even seen the desert:

"Our first camp was set up at Goffs (May 1942—Goffs was not a Divisional Camp, however it was the temporary site of the 7th Infantry Division and the 58th Quartermaster Regiment) where we were limited to the use of one shelter half for protection against the sun and blowing sand....The radiation off the dark canvas was almost as intense as the sun itself so comfort was a relative term. Large, refrigerated boxes on wheels were brought in to cool and rehydrate those overcome by the heat, physical exertion, and lack of water. They were placed on racks in these boxes, much as in a morgue, for about 24 hours, or until their body temperature dropped to subnormal for a few hours, and most were then able to return to duty." (related by H.J. Meany, Casebier 1990)

Patton was a stickler for uniform regulations. Everybody had to wear a tie. On one occasion, Patton and some of his staff were out inspecting the camps and the troops when he discovered what he thought was an enlisted man up a power or telephone pole installing some equipment. The man was not wearing a tie or regulation uniform. Patton called the man down and then proceeded to chew him out for being out of uniform. The man then chewed Patton out, pointing out that he was not in the army but worked for the telephone company and was installing phone lines. (Pearson 2014)

Of course, the sand was everywhere—in tents, equipment, clothing, sleeping bags, blankets, and food. The dust kicked up by hundreds of tracked and wheeled vehicles settled over everything. Drivers soon discovered the practicality of driving through the occupied camp areas at a slow speed, especially near the kitchens and chow halls. An occasional shower (at some of the camps) offered a brief respite from the ever-present sand and dust.

The training regimen was rigorous and constant. Units usually trained for fourteen week periods, at the beginning of which scores of men succumbed to heat prostration and dehydration. To combat this, each man was required to consume salt tablets three times a day. (Bischoff 2000) By the end of the training period, however, the soldiers were hardened, and found they could survive on one gallon of water per day. During field maneuvers, this amount was reduced to one canteen per day. Training included hand-to-hand combat, forced marches, small arms training, and specialized weapons training. Live fire exercises were common; it was important that soldiers were exposed to as much of the sounds and sights of real combat as possible. During the fourteen-week training

period, each unit was required to conduct at least one 24 hour (minimum) training program with no sleep and little food or water.

Furloughs were not common, but they did occur. If granted a furlough, the lucky soldier might find his way to Indio, Los Angeles, or Las Vegas. Otherwise, any time off that was granted to the men was spent in camp, usually playing cards and (especially in the summer) staying out of the sun. Camp PX's were established, and a thirsty soldier might be lucky enough to enjoy a beer from one of these. On occasion, entertainment came to the camps in the form of the USO, and included Bob Hope, Red Skelton, and Linda Darnell. (Bishoff 2000)

Maneuvers

Since the purpose of the Desert Training Center was to train combat soldiers, maneuvers were of primary importance. At the beginning of the 14-week training schedule, small unit operations were emphasized. Toward the end of the period, the emphasis shifted to large-scale maneuvers, during which men and equipment were pushed to their limits. Observations of combat in North Africa were translated for use at the Desert Training Center. Units were assigned specific roles, including attacking and defending prepared positions, movement to contact, and a meeting engagement. (Bischoff 2000) Each side was designated by either red or blue, and umpires were present to keep things fair and to determine the victor.

Six division-strength maneuvers were held at the Desert Training Center/California-Arizona Maneuver Area. These maneuvers included units within each division, including hospital, quartermaster, and other service units. They were gargantuan in scale; "Yank" war correspondent Robert Casey wrote:

“I saw the British knock the Italian Army out of Libya, and I saw Rommel knock the British back to Sollum, but never in my life have I seen anything equal this (referring to a mock battle at the DTC). Why, brother, there were more armored vehicles in this one action than there were in the whole first Libyan campaign.” (Bischoff 2000)



Air and ground forces at the DTC.

Palen Pass, just to the northeast of Desert Center, saw the largest of these division-strength maneuvers. The defensive positions in the pass were strafed, shelled, and raked with artillery fire. Masses of troops then ascended to the pass to “take” the positions from the enemy. Many of the defensive positions in Palen Pass can still be seen today.

Eight exercises were carried out during the large-scale maneuvers:

1. Meeting engagement
2. Attack of a defensive position
3. Advance and delaying action
4. Attack on a defended bridgehead
5. Second advance and delaying action
6. Advance and delaying action on different ground
7. Same as 5 and 6 on different terrain
8. Meeting of two forces. (Bischoff 2000 from Meller 1946: Appendix K)

In February and March of 1943, the IV Corps, in one scenario, saw three divisions, each with about 15,000 men, converge on a single location. At the beginning of the exercise, one division was located near Searchlight, Nevada, a second near Desert Center, and the third near Yuma. The three divisions engaged late on day one; however, by the second day, fuel supplies were nearly spent, as the supply vehicles could not keep up with the combat vehicles. Again, realism was a key factor in these maneuvers. The inability to keep men and equipment supplied has led to more than a few defeats. The IV Corps (later redesignated the XX Corps) was at the Desert Training Center until March 29, 1943. The IV Corps was replaced by the IX Corps. The 14 week program had become more regimented by this time, and was broken down into the following schedule:

1st-4th weeks: Individual and small unit training

5th week: Battalion—combat firing

6th week: Reinforced battalion—combat firing

7th week: Combat command or team—field exercise

8th week: Combat command or team—combat firing

9th-10th weeks: Division—field exercises

11th-14th weeks: Field maneuver—attack and defense of an organized position (Bischoff 2000)

Three more corps followed the IX Corp: the XV Corps (July 1943-November 1943); the IV Corps (November 1943-January 1944—not the same as the IV Corps mentioned above); and finally the X Corps (January 1944-April 1944). The X Corps was last to use the Desert Training Center (California-Arizona Maneuver Area by that time). In all, over 1.2 million men trained at the Center.

Expansion and the California-Arizona Maneuver Area (CAMA)

As originally designated, the Desert Training Center encompassed 19,000 square miles in southeastern California. Between March and July of 1943, 11,000 square miles of land in Arizona were added to the training center. This additional land extended east from the Colorado River along the Bill Williams River toward Prescott, Arizona, then south to the Gila River, then west back to the Colorado River. A third area was added farther to the north. 1500 square miles in area, this section “was bounded by the Colorado River from Topock (Arizona), to a point 15 miles north of Katherine, then east to U.S. Highways 466 and 99, south through Kingman, then along the Santa Fe Railroad through Franconia to Topock.” (Bischoff 2000) The total area of the Desert Training Center included over 31,500 square miles!

The campaign in North Africa was winding down by the beginning of 1943. Attention was being focused on the next step: the invasion of Sicily. This resulted in a change in the operational concept of the Desert Training Center. Rather than train soldiers specifically for desert warfare, the Center would focus on large-scale training to simulate the type of maneuvering that would be seen in any theater of the war, not just in North Africa. As a result, the name of the Desert Training Center was changed to the “California-Arizona Maneuver Area” in October of 1943.

The Divisional Camps

Of the fourteen divisional camps in the Desert Training Center/California-Arizona Maneuver Area, eleven were in California. It was from these camps that most training activities were based. The camps were very large, generally running one mile wide by three miles long. As realism was an essential element of the training regimen of the

Desert Training Center, all support units required by a division going into combat were assigned to the divisional camps. What follows is a brief description of the eleven divisional camps located in California. The information for these summaries comes from The Desert Training Center/California-Arizona Maneuver Area, 1942-1944 by Matt Bischoff, published in 2000 by Statistical Research Inc. for the Bureau of Land Management.

Camp Clipper—Constructed in 1942. Occupied by the 33rd Infantry Division, followed by the 93rd Infantry Division, Camp Clipper was used as a transition camp until Camp Essex, a few miles to the west, was completed. While it was open, soldiers from Camp Clipper hiked seventeen miles to Mitchell Caverns on a road graded by Jack Mitchell. Some of the officer's wives rented cabins at Mitchell Caverns. Camp Clipper was located near the town of Essex on Route 66.

Camp Coxcomb—One of the stops on our HEMORRHOID Trip, Camp Coxcomb was constructed in the summer of 1942. This camp was more permanent than most of the others, and included tents with wood floors. The facilities here included 39 shower buildings, 165 latrines, 284 pyramidal tents, and 40,000 gallon water tank. Camp Coxcomb was located between California Highway 177 and the foot of the Coxcomb Mountains to the west. A Billy Holcomb monument stands near the site.

Camp Desert Center—Located north of present Interstate 10 between Desert Center and Shaver (now Chiaraco) Summit, Camp Desert Center is the site of Billy Holcomb Plaque honoring the 36th Evacuation Hospital. The camp also consisted of a maneuver area, observer's camp, ordnance campsite, and a quartermaster truck site.

Camp Essex—Camp Essex was established in 1942. The camp used Camp Clipper, a few miles away, as a staging area when one unit was moving in and the other was moving out. Initially, the 33rd Infantry Division occupied this camp; the 33rd was followed by the 93rd Infantry (same succession as at Camp Clipper). The 93rd was an all African-American unit—segregation was still the rule in the Army. The 93rd departed Camp Essex in January of 1944, and was followed in May by Italian POWs. The POWs left in October, and the camp was closed. Adjacent to Camp Essex was Essex Airfield. Camp Essex was located just to the northwest of the town of Essex.

Camp Granite—This camp was constructed in the spring and summer of 1943, and was located south of California Highway 62 and to the southeast of that highway's intersection with California Highway 177. In addition to shower buildings, latrines, and nearly 200 pyramidal tents, Camp Clipper was the site of nine ranges, all facing into the Granite Mountains. The ranges were used for artillery, small arms, towed target, and antiaircraft training. A Billy Holcomb monument stands near the site.



Tents at Camp Ibis

Camp Ibis—Bisected by U.S. Highway 95, Camp Ibis was constructed in the winter of 1943 and 1944. Three Divisions were encamped here in succession: the 4th Armored Division (until June 1943), the 9th Armored Division (July-November 1943) and the 11th

Division (November 1943-February 1944). Camp Ibis boasted 23 ranges as well as several combat ranges, vehicle combat ranges, and transition courses. A POW camp was located about a mile south of Camp Ibis near Searchlight Junction.



Catholic Chapel at Camp Iron Mountain

Camp Iron Mountain—Camp Iron Mountain was established in the spring of 1942, shortly after the establishment of Camp Young. The first unit to train there was the 3rd Armored Division. Camp Iron Mountain was located on the north side of California Highway 62 near the MWD's Iron Mountain Pumping Plant. This camp was one of only three that featured a large relief map, measuring 200 feet by 175. This map was so constructed as to represent the entire Desert Training Center. Camp Iron Mountain also had two outdoor stone chapels, one Protestant and one Catholic. These chapels remain at the site. A Billy Holcomb monument marks Camp Iron Mountain.

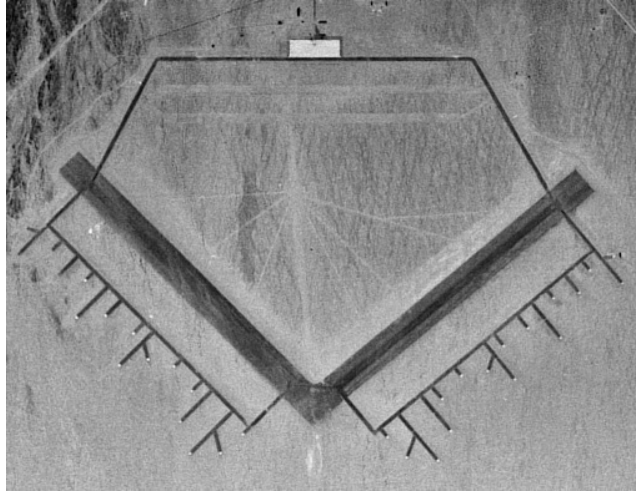
Camp Needles—Camp Needles was located between the city of Needles (on the north) and present-day Interstate 40 (on the north and east). Two hospitals, each with 250 beds, were located here, as well as 62 administration buildings, 14 showers, and 29 latrines.

Camp Pilot Knob—Opened in April of 1943, Camp Pilot Knob is the southern-most of the Desert Training Center camps. The camp was the location of the 54th Evacuation Hospital. Camp Pilot Knob was adjacent to U.S. Route 80 and the Southern Pacific

Railroad, and the Army built a short spur line from the Southern Pacific tracks to better supply the camp. A John P. Squibob Chapter Plaque marks the site.

Camp Rice—Camp Rice was a short-lived camp located near the Rice Army Airfield, and was opened in spring, 1942. Photographs from the period indicate the presence of a relief map at Camp Rice similar to that at Camp Iron Mountain, but on a smaller scale. The relief map at Camp Rice was about 50 by 40 feet. It is not known exactly where the map was located. Camp Rice was the forgotten camp. The 6th Armored Division was there first followed by the 5th Armored Division. After the 5th left, the camp was used by or incorporated into Rice Army Airfield to house the men from that unit (see below)

Rice Army Airfield--What would become Rice Army Airfield, Rice Municipal Airport, was opened sometime in the 1930's approximately five miles east of the highway junction of Rice, California. On September 29, 1942, the airport was acquired by the United States government and assigned to the Fourth Air Force (4AF). The mission of the 4AF was the organization and training of combat units prior to their deployment overseas, and was based at March Field in Riverside, California. Rice army airfield was placed under the control of Thermal Army Airfield (currently Jaqueline Cochran Regional Airport). Rice Army Airfield was an element of the Desert Training Center (later California-Arizona Maneuver Area), the mission of which was the preparation of American air and ground forces for combat in North Africa. The original commander of the DTC was then-Brigadier General George S. Patton, Jr.



Rice Army Airfield—computer enhanced.

The main runways were laid out in a “v” pattern, with one runway running north-east to southwest and the other running northwest to southeast. Each runway was 5000 feet long. In addition, several dispersal pads were positioned both north and south of the main runways, while barracks and support facilities were erected to serve about 3000 personnel. The 71st Reconnaissance Group and the 85th Bombardment Group were deployed here in support of Desert Training Center operations. By early 1943 operations had shifted to training Army Air Force units for combat. Units serving at Rice Army Airfield included the 312th Bombardment Group, which trained here from April 13, 1943, until August 15, 1943, before being deployed to the southwest Pacific in October 1943. The 312th trained with the Douglas A-24 Banshee and Curtis P-40 Warhawk, among other aircraft. In September 1943 the 339th Fighter Group was assigned to Rice Army Airfield, where it trained until March 1944. The 339th trained with A-24 Banshee and A-25 Shrike dive-bombers before being equipped with the P-39 Airacobra. Following training here, the 339th was deployed to England, where it was assigned to the 66th Fighter Wing, 8th Air Force at R.A.F. Fowlmere.



P-39 Airacobra at Rice Army Airfield. Maybe that's Mark's uncle just aft of the prop!

Frank German, uncle of Billy Holcomb's very own X-Head Abbott Mark German, served for a time at Rice Army Airfield. Brother Mark was kind enough to relate the following story of his uncle:

Frank German was born 1915 on a farm in Guelph North Dakota. He entered the military along with four of his eight brothers during WWII. The other three were not allowed to join the military because the government stated they needed to stay on the farm to support the war effort. Frank enlisted December 8, 1941 in the USAAF where the military determined his mechanical aptitude with farm equipment would translate well into a fighter mechanic. His specialty area was aircraft props and was soon assigned as a mechanic on various fighter aircraft. Frank was assigned to the 386th Service Group. Part of his training before being deployed overseas was in the California desert at Rice Army Airfield, working on several different types of aircraft at Rice as well as Thermal Army Airfield. A lot of maintenance time was spent on "the tiny P-39 Airacobra." The idea with training in the Mojave Desert was getting personnel a taste of surviving and maintaining aircraft in a hot dirty environment. In one of his letters home from Rice, Frank described how he was surprised that the camp survived a massive thunderstorm that rolled through the area. After training in the states, Frank moved on to P-51s and was sent to Iwo Jima, another dirty rocky environment south of Japan to maintain the long range fighters for B-29 escort missions over Japan. The fighting continued on Iwo Jima while the USAAF flew missions out of Iwo Jima including an ambush by Japanese soldiers on Army aircrew members walking to their planes, killing several crew members. Frank survived Iwo Jima to return to North Dakota for a short period before moving to southern California.

P-40 at Rice

In May 1943 Rice Army Airfield was assigned as a sub-base for the 15th Bombardment Wing, based at March Army Airfield. Flight operations ended in August of 1944, and the field was declared surplus the following October. With the exception of a few foundations, no structures remain today. The runways, rock alignments, and some of the dispersal pads are easily visible, although they, like the Army Air Force crews who served here, are disappearing into the past.

Camp Young—The first and most developed of the divisional camps, Camp Young was the headquarters of the Desert Training Center and, later, the California-Arizona Maneuver Area. It was here that General Patton had his residence until he departed in July of 1942. The camp was far more developed than other divisional camps, and included 98 administration buildings, over 50 warehouses, bathhouses, mess halls, kitchens, a PX (with beer!), a post office, radio station, theater, garages, officers' clubs, and shops. There were more than 3000 pyramidal tents, with wooden floors and half walls. It was at Camp Young that the USO and other shows entertained troops at the DTC. A Billy Holcomb Plaque marks the location of Camp Young.

Closure

By the spring of 1944, the world-wide demand for men and equipment led to a re-evaluation of the California-Arizona Maneuver Area. Personnel shortages were obvious in the desert, as men specializing in areas such as communications and transportation were desperately needed elsewhere. So it was that General McNair urged the closing of the facility. The War Department concurred, and on April 1, 1944, the center was declared surplus.

The two-year legacy of the center was unprecedented. The Desert Training Center/CAMA was the largest training area in the United States. The maneuvers held there were on a scale that had never before been attempted. Although its original purpose was to prepare the Army to fight on a desert battlefield, the center's sheer size allowed for training exercises that would be useful on battlefields in Europe, Asia, and even the Aleutian Islands. The center's size also allowed for a new type of training: theatre of operations, in which every unit used in a theatre of war was used in the training maneuvers to prepare them for real combat. The skills and techniques learned by the 1.2 million troops who trained at the Desert Training Center/California-Arizona Maneuver Area were vital in bringing victory to United States forces in North Africa, Europe, and Asia.

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RICE ARMY AIRFIELD

WHAT WOULD BECOME RICE ARMY AIRFIELD, RICE MUNICIPAL AIRPORT WAS OPENED SOMETIME IN THE 1930'S NEAR THIS SPOT APPROXIMATELY FIVE MILES EAST OF THE HIGHWAY JUNCTION OF RICE, CALIFORNIA. ON SEPTEMBER 29, 1942, THE AIRPORT WAS ACQUIRED BY THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT AND ASSIGNED TO THE FOURTH AIR FORCE (4AF). THE MISSION OF THE 4AF WAS THE ORGANIZATION AND TRAINING OF COMBAT UNITS PRIOR TO THEIR DEPLOYMENT OVERSEAS, AND WAS BASED AT MARCH FIELD IN RIVERSIDE, CA. RICE ARMY AIRFIELD WAS PLACED UNDER THE CONTROL OF THERMAL ARMY AIRFIELD (CURRENTLY JAGUELINE COCHRAN REGIONAL AIRPORT). RICE ARMY AIRFIELD WAS AN ELEMENT OF THE DESERT TRAINING CENTER (LATER CALIFORNIA-ARIZONA MANUEVER AREA—SEE ADJOINING PLAQUE). THE MISSION OF WHICH WAS THE PREPARATION OF AMERICAN AIR AND GROUND FORCES FOR COMBAT IN NORTH AFRICA. THE ORIGINAL COMMANDER OF THE DTC WAS THEN-BRIGADIER GENERAL GEORGE S. PATTON, JR.

THE MAIN RUNWAYS WERE LAID OUT IN A "V" PATTERN, WITH ONE RUNWAY RUNNING NORTHEAST TO SOUTHWEST AND THE OTHER RUNNING NORTHWEST TO SOUTHEAST. EACH RUNWAY WAS 6000 FEET LONG. IN ADDITION, SEVERAL DISPERSAL PADS WERE POSITIONED BOTH NORTH AND SOUTH OF THE MAIN RUNWAYS. WHILE BARRACKS AND SUPPORT FACILITIES WERE ERRECTED TO SERVE ABOUT 3000 PERSONNEL, THE 71ST RECONNAISSANCE GROUP AND THE 85TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP WERE DEPLOYED HERE IN SUPPORT OF DESERT TRAINING CENTER OPERATIONS. BY EARLY 1943 OPERATIONS HAD SHIFTED TO TRAINING ARMY AIR FORCE UNITS FOR COMBAT. UNITS SERVING AT RICE ARMY AIRFIELD INCLUDED THE 312TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP, WHICH TRAINED HERE FROM APRIL 15, 1943, UNTIL AUGUST 15, 1943, BEFORE BEING DEPLOYED TO THE SOUTHWEST PACIFIC IN OCTOBER 1943. THE 312TH TRAINED WITH THE DOUGLAS A-24 BANSHEE AND CURTIS P-40 WARHAWK, AMONG OTHER AIRCRAFT. IN SEPTEMBER 1943, THE 325TH FIGHTER GROUP WAS ASSIGNED TO RICE ARMY AIRFIELD, WHERE IT TRAINED UNTIL MARCH 1944. THE 325TH TRAINED WITH A-24 BANSHEE AND A-23 SHRIKE DIVE BOMBERS, BEFORE BEING EQUIPPED WITH THE P-39 AIRACOBRA. FOLLOWING TRAINING HERE, THE 325TH WAS DEPLOYED TO ENGLAND, WHERE IT WAS ASSIGNED TO THE 48TH FIGHTER WING, 8TH AIR FORCE AT RAF FOWLMERE. IN MAY 1943 RICE ARMY AIRFIELD WAS ASSIGNED AS A SUB-BASE FOR THE 15TH BOMBARDMENT WING, BASED AT MARCH ARMY AIRFIELD. FLIGHT OPERATIONS ENDED IN AUGUST OF 1944, AND THE FIELD WAS DECLARED SURPLUS THE FOLLOWING OCTOBER. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A FEW FOUNDATIONS, NO STRUCTURES REMAIN TODAY. THE RUNWAYS, ROCK ALIGNMENTS, AND SOME OF THE DISPERSAL PADS ARE EASILY VISIBLE, ALTHOUGH THEY LIKE THE ARMY AIR FORCE CREWS WHO SERVED HERE, ARE DISAPPEARING INTO THE PAST. IT IS TO THOSE VETERANS THAT THIS MONUMENT IS DEDICATED.

PLAQUE DEDICATED MAY 5, 2024 (CLAMP YEAR 6029) BY THE BILLY HOLCOMB, QUEHO POSSE, LOST DUTCHMAN CHAPTERS OF THE ANCEINT AND HONORABLE ORDER OF E CLAMPUS VITUS. SATISFACTORY!



Billy
Holcomb
ECV1069



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(Put Billy Holcomb, Queho Posse and Lost Dutchman Logos at the bottom)