

CAMP COXCOMB (NORTHERNMOST UNIT OF THE PROPOSED CHUCKWALLA NATIONAL MONUMENT)

The northernmost unit of the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument consists of was Camp Coxcomb in 1942-1944. Camp Coxcomb was one of 14 divisional camps in General George Patton's World War II (WWII) Desert Training Center (DTC). At the height of the DTC, there were 11 camps in California and three in Arizona). Figure 1 depicts some of those camps, including Camp Coxcomb, which is located near the center of the map.

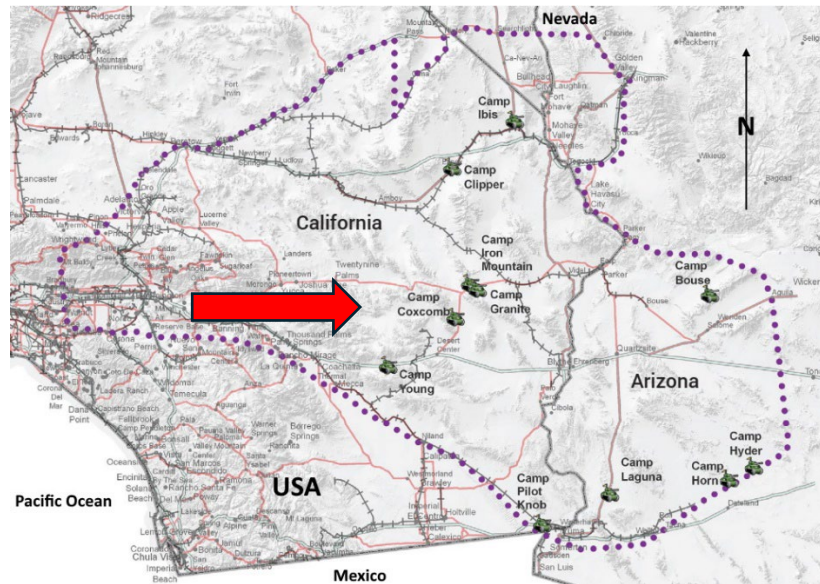


Figure 1 (<https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/documents/files/media-center-public-room-california-desert-training-center-brochure.pdf>)

Divisional camps are the most recognizable, longest lasting remnants of the DTC (Bischoff, 2016). Divisional camps housed a division of soldiers (i.e., 15,000 or more soldiers). While the soldiers did much of their training on field exercises, the divisional camps provided in-camp training opportunities such as firing ranges and infiltration courses (otherwise known as “battle-inoculation courses”). Camp Coxcomb had seven ranges (machine gun, rifle, and pistol) and an infiltration course that were all built on the north side of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Water District (MWD) aqueduct, at the foot of the Coxcomb Mountains (i.e., immediately adjacent to what was then Joshua Tree National Monument) (Bischoff, 2016).

Camp Coxcomb was constructed in the spring or summer of 1942, between California Highway 177 and the MWD aqueduct (Bischoff, 2016). 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 (Bischoff, 2016). The 6th and 7th Armored Divisions and the 85th and 95th Infantry Divisions were among the units stationed at the camp (Bischoff, 2016). Entertainers who went there to perform for the troops include Red Skelton, Rosalind Russell, Pat O’Brien and others (Bischoff, 2016).

A 1940’s-era hand drawn image of Camp Coxcomb’s layout is below (Figure 2).

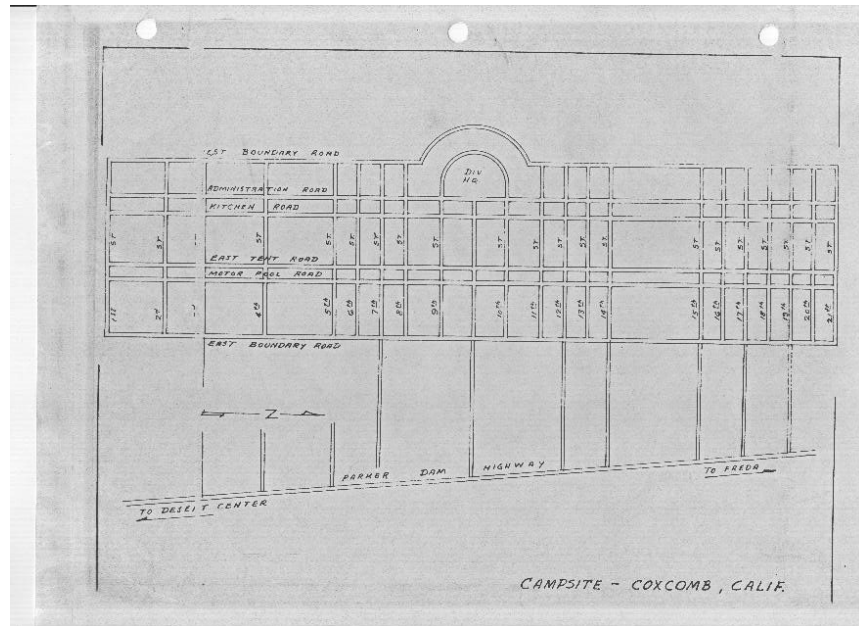


Figure 2 (<https://www.7tharmdiv.org/coxcomb.htm>)

Despite the fact that it was the U.S. Army's orders to completely dismantle and remove all of the components of the divisional camps at the closure of the Desert Training Center (DTC), a number of interesting artifacts remain on the ground at Camp Coxcomb today.

The most impressive remaining artifact is an altar that was built for religious services at the Camp (Figure 3). Linda Castro, CalWild Assistant Policy Director, has visited all of the DTC divisional camps in California on a number of occasions, with the exception of Camp Pilot Knob, and has only seen a rock altar such as the one at Camp Coxcomb at only one other divisional camp.



Figure 3 (taken by CalWild staff 10/14/21)

DTC leadership often kept soldiers busy by having them build rock alignments or pathways around residential, leadership, and common use areas (Bischoff, 2016). Numerous rock alignments can still be found at Camp Coxcomb today (Figures 4 and 5 below).



Figures 4 and 5 (taken by CalWild staff 12/20/23)

In addition, Camp Coxcomb appears to be unique in having not only rock-lined pathways and other areas, but also some pathways that have smaller, crushed gray rocks along the pathway which make the pathway even more evident (Figures 6 and 7). Linda Castro has only seen this type of smaller, crushed rocks along a rock pathway at Camp Coxcomb (and at no other California DTC divisional camp).



Figures 6 and 7 - rock lined pathways with crushed gray rocks (taken by CalWild staff 10/14/21)

Another example of existing artifacts is the camp's flag tower circle. Today, one can still see rock-lined pathways that all lead to what was considered the most important part of the Camp (depicted in Figure 7).



Figure 7 taken at flag tower circle by CalWild staff 12/20/23

Camp Coxcomb also holds the remains of what military personnel call a sand table (i.e., a relief map). Figure 8 depicts 1940s-era photos of a similar sand table that was built at another DTC divisional camp (Bischoff, 2016). A sand table was designed to be a scale representation of the entire training facility. These features contained mounds of earth formed to represent mountain ranges, labeled with small wooden signs. (Bischoff, 2016). These were used to strategize troop and equipment movement through the training facility.

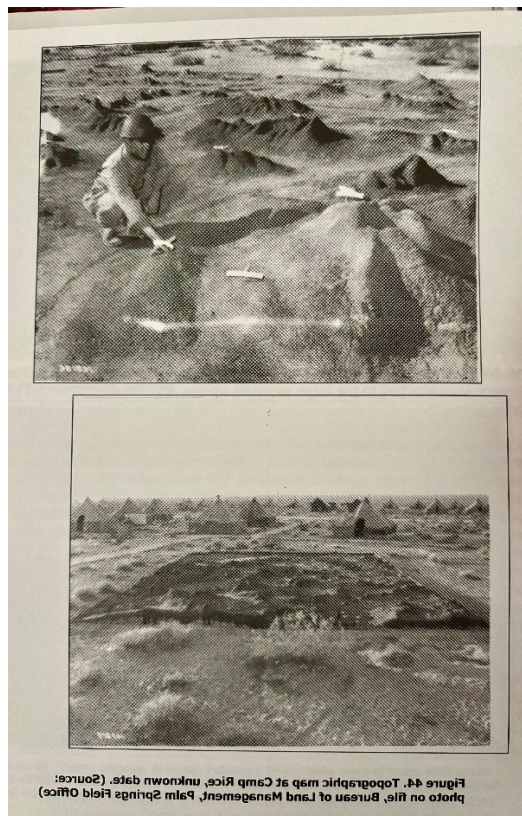


Figure 44. Topographic map of Camp Rice, unknown date. (Source: Photo on file, Bureau of Land Management, Palm Springs Field Office)

Figure 8 (Bischoff, 2016)

Camp Coxcomb's sand table currently lies within a fenced-in area, but the fencing consists of a couple of strands of barbed wire and wooden posts, which would not keep out anyone desirous of using motorized vehicles or other implements to cause destruction (intentionally or not) of this important WWII artifact (Figure 9). It would probably be difficult for one without knowledge of the history of the area to see and understand the significance of the dirt mounds behind this fencing.



Figure 9 (taken by CalWild staff, 10/6/21)

Another interesting remaining artifact is the remnant of a concrete slab (Figure 10) on which a Captain Frank Lovejoy carved the following prior to the cement drying: **Captain Frank Lovejoy, C Company of the 33rd Armored Engineer Battalion of the 7th Armored Division, 1943**. The 7th Armored Division, also known as the “Lucky Seventh,” was an armored division of the U.S. Army that saw service on the Western Front from August 1944 through May 1945 during WWII.

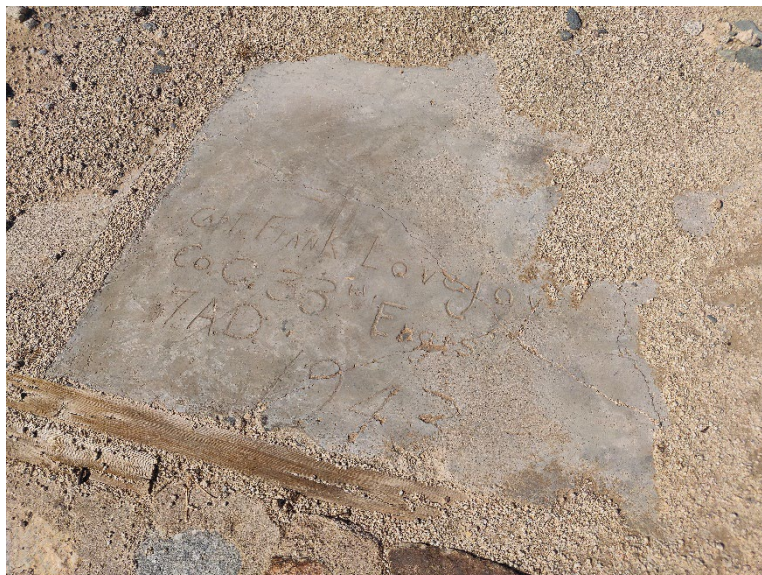


Figure 10 (taken by CalWild staff 10/14/21)

Other interesting artifacts that remain on the ground include water developments/reservoirs (Figures 11 and 12) and the MWD aqueduct (Figure 13). The aqueduct is not actually part of this

unit; it is merely adjacent to it. However, the aqueduct played an important role in the placement as well as the viability of Camp Coxcomb during the existence of the DTC. Moreover, the aqueduct exists in essentially the same condition today as it was during the operation of the DTC.



Figures 11 and 12 – water development with “Company D” written into the concrete on the side (taken by Craig Melling, VetVoice Foundation, 2/27/24)



Figure 13 taken by CalWild staff 12/20/23

General Patton negotiated for use of the Southern Pacific Railroad and utilities, including water for at least five of the California divisional camps from the MWD aqueduct. General Patton personally

met with representatives from these companies and worked out agreements whereby the Army was supplied with transportation, electricity, and water (Bischoff, 2016; Meller, 1946).

Last, but not least, the camp holds an innumerable number of small artifacts, such as those depicted in Figure 14 (old batteries, wiring, and cans) and Figure 15 (old bottles).



Figures 14 and 15 (taken by CalWild staff 10/6/21)

While Camp Coxcomb would form a separate unit of the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument, please note that in 2016, Camp Granite (another DTC camp) was also discontinued (being divided by California State Highway 62), from what was then the proposed Mojave Trails National Monument. Recognizing the immense historical values of the DTC camp system, President Obama nevertheless added Camp Granite to Mojave Trails. We hope that President Biden will likewise decide to protect Camp Coxcomb as a separate unit of the proposed Chuckwalla National Monument.

Sources:

Bischoff, M. C. (2016). Preparing for Combat Overseas: Patton's Desert Training Center.

Meller, S. L. (1946). The Army Ground Forces: The Desert Training Center and C-AMA. Study No. 15. Historical Section, U.S. Army Ground Forces.