

THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PALM DESERT

PALM VILLAGE MOTOR POOL 1942-1945

HWY 111 and Portola Avenue, Palm Desert, CA



Photos unless noted: Palm Desert Historical Society Archives

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.

"ARCHITECT":
GEN GEORGE S. PATTON

"THE OWNER":
US ARMY & THE
BUREAU OF LAND
MANAGEMENT



Official Modernism Week Event



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 desert.

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 Desert Training Center, encompassing 18,000 square miles of rugged, desolate and largely uninhabited lands within the Mojave and Colorado Deserts.

Patton established the headquarters for his base camp near Shavers Summit (now Chiriaco Summit), 25 miles east of Indio. Over 1,000,000 soldiers trained in the desert from 1942 to 1944. Twelve divisional camps were established, supported by a vast network of field hospitals, ammunition and supply depots, as well as transportation links – railroads to facilitate the movement of troops and supplies, and 5 airstrips to train pilots.

To support the Desert Training Center, the Army commandeered land near the Indio Highway (Highway 111) and Portola in Palm Desert and created the Palm Village Motor Pool. Camouflaged tanks, field artillery, a motor pool, gunnery ranges and areas for target were in Palm Village.

The “service bays” and other buildings at the Palm Village camp were constructed of post and beams, with palm fronds used for roofs and walls.



The purpose of the Motor Pool was to train officers and enlisted men in the operation, maintenance, and repair of all types of military vehicles in the harsh desert environment. Patton believed that combat training should be as realistic as possible and that support services should not be unrealistically “convenient” for the troops. That might explain why the Palm Village Motor Pool was located so far from the actual combat training.

By mid 1943 with the Allied victory in North Africa assured, the Desert Training Center was no longer needed and started winding down. The Palm Village Motor Pool became responsible for patching up the equipment from the Desert Training Center and shipping it off to where it was needed. The 897th Ordinance Heavy Automotive Maintenance Company, which departed the camp in July, 1943 was redeployed as the first maintenance unit to go ashore at Normandy, landing on Omaha Beach nine days after the D-Day invasion on June 6, 1944.

After the war, the four Henderson brothers – Randall, Clifford, Phil and Carl, along with Cliff’s brother-in-law Tommy Tomson, Edgar Bergen, Leonard Firestone and Harold Lloyd invested in a dream to turn what had been called “The Sand Hole” - the Palm Village Motor Pool, into a desert oasis.

Source: Bureau of Land Management, Desert Training Center brochure and the Desert Sun, June 29, 2017



General George S. Patton

Born November 11, 1885, in San Gabriel, California, Patton attended the Virginia Military Institute and then the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, graduating on June 11, 1909.

Patton had his first real taste of battle in 1915, when leading cavalry patrols against Pancho Villa at Fort Bliss along the Mexican border. In 1916, he was selected to aide John J. Pershing, commander of the American Expeditionary Forces in Mexico.

In 1917, during WWI, Patton was the first officer assigned to the new American Expeditionary Force tank corps where he established himself as one of the leading experts in tank warfare. He organized the American tank school in Bourg, France, and trained American tankers to pilot the French Renault tanks. He was wounded in the battle of Meuse-Argonne and later earned the Distinguished Service Medal.

It was during WWII that Patton hit the high point of his military career. In 1943, he used daring assault and defense tactics to lead the 7th U.S. army to victory at the invasion of Sicily. On D-Day in 1944, when the allies invaded Normandy, President Roosevelt granted Patton command of the 3rd U.S. Army. Under Patton's leadership, the 3rd Army, along with Allied forces, swept across France, and eventually Germany, capturing 10,000 square miles of enemy territory along the course of the 10-day march, liberating Germany from the Nazis.

In December 1945, General Patton died following a car accident near Mannheim, Germany. (Source: biography.com)

Historical Society of Palm Desert

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