LOS ANGELES CORRAL
WESTERNERS
Headin' Home
J. GOODMAN

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Most lifeguards were surfers and helped to popularize the sport, circa 1936. Courtesy of the LA County Lifeguard Association.

Protecting Southern California's Treasure

by Arthur C. Verge

I often tell people that if it weren't for my career as an ocean lifeguard, I would have never become an historian. The income I earned from "working at the beach" allowed me to attend graduate school. Upon hearing this some ask me, "But what did you do during the winter months?" I tell them, "I worked." I know its hard to believe but there are ocean lifeguards at work 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Even those that have lived here for decades fail to realize that the beaches of southern California remain by far the region's number one tourist attraction. With over fifty million visitors to the shoreline a year, lifeguards find themselves quite

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EDITOR'S CORNER

Arthur Verge's remarkable article, "Protecting Southern California's Treasure," provides us with a history and a description of the Los Angeles County Service that we think very few of us knew. We are sure that virtually all of us have been to the beach one time or another and some of us many times. We have been impressed by the professionalism and skill of lifeguards and some of us may even owe or lives or know someone who owes their lives to a lifeguard. It was fascinating to read how the lifeguard service evolved from a group of volunteers in the early part of the twentieth century to what it is today, a division of the Los Angeles County Fire Department. The author's description of the Depression years where even more people headed for the beach than before was particularly interesting in that we would have thought just the opposite. Thank you for giving us a history of a profession that many people take for granted.

However we do have a question: "With all those beautiful people in front of you daily, parading back and forth, how do you keep from being distracted?"

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busy. The agency I work for, the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Service (a division of the Los Angeles County Fire Department), performs on average over 10,000 ocean rescues a year. We are also responsible for rescuing boaters and boats in distress, providing emergency medical assistance to beachgoers, finding and returning lost children, working with law enforcement agencies to provide a safe beach environment, and maintaining a constant monitoring of the ocean for the public's protection and for environmental concerns. We are also assigned to respond to downed aircraft in the ocean, boat and pier fires, and when necessary, perform ocean and lake recovery operations of deceased victims

I am just one of 700 who are responsible for providing ocean lifesaving protection for over 72 miles of southern California coastline. Los Angeles County Lifeguards also provide rescue services and around the clock paramedic services to the residents of Catalina Island.

The history of ocean lifeguarding along the shoreline of today's Los Angeles County beaches is a colorful one. Its earliest roots can be traced to the June 1907 arrival of 22-year-old Hawaiian George Freeth. Freeth, already a surfing legend in the islands, would be the first to demonstrate and popularize the sport here. As importantly he would work for both Abbot Kinney and Henry Huntington in establishing volunteer ocean life-saving corps in both Venice and Redondo Beach. In the course of his work as a swim instructor and ocean lifeguard captain, Freeth would win the Congressional Gold Medal for lifesaving for his actions on December 16, 1908. On that day Freeth and his men would rescue eleven Japanese fishermen whose boats were being perilously swept towards the Venice breakwater during a surprise winter gale. The two and half-hour long rescue, involving multiple entries into the frigid ocean by the young Hawaiian, would earn him and the crew who aided him a cherished ceremonial march down Colorado Boulevard in the 1909 Rose Parade.

Santa Monica Volunteer Lifeguards 1912. Courtesy of the LA County Lifeguard Association.

It wasn't until the boom decade of the 1920's, however, that local municipalities, including Los Angeles County, began moving away from volunteer lifeguards. Matching the region's around the clock growth and year round temperate weather, was the need for guard's who could serve at a moment's notice. The first to do so was the City of Venice who hired George Wolf as a dual police officer and ocean lifeguard. When the City of Venice was consolidated into the City of Los Angeles, in November of 1925, Wolf was retained serving both as an L.A.P.D. officer and a Los Angeles Municipal Lifeguard. Using his personal automobile or a bicycle with a rescue can attached to it he was in charge of patrolling the shoreline from the border of Ocean Park to El Segundo.

Although Los Angeles City was leading the way in putting year round ocean lifeguards out on the increasingly crowded beaches, Los Angeles County was not far behind. Wolf's friend, Ed Carroll, who worked with Wolf at the Venice and Ocean Park Plunges, was hired in 1927 to put lifeguards out on County beaches. One of the first to serve was Morley Gillan, who was asked by Carroll if he would prefer to lifeguard on the beach versus working indoors at the Ocean Park Plunge. Although he was

only fifteen years old at the time, Gillan jumped at the chance to be a beach lifeguard. In an age where it was not uncommon for fifteen year olds to drive, Gillan recalled showing up in his parent's car at his very first assignment at the Manhattan Beach Pier. There he was met by Carroll who handed him a large, three-foot long, metal rescue can. Carroll then told him that if someone in the ocean looked in need of assistance that he was to swim out and rescue them.

During the 1920's the population of southern California tripled, causing Los Angeles to surpass San Francisco as California's most populated city. With a booming economy, and the affordability of Henry Ford's Model T automobile, many of Los Angeles County's two million plus residents took to the road with the beach as their number one recreational destination. Gillan recalled that during the 1920s, well into the mid 1930s, the attitude amongst Angelenos was that "the beach was the place to be." It was also for many lifeguards was a way of life. According to Gillan, "You lived there, you were employed there, and you found your entertainment at the dance halls after work there. We all became proficient in the ways of the ocean, whether it was swimming, rowing, sailing or fishing."

The "Roaring Twenties" proved to be an exciting time to be an ocean lifeguard in Los Angeles. The film industry, although still in its infancy, hired off-duty lifeguards to perform as stunt men in the many movies being shot on the beach and in the ocean. Film stars as such as Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton, and Charlie Chaplin all enjoyed coming down and visiting with the lifeguards they had met on various movie sets. Chaplin, for example, happily dressed up as a referee and posed several times as lifeguards wrestled against each other on a makeshift ring that was located at the Brooks Avenue Lifeguard Station in Venice. Other film stars, who bought homes along the coastline, befriended the lifeguards, who in turn watched over their homes while they were away on location.

Lifeguards, however, also found themselves on the front lines in the unwinnable war against alcohol that consumed the nation between 1919 and 1933. The prohibition era saw the rise of organized gang syndicates who would often use local beaches at night to smuggle liquor ashore. In one case, lifeguards responding to what they thought was a boat in distress, instead found themselves arriving on scene only to be surrounded by gangsters. Told to move on, the guards could see that the gangsters were uneasily waiting for a shipment of liquor that was in the process of being ferried ashore by a fast-moving speedboat. Other lifeguards found themselves being asked at their stations if they would like to make a little extra cash in their off-duty hours. The questioner was usually a well-attired businessman who would explain that all the guard would have to do was to come down to the beach at night to allow him and his associates' unfettered access to the shoreline for a few hours. When one veteran lifeguard was asked years later if he was tempted by such offers, he responded, "No way. I knew if the gangsters didn't kill me, my mom would!"

Many lifeguards felt the onset of the Great Depression would call for the end for their services. Instead, however, lifeguard services were forced to expand as record numbers of unemployed workers took to the beaches. One lifeguard reflected, "When the economy is good, there is money is for lifeguards. When the economy is bad, there is a greater need for lifeguards because everyone goes to the beach to help take their minds off of things."

The 1930s proved to be good years for lifeguards. Under FDR's Works Progress Administration program, carpenters and painters were employed to construct lifeguard towers. The New Deal program also built lifeguard rescue boats and several new main stations. An openly disliked part of the W.P.A., however, was the federal agency's insistence that in return for its aid, that each lifeguard service would have to employ WPA workers as lifeguards on area beaches. Although well intentioned on paper, the

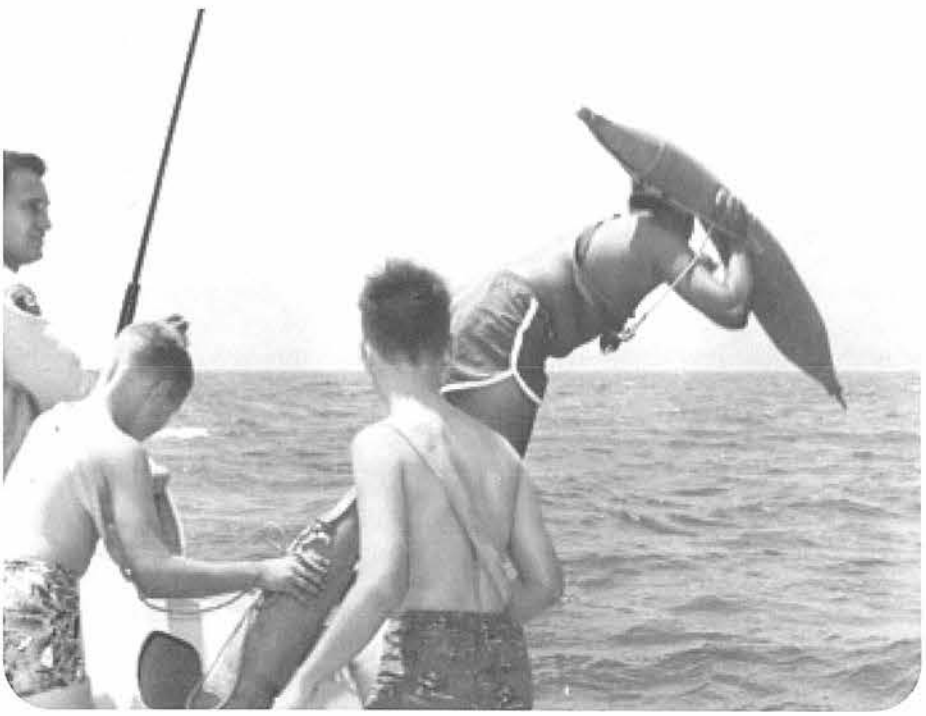
New Wiley Jeep from WW II surplus. Lifeguard in photo was a VDT(Navy Seal) driver in WWII. He survived D-Day and Pacific landings.Courtesy of the LA County Lifeguard Association.

plan in all practicality was a complete failure. Several lifeguards interviewed regarding that program recalled that the W.P.A. guards had limited swimming skills at best. County Lifeguard Nate Shargo recalled, "It was make do work. Fortunately, in the interest of self-preservation, they knew not to go out. We reminded them that we didn't need two victims instead of one."

Despite the "boom and bust," economy of the late 1920's into the 1930's, lifeguards from this era recall an age of innocence, an innocence that was soon lost when many of them went off to serve in the Second World War. Among the fond memories these lifeguards shared together was of helping one another out during the financially stressful Depression era. The lifeguard services had a tendency to "look the other way" when financially strapped lifeguards took to sneaking into closed lifeguard buildings during the winter months. What the winter squatters didn't give up was surfing, fishing and lobster diving. Many guards from that era fondly remember eating well and enjoying life at the beach. When the weather perked up so did the desperately needed work. Particularly treasured was being asked to stay on to work the beach at night, when hot Santa Ana winds would descend from the neighboring southern California desert floor. These winds would send thousands of city dwellers to the beach to escape the heat – this in the days before modern air conditioning. As the sun would set, thousands of tents would suddenly seem to spring up causing lifeguards to patrol the shoreline with flashlights in hand.

With the onset of the Second World War many lifeguards volunteered to serve in military. Given their aquatic skills, the armed services quickly embraced their service, with several lifeguards being asked to serve as "Navy Combat Swimmers." As members of "Underwater Demolition Teams," these ocean skilled lifeguards helped to pioneer the use of flexible swim fins, facemasks, and closed-circuit diving equipment in daring

Brand new Santa Monica lifeguard boat 1938. Courtesy of the LA County Lifeguard Association.



Junior lifeguard training off the Santa Monica Lifeguard rescue boat-that's actually my father-the instructor. Courtesy of the LA County Lifeguard Association.

offshore operations.

Given the tremendous need for service personnel during the Second World War, the lifeguard service was quickly depleted of its rank and file (by the summer of 1942, over one-half of the County Lifeguard Service was in the military). The large loss of lifeguard personnel happened just as the region's population swelled with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of war workers. Lifeguards too old for military service then found themselves training area youngsters to help maintain a semblance of a lifeguard force.

The end of the Second World War brought forth a golden age of lifeguarding. Returning lifeguards from military service brought back with them a strong organizational spirit that helped to further professionalize the lifeguard services they worked for. Developments in wartime technology and lessons learned on the battlefield also helped to reshape the world of ocean lifesaving. For example, new uses for fiberglass enabled the manufacturing of swifter and more maneuverable lifeguard rescue boats, and lighter and faster rescue paddleboards. Similarly, wartime advances in the rubber industry encouraged lifeguards to create equipment beneficial to their work in the ocean. Santa Monica lifeguard Pete Peterson used neoprene to produce the "Peterson Rescue Tube," still in use by lifeguards today. Unlike the heavy and dangerous metal rescue can, the "Peterson Rescue Tube" allowed the rescuing lifeguard to safely wrap and secure their rescue victims. Using declassified U.S. Navy reports on the use of neoprene-like materials, Los Angeles County Lifeguard Bev Morgan began making wetsuits for his fellow lifeguards, two of whom were twin brothers, Bill and Bob Meistrell. The three then collaborated together opening the popular Dive `N Surf store. The Meistrell's then went on to start the internationally renowned "Body Glove" corporation. Adding to the "salt water revolution" were returning lifeguard frogmen who helped to popularize the sport of scuba diving. Under the direction of the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Service, these lifeguards were instrumental in putting together the nation's first Scuba Diving Training manual as well as designing the country's first Scuba safety program. It was from this program that the first recognized scuba diving certifications were given.

Lifeguards veterans were also quick to encourage the incorporation of new techniques in emergency medical treatment. These updated emergency procedures came with new first aid materials and equipment that enabled lifeguards to better save lives. Also of tremendous help in saving lives of beachgoers was the introduction of the Willy four-wheel drive jeep. Introduced onto Los Angeles beaches at the war's end, the Willy's allowed lifeguards to more effectively cover large stretches of beach, and to quickly carry out emergency first aid and rescue operations. Prior to the introduction of these four-wheel jeeps, the only way to get an emergency vehicle down on the beach was to laboriously lay down wooden planks on the sand, which the vehicle then had to traverse.

Many guards from the post-war years to the early 1960's era recall a "Camelot by the Sea," era. Once tight civic budgets were loosened, allowing for better pay and more plentiful work opportunities for lifeguards throughout the beaches of Southern California. Although Los Angeles lifeguards worked for competing services, many shared friendships from the sports of swimming, water polo, and surfing. To help maintain those friendships, surf trips and lifeguard parties were frequently put together. So popular were these unofficial lifeguard events that a wide range of outside guests joined in the fun including Marilyn Monroe, Johnny Weissmuller, June Lockhardt, Buster Crabbe, Jackie Coogan and Peter Lawford. One who particularly enjoyed going to lifeguard luaus and on fishing excursions with the guards was California Governor Earl Warren. Warren, who later became the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, was so closely tied to the lifeguard services that when it was suggested that popular Santa Monica

Lifeguard Chief "Cap" Watkins retire because of his age Governor Warren personally intervened, letting the personnel officer know that he "should rethink his position – or else."

Entering the 1960's, lifeguards throughout the southern California beach areas found themselves increasingly busy as more and more Angelenos moved into suburbs along the coastline. The tremendous increase in automobile use made for large increases in year-round beach attendance. The sport of surfing took a tremendous leap in popularity beginning in 1962 with the release of several hit singles by the South Bay based band "The Beach Boys." So popular was the music of the group that it fostered the rise of an entire culture dedicated to the surfer look and life-style. Hollywood was quick to pick up on what was then incorrectly considered a "craze," producing numerous movies with the sport of surfing as the enticing backdrop. It was the Vietnam War, however, that caused a dramatic shift between the surfing community and the three lifeguard services. Whereas in the middle 1960's lifeguards like Mike Doyle and Dr. Ricky Grigg were winning world and national titles in the sport, by the late 1960's, in response to the war, an anti-authoritarian attitude tended to prevail amongst many young surfers. Lifeguards once respected and admired in the surfing community often found themselves challenged by issues dealing with illegal drug use, and failure to comply with beach regulations – such as surfers relegated to stay in the surfing-only zones on crowded days.

The schism between the surfing community and lifeguards working on the beach was not all negative. Public support for lifeguards increased during this turbulent period. Part can be traced to the public support of the various junior lifeguard programs and the positive benefits it had on beach-going youth. It was also during this time, with popularity of television, that the public learned of the fast and effective response lifeguards had to various large-scale incidents, including the crashes of two airliners

Lifeguards during a mock first aid drill. Courtesy of the LA County Lifeguard Association.

in the ocean off LAX in January, 1969. The professionalism displayed by lifeguards in protecting the beaches and handling major emergencies led to increased respect for those in the ocean lifesaving profession. In turn, it was during the late 1960's that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved pay and benefit packages that were on parity to those offered in the Sheriff's and Fire Departments.

A positive outcome of the counter-culture movement was its focus on preserving and defending the environment. This proved to be of great importance in helping not only to protect the ocean, but also serving as a catalyst to make the coastline more accessible to the public. It was during the early 1970's that the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Service, under the Department of Beaches, was able to encourage the County and State of California to purchase tracts of private beach properties that had previously been off-limits to the public use. In addition to opening up public access to the coastline, construction was begun in South Bay on the very popular beach bicycle path.

The 1970's proved to be one of the most critical decades in the history of Los Angeles ocean lifeguards. During the decade both the Santa Monica and Los Angeles City Lifeguard Services were merged into the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Service. The unification proved particularly beneficial to the tax paying public by preventing the duplica-

tion of much needed resources and services. When it was completed, the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Service became, and remains, the largest professional lifeguard service in the world.

On February 17, 1980, Nancy Riggs witnessed the loss of her fiancé, Earl Higgins, as he heroically went to the aid of a young boy who was being swept down a rain swollen flood control channel. Sadly, as Higgins offered his hand out to the boy, the grassy riverbank that he was standing on gave way. Higgins then fell into the raging river himself. As Higgins rushed downstream, emergency responders were unable to do anything to save him because none of the responding agencies had the training or equipment to carry out his rescue. Stunned at what had transpired, Rigg's began a one-woman campaign to prevent such an incident from happening again. She wrote letters and had meetings with various city and county politicians but it all was to no avail. As she later told the Los Angeles Times (October 17, 1997) no one took her seriously – "except for the Los Angeles County Lifeguards." Several lifeguards worked closely with Rigg's in what was then an unsuccessful effort to get area politicians to fund river and flood rescue programs. Twelve years after her fiance's passing, a young teenager was swept down another rain-swollen flood channel. However, this time the victim's plight was caught on live television. Efforts to save the life of fifteen-year-old Adam Bischoff proved futile as emergency responders were without the proper equipment or training to handle the situation. The teenager's death sparked a large public outcry. Based on the groundwork laid down by Ms. Riggs, area politicians quickly gave their blessings and then funded the creation of today's well-known swift water teams.

1992 proved to be a very important year in Los Angeles County Lifeguard history. The creation of the swift water team program enabled lifeguards to work with a multitude of various emergency agencies. Mutual respect between firefighters and lifeguards deepened as both trained together in water rescue operations. Lifeguards and law enforcement officials also worked in unison to protect area beaches and beachgoers in the wake of that year's Los Angeles Riots. Adding to the identity of the County Lifeguards and the work they did, was the most watched television series in history, "Baywatch." Given that the show's fictional lifeguards were based on actual County Lifeguards, and that "Baywatch" was filmed on L.A. County beaches using identical towers, uniforms and equipment, beachgoers often became confused between fiction and reality. During the height of the show's popularity, almost every time a lifeguard appeared on scene to perform a rescue or a medical assist, people would remark, "Oh good – Baywatch is here." Fortunately, the show fostered positive feelings towards lifeguards, which later proved of great importance in generating public support for maintaining adequate funding for lifeguard operations.

Support for the lifeguards had grown so strong that it was recommended in 1995 that the lifeguard service be incorporated into the Los Angeles County Fire Department. Lifeguards today can now count on Fire Department helicopters and bulldozers to aid in all emergency operations. In addition the merger provided new communications systems to enable better response times between fire and police agencies and the lifeguard service. Lifeguards themselves were given updated training and now participate in a wide range of Fire Department activities and exercises.

Entering the 21st century the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Service remains the largest and highest paid ocean lifesaving service in the world. In light of the events of 9\11, lifeguards have been given additional responsibilities that included working closely with the United States Coast Guard to protect the southern California coastline. In fact, one Los Angeles County Lifeguard boat is presently stationed at a United States Coast Guard facility making the lifeguard service the only life-saving agency to have

A lifeguard "hitting the water." We average 10,000 rescues a year. Courtesy of the LA County Lifeguard Association.

its equipment stationed on a United States Coast Guard military base. In turn the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Service has been appointed the lead agency in responding to down aircraft within three miles off Los Angeles International Airport. With nine Baywatch Rescue boats and nine lifeguards on duty at all times, the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Service remains a year round, 24 hour a day operation that is committed to protecting both the environment and the citizens who enjoy southern California's treasured coastline.

Although ocean lifeguarding has certainly evolved from the days of George Freeth, the primary mission of a lifeguard has remained the same - to detect and rescue those in distress. As with their brethren firefighters and police officers, lifeguards are constantly put in difficult and dangerous situations. Much like those called on to fight a raging fire, or rush to a scene where gunshots have been fired, lifeguards, clad only in a red bathing suit and a rescue can at their side, enter an often dangerous and unforgiving ocean. It is because of public support and the knowledge of the past – that people frequently drown without lifeguards – that the Los Angeles County Lifeguard Service remains generously funded. Perhaps next time when you go to the beach you'll look at the lifeguard a little differently knowing a bit of history as to why and how they are there in the sand.

Arthur C.Verge has been a recurrent Los Angeles County lifeguard since 1974. He received his M.A., M.P.A. and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Southern California. He is a Professor of History at El Camino College and was the recipient of the college's Distinguished Professor Award in 2004. He is presently working with Professor Andrew Rolle on Professor Rolle's seventh edition of California: A History. Verge also serves as the Co-Director of the Los Angeles History Research Group at the Huntington Library.

Geronimo

I will always be an Apache
I know what is in my heart
You have condemned me to a war
A war I did not start

My wife, my babies, they have died
My people try, they can no longer fight
Now, Wide Eyes, show me
Show me what you think is right

Why do you harass me
Why do you chase me
I ride away, but you follow
Peace, I shall never see

I did not ask for this
I did not want to come and go
Now, they know me far and wide
I must live as the renegade,
GERONIMO!

—Loren Wendt

Remembering Boyhood Matinees

Gordon J. Van De Water

The two generations that have come along since my boyhood have quite different interests in movies and series on television than I did. Yet boys today still enjoy films with plenty of action and exciting locales. Superheroes battle supervillains and fleets of space ships whiz by distant galaxies – all the product of gurus at high-power computers creating images not dreamt possible in previous decades.

Boys of my generation certainly enjoyed good action movies, but the settings and story lines were much closer to the good earth than to outer space. We saw movies that transported us to ancient Rome with gladiatorial fights to the death, and others that took us to seventeenth-century France where we screamed support for the Three Musketeers as they fought with their flashing blades the dastardly enemies of the king and queen. There were also movies that featured larger-than-life actors who took recurring, but varied roles, stalwarts such as Edward G. Robinson, James Cagney, Errol Flynn, and Humphrey Bogart. We had a love/hate relationship with all of them, knowing that these were actors playing make-believe roles, sometimes as bad guys in gangland settings filled with violent action. For example, we would rarely see blood, and then only as it seeped through a bandage. Unbeknownst to us, we were protected by the Hays Code from directly viewing blood and guts spilling from a corpse, and even dead bodies themselves.

My favorite movies about the Old West were romanticized, clean in the sense that there was no smutty language or sexual innuendo, and full of action - especially the so-called B Westerns. The hero wore a white hat, could shoot half a dozen cattle rustlers, fight off an Indian attack, stave off craven villains, and still have time to kiss his horse before riding off into the sunset. The bad guy (unless it was the crooked town attorney) always needed a shave and, you guessed it, wore a black hat. There were sometimes women in these movies, but usually they were not germane to the plot. This was just fine for me and my friends because girls were not necessary for any red-blooded boy of ten or twelve years in our generation. In the movie, however, the hero had to have someone to kiss, other than his horse, as *THE END* rolled on the screen.

Although B Westerns were usually not much longer than an hour, they had the power during matinee performances to transport us to an exciting era where the cowboy had, not a 6-shooter, but a 12 or even 18-shooter, with clouds of smoke coming from the barrel during the inevitable shootout with the bad guys. (It was uncommon to see the hero reload his gun.) These were rough and tumble days when the hero, along with the sheriff and his deputies (who would often break or disregard the law), were much like the bad men except they wore white hats and always won out in the end, whether by catching a bank robber or thwarting the evil town land agent who, through illegal means, was trying to secure all the water rights and dispossess the surrounding ranchers. The hero usually had a sidekick or two, younger or older men with much to learn about remaining cool under fire and clownish enough to entertain when the gunplay and horse-chase action lagged.

Before our time, in the 20's and 30's, the big cowboy heroes were William S. Hart, Tom Mix, Tim McCoy, Bob Steele and Ken Maynard. For us in the 40's and 50's the heroes were William Boyd as Hopalong Cassidy, John Wayne, Gene Autry and Roy Rogers. Both Gene and Roy added singing to the repertoire of the Western hero – not always agreeable to many viewers, who disliked any pause in the action. When I was in my fifties, it was an exciting moment when I was able to see Gene and Roy in person: Gene at an Angels baseball game and Roy at the now defunct museum in Victorville.

Both were generous men who always had friendly words for their fans.

Now all these movie heroes of the West have gone to the last roundup. But happy memories of them live on in older men like me who recall that magic time when heroes wore white hats, always got – or kissed - the girl, and rode off into the sunset. We could hardly wait to return to the matinee the following Saturday for more action-packed adventures.

Saturday Matinee, 1950

Saturday afternoon matinees
With cowboys, gun smoke, and clouds of dust
Carried me to the Wild West
To whistle and worry for the hero.

Seeing the Roman Legions
Marching in merciless formation,
Clanging toward the enemy,
I became their haughty General.

Galloping along on my horse
With the dashing Three Musketeers
I grasped a dispatch to save the Queen
And foil the evil Cardinal.

Emerging from the dark cave
Of the sticky-floored movie theater,
Shading my squinting eyes
From the brightness of a warm sun,

I replayed intense matinee memories
With friends in faded corduroy pants.
Romping in the neighborhood lane,
Transformed into cowboys or adventurers,

Shooting each other with wooden guns,
Thrusting with our broomstick swords,
We became the gallant, fearless heroes
Of our own Saturday afternoon matinee.

Photograph by Larry Boerio.

February Meeting Speaker Leonard Pitt

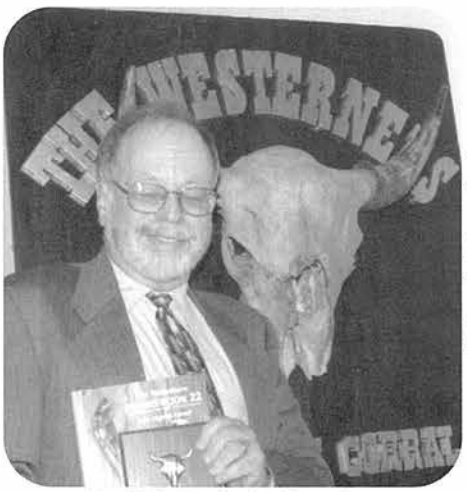
February Meeting

Leonard Pitt provided an overview of his research and writing of "The Decline of the Californios: A Social History of the Spanish-Speaking Californios, 1846-1890." Pitt's research provided the foundation for later studies of the cultural conflict and frontier backdrop of southern California's early history after statehood. Professor Pitt earned his advanced degrees from U.C.L.A. where he studied under the guidance of John Walton Caughey. He taught for many years at California State University at Northridge, and was the founder of the Urban Archives in 1978. Pitt is also co-author of a 1997 study, "Los Angeles A -Z: An Encyclopedia of the City and County."

Professor Pitt noted that Californios were working-class ranchers, self-sufficient, and represented the political and social power in Mexican California. He then offered an overview of the frontier period in southern California. In short, the Californios were a victim of several factors, which included droughts that destroyed herds, protracted land disputes over rancho titles, exorbitant legal fees, and law and order concerns which heightened tensions between Mexicans and American settlers. Thus, Pitt's research offered an analytical alternative to the romantic myth of Ramona and the folk legend of Joaquin Murrieta.

Pitt also discussed the evolution of his research and writing while a graduate student in the late-1950s. Professor Pitt researched at the Huntington Library and the Bancroft Library, discovering some of the earliest materials by Francisco Ramirez, editor of *El Clamor Publico*. He had the opportunity to study under John Walton Caughey,

and rub shoulders with Andrew Rolle, Allan Nevins, and Glenn S. Dumke. If anything, the Californios' decline is also a celebration of a valiant people who have endured, assimilated, and succeeded in becoming an important part of the southern California experience —past and present.



Photograph by Larry Boerio.

March Meeting Speaker James Brust

March Meeting

James Brust gave an intriguing presentation on the location of Custer's demise at the Little Big Horn in 1876. Brust attempted to authenticate historical photographs in order to determine the accurate location of skirmishes and clashes at the battlefield. Brust, along with Brian C. Pohanka and Sandy Barnard, published their findings in a popularly acclaimed book entitled, "Where Custer Fell: Photographs of the Little Bighorn Battlefield, Then and Now."

Brust displayed a number of graphic photos of monuments and battlefield markers which date from 1877 to present-day. Using a comparative approach of locations, Brust and his associates were able to either confirm or debunk several locations of famous sites, including Last Stand Hill, soldiers' grave sites, General Reno's retreat to the bluffs above Little Big Horn River, and the Reno-Benteen defense site. It was a fascinating visual journey back in time and to a place of symbolic importance for the American West. Now, if only we had Iron Eyes Cody to verify the facts.

Photograph by Larry Boerio.

April Meeting Speakers Eric Nelson and Michael Patris

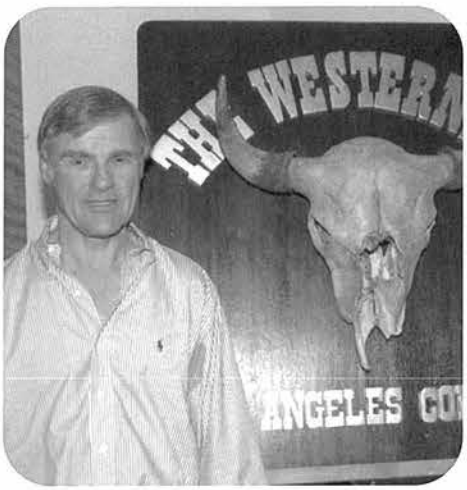
April Meeting

Eric Nelson and Michael Patris have tirelessly worked for several months to catalogue the Frank Q. Newton collection of rare stamps, western firearms, and stagecoach memorabilia. Frank Q. Newton was a longtime member of the Los Angeles Westerners Corral who passed away in November, 2004. Mike and Eric presented a power point program as a tribute to Newton's passion for the American West and as a rare glimpse at western ephemera of a 19th century frontier society.

Newton's collection contained rare stamps of the gold country, including stamps from El Dorado and Sonora counties. The collection also included several thousand revenue stamps and Wells Fargo bank notes, deposit receipts, and commission envelopes. The gun collection had rare pocket revolvers, derringers, shotguns, rifles, and pistols. In

addition, Nelson's collections included treasure boxes and a Wells Fargo horse and buggy.

Regrettably, Frank Q. Newton should have given this presentation to the corral many years before, but thanks to the efforts of Eric and Michael, the historical items were not just auctioned to posterity without first being shared with Newton's friends in order to further our appreciation of the West.



Photograph by Larry Boerio.

May Meeting Speaker Deke Keasbey

May Meeting

Deke Keasbey presentation concerned the "American Indians and the Horse." Deke studied at the University at Honolulu and the University of Southern California in the sixties. He has spent several decades in real estate investment and development. He has also had a passion for skiing, surfing, and karate.

Keasbey discussed how the horse impacted Native American society, which also led to cultural conflict between various tribes and settlers. The story of the horse begins with Spanish colonization and led to the rapid adaptation of the horse to the New World. From the Spanish pueblos of the southwest, the horse migrated in a northeast pattern into the great plains. Native Americans used the horse for transportation, hunting, trade and warfare. Horses represented a status symbol and led to increased Indian raids on European and American settlements. Keasbey concluded that the horse "was a perfect fit in the ecology occupied by the Plains Indians and greatly enhanced their roaming predatory cultural habits."

The overview included several maps and photos which profiled the everyday use of the horse among the plains tribes. Of course, Abe Hoffman enthused that Keasbey's informative presentation made "complete horse sense" to him.

The Cowboy's Dream House !

A prairie floor—sagebrush and wild flowers everywhere
A ceiling of blue — bordered by snow white clouds
And like a delicate, rich tastey—the smell of summer air
And distant, majestic mountains draped in silvery shrouds

A place to spread a bedroll beneath a big, old cottonwood
A murmuring stream that meanders through the plain
A campfire that he started as every cowboy should
And a tarp that waits patiently for a cooling summer rain

"Lord, I sure as heck don't need much more than this As far as I'm concerned this is where I'll always stay
If I ever had to leave here I know how much I'd miss So, here's my prayer of thanks, that's all I have to say"

—Loren Wendt

THE MONTHLY ROUNDUP

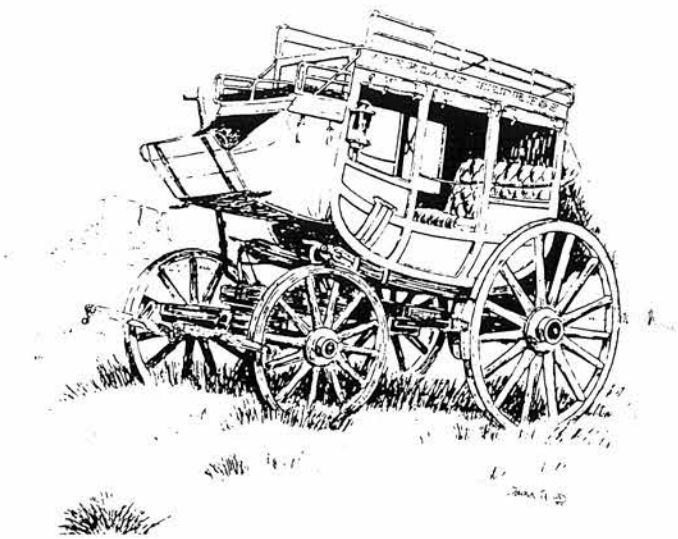
Former sheriff **JERRY SELMER** has recently completed his second term as a member of the Board of Trustees of the Arcadia Public Library. During his eight year, Jerry served twice as chairman, and he played an instrumental part in developing a strategic plan for development, reorganization of the library staff, and the selection of a new city librarian.

MIKE GALLUCCI, DOYCE NUNIS, ERIC NELSON and **JERRY SELMER** have been actively involved in the Los Angeles Archdiocese archival program. Recently they helped **MONSIGNOR WEBER** organize the biennial book sale and auction. Unsold items were donated to the Alemany High School library, the public libraries of Arcadia, Hollywood and Brentwood, and the Detention Ministry of Saint John the Baptist parish.

JOHN ROBINSON recently spoke to the Cresenta Valley Historical Society. His presentation centered on the importance of the mountains and foothills to southern California's destiny. He discussed Native American trading routes, wagon roads, escape routes for horse thieves, and railroad lines that have impacted southern California's past.

New member **MICHELE ZACK** recently received the Donald Pflueger award from the Southern California Historical Society. The award recognizes outstanding scholarship in local and state history and is named after a revered scholar and teacher, who was also a past sheriff of our corral. Don Pflueger passed away in 1994. Michelle's book, *Altadena: Between Wilderness and City,* earned the deserved recognition from the HSSC. Los Angeles Westerners expresses their congratulations on her accomplishment.

An addendum to the winter and spring issues of the *Branding Iron*. **LARRY BOERIO** should be credited with taking the monthly meeting photos of Hoffman, Krizek, and Curry. **FROY TISCAREÑO** photographed Warren and Wannamaker. Froy also took all photos of the 2005 Rendezvous except for a photo taken by Mike Gallucci of Osborne and Robinson.

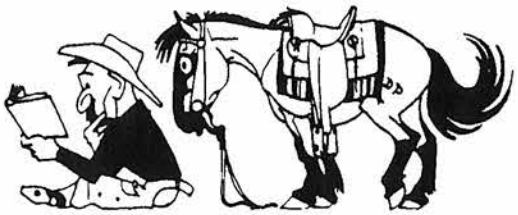


Ode to the Pioneers

We went dancin' last night at the Longhorn Saloon
with the girls and a friend or two.
Walked through the haze to the far side of the room,
stopped by a table to view.
For straight across from us was the band for the night,
they had just arrived for their set.
They were all dressed country and looked quite a sight,
they sure played the part, you bet.
So we grabbed a stool near the hard-wood dance floor,
sat down as the waitress stepped up.
Ordered our drinks, straight whiskey, lite Coors,
one coke, tonic water, one cup.
Then with a smile Bish toasted the night
and longnecks were raised on high.
With our dusters on hooks, our hats cocked just right,
we downed, first, the pure shots of rye.
Followed by beer, one swig at a time,
the smoke of the bar grew thick.
'Twasn't too long, everyone felt so fine,
mellow feelings and thoughts came so quick.
We conversed and laughed as the band took the stage,
tuned up their fiddle and guitars.
Another round was ordered, our wit was quite sage,
and the vocalist began a few bars
of an old Hank Williams song, "Your Cheatin' Heart."
us old timers cheered at the tune.
We knew we were off to a fantastic start
with the next song, "Kentucky Moon."
But something was lacking, the next song did ring,
it was good but not great at all.
The harmony 'twas there as they all joined to sing
that classic song, "Cattle Call."

But it wasn't the same, the sound was not right,
the yodeling could not compare.
The group sang to their best but try as they might,
they weren't Roy and the Pioneers.
But the Longhorn band was doing its best
and I'm wrong to try and compare.
For nothings as good as those songs of the West
from the original Sons of the Pioneers.

—Gary Turner



DOWN THE WESTERN BOOK TRAIL . . .

Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight, Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles, Eric Avila, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2004, ISBN 0-520-24121-5, 308 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index, $39.95 in hardcover.

Cultural history is invariably written by authors with a slant. Eric Avila is an Assistant Professor of Chicano Studies at UCLA who spent 1986 to 1997 as a student and graduate student at UC Berkeley. He grew up in suburban San Diego. He tells us his mother was a child in the late 1950's. It seems reasonable to assume his thoughts about southern California in the 1940-1970's are mainly from sources other than personal experience. One favored phrase reverberates throughout this book – "Chocolate Cities and Vanilla Suburbs."

Professor Avila identifies several powerful influences within Los Angeles during this post World War II period. These include Disneyland, Hollywood's Film Noir, Dodger Stadium, Freeways and Ronald Reagan. In his opinion, each of these influences contributed significantly to the decay of racial relationships.

Disneyland was Walt Disney's dream of the world – ordered, clean, and populated by bright faced young Orange County (read Caucasian) guides. Main Street was designed to look like hometown to every middle-class American. In the author's opinion, Walt Disney's counterculture was in fact "a rage for order." Indians were exploited in Frontierland and "along the banks of the Rivers of America, one could find Aunt Jemima's Kitchen." Both symbols are long gone from the park but the cigarette butts and candy wrappers still meticulously disappear in stark contrast to much of today's real world Los Angeles.

The building of Dodger Stadium is described quite accurately. Mexican Americans were displaced to build low income housing. A regime change in City Hall and a resounding defeat for financing public housing at the polls left politicians seeing less personal harm from selling public land into private hands than from admitting their embarrassing mistake. Walter O'Malley to the rescue, covering the politicians and building the world's largest parking lot rather than public housing. If this was ethnic cleansing perhaps the blame might better be placed than on the Dodgers.

The author tells us cities used the Lakewood model to incorporate "as a means of ensuring homogeneous communities and stable property value." California currently has 478 incorporated cities, of which 51 incorporated in the 1956-1960 period. These include Santa Fe Springs, South El Monte, Downey and Rosemead. These cities were incorporated rapidly but certainly not with the idea of excluding minorities. Until that time unincorporated cities enjoyed the advantage of a lower sales tax. The Los Angeles Board of Supervisors lobbied the State Legislature to change the rules. Sales Tax became uniform, with the County receiving the extra revenue from all unincorporated areas. Cities quickly incorporated to keep the extra tax money within their borders, not to exclude minorities.

This illustrates a problem with a lot of cultural history – the "one concept drives everything rule" is often flawed. An author needs to look outside of his own narrowly focused world for support of his theories.

— Bill Warren

California. A History by Kevin Starr The Modem Library, 2005, ISBN 0-679-64240-4, 370 pp., Notes, Photos, Maps, Chronology, Index, Hard Cover.

Kevin Starr has an encyclopedic knowledge of California having written nine earlier books on the subject. He served as a State librarian from 1994 to 2004. Since 1989 he has been a Professor at the University of Southern California. He has won the Guggenheim Fellowship and the Gold and Silver Medals from the Commonwealth Club of California. With this marvelous background and study over decades, he synthesizes our state's history by briefly revisiting its early days under Spanish and Mexican rule, the coming of the Argonauts in the 1840's and 1850's, and then explaining in easy reading, the trends and population that turned California into a nation-state in only a century and a half. By 2005, California had a 1.5 trillion-dollar economy causing it to be the fifth largest economy on the planet and with 12.5 percent of the population of the country. The five-county Los Angeles Metropolitan area has 20.6 million people in it making it the fourth largest state in the nation.

Resources, natural and human, industry, natural beauty and climate with a massive infusion of people made the state what it is and in a beautifully readable way Starr treats in the last two-thirds of his book with the mastery and supplementation of natural challenges spawning aviation, electronics, education, agriculture and a host of other enterprises. All of this was done by the infusion of energetic talented people from the rest of the country and from around the world. From his Olympian view he tells of how Koreans came to LA to make it the second or third largest Korean city in the world, how the Watts' riots were correctly or incorrectly handled in 1965 and the "water battles" spiced with vignettes of little known historical "tidbits" most of us have never heard about.

The Olympic Club was founded by German immigrants who appreciated athletics and who encouraged "Gentleman Jim" Corbett, one of its members, to challenge John L. Sullivan. Charles Fletcher Lummis, the publisher of the Los Angeles Times and a promoter of Indian cultures, walked all the way west from Ohio. The Central Pacific Railroad was founded by the Big Four in 1863 with $15,800 in cash and would generate profits to them of over 200 million dollars. The scandal of the summer of 2000 increasing the state's energy bill by 10.9 billion dollars over that of the previous summer is thoroughly exposed.

In touching on the entertainment industry portraying gold rush California as wild, free, unrestrained and exuberant Starr said: "This interpretation of the Gold Rush as a fun-filled and affirmative adventure survived through numerous celebrations including the 1949 centennial. It lingered in the movies (Gabby Hayes playing the comic prospector) and continues to sustain the ongoing revelry of a flourishing antiquarian drinking fraternity, the Ancient Order of E Clampus Vitus, founded in 1857 and revitalized in 1931 by historian Carl Wheat, which places plaques at historic Gold Rush sites before adjourning to a nearby saloon." He also remarked that the early days were brutish. One out of every 12 forty-niners would lose his life in route to, in or returning from the mines from accidents, cholera or other fatal diseases. The murder ratio in San Francisco was 49 per 100,000 between 1849 and 1856, six times the 1995 homicide rate in that city.

Taken altogether, Starr's treatment of California's older and recent history allows the reader to observe a multitude of issues including the free speech movement, hippies, surfers, educational funding and reading and math scores, the collapse of the "dot.com" industry and the causes of the landslide election of Governor Schwarzenegger. It will generate many pleasurable hours of reading. This is an excellent job of recounting California's endless variety.

—Norman S. Marshall

MEXICAN-ORIGIN PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES: *A Topical History,* by Oscar J. Martinez. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001. 244pp. Maps, Tables, Notes, Bibliography, Index. Cloth, $45; paper, $17.95.

Order from University of Arizona Press, 3555 Euclid Avenue, Suite 103, Tucson, AZ 85719 (520) 621-1441.

More a status report than a topical history, this book measures the progress (or lack of it) made by Mexican-origin people since the U.S.-Mexico War, with a main focus on the 20th century. Oscar Martinez examines Mexican American immigration, employment, and political power, along with discussing how immigrants have met discrimination, exploitation, and prejudice. For the most part his assessment is positive, especially in the progress made since the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Mexican Americans have increasingly won political office at local and congressional levels. More of them are going to college, succeeding in business, and living in areas outside the Southwest. Martinez notes that Anchorage, Alaska, has no fewer than 22 Mexican restaurants.

Martinez takes great pains to identify the diversity of Mexican-origin people. He distinguishes between Mexican, Mexican American, Hispanic, Latino/a, Chicano/a, Mexican-heritage, and Hispano/a to reflect generation, location, and self-referent identities. The use of/a, /o, /os, and /as to show equality of gender seems awkward, but he uses it anyway throughout the book. By contrast, he uses the terms "non-Hispanic whites" and "European Americans" as replacements and a possible improvement of the term "Anglo Americans," which he notes, "wrongly implies that all non-Hispanic whites have their roots in Great Britain" (p. xxvii). In doing so, however, Martinez just creates a reverse stereotype that claims all non-Hispanic whites are the same. White ethnics make almost no appearance in the book, though at one point he refers to "European American Texans." Thus does good writing succumb to the dictates of academic political correctness.

Martinez begins each chapter with a description of the discrimination and hardship endured by Mexican immigrants shut out from job opportunities, education, and participation in the political process. World War II provided a major watershed for Mexican-origin people. Veterans organized such groups as the American GI Forum, and a political voice began to speak through such organizations as the Mexican American Political Association. The civil rights movement created a quantum leap in Mexican Americans attending college, running for and getting elected to political office, and engaging in entrepreneurial activity. Success is muted, however, by the continuing challenge of Mexican immigration, especially the issue of illegal/undocumented immigrants who reinforce old stereotypes in their lack of job skills, education, and difficulties in adjusting to life in the U.S.

In the end Martinez has a difficult time reconciling what in effect are two minority groups—Mexican Americans of Mexican descent whose presence and contributions to American society are consistent with other immigrant groups, and the problems of Mexican immigrants. The difference between the two groups lies in chronology; over the past forty years American society has accepted or been forced to accept a more level playing field for minorities. The United States offers opportunity that makes no place for racism or unjust laws; and when such bigotry occurs, it is dealt with.

American society is not Utopia, nor is it a perfect place, but as the Preamble says, we're trying to form "a more perfect union."

That said, it is unfortunate that Martinez slights the issues of education, crime, and the responsibilities of immigrants to the society in which they have come to live. He glorifies Joaquin Murietta and Tiburcio Vasquezs who didn't strike back "at European American oppression" so much as they robbed and killed innocent people. Enough minor errors occur as to merit notice: Juan Cortina's middle name is correctly spelled Nepomuceno; the *Mendez* v. *Westminster* case was decided in 1945 by the California State Supreme Court, not in 1947 by a federal court; it's the Los Angeles Unified School District, not the Independent School District. There seems no reason why the story of Felix Longoria, the veteran

refused a burial place because he was of Mexican descent, should be told twice (p. 69 and p. 169); there are other repetitions as well. Comparisons with other Latino groups—Puerto Ricans, Cubans, El Salvadorans, etc.—are minimal.

In sum, the book offers much of value in assessing the progress made by Mexican Americans, but the challenges of Mexican immigration and the issues raised by that immigration require more discussion, perspective, and analysis than Martinez provides.

—Abraham Hoffman

THE DESERT TRAINING CENTER/CALIFORNIA-ARIZONA MANEUVER AREAS, 1942-1944: *Historical and Archaeological Contexts,* by Matt C. Bischoff. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2000. 146 pp. Maps, Illustrations, References Cited. Paper, $25. Order from University of Arizona Press, 1230 North Park Avenue, Suite 102, Tucson, AZ 85719, (800) 426-3797.

This is a reference for those having an interest in the military history of World War II. It is a compendium of photos, maps and drawings of every encampment of the Army in the Nation's largest military base. Few of us have visited the Desert Training Center (DTC), except for the Patton Museum at Chriaco Summit just east of Indio, California. Only cement slabs and stone-lined walkways remain. In 1940, the U.S. Army stood 18th in the world, behind even the Netherlands and Belgium which fell within a week after the Nazi invasion. Italy had invaded Libya and Egypt in 1940, and when the Italians ran into trouble, Rommel came to assist them; he seized Benghazi in January of 1942 and in the Spring took Tobruk and the Suez Canal was threatened. It became apparent that the United States would have to assist Britain. But the U. S. Army had never fought a full scale war in a desert environment since the war with Mexico. Even Pershing's 7,000 men, marching back and forth across the Mexican deserts in 1916, did little fighting.

George S. Patton, a native of San Marino, California, had had tank experience in World War I and continued to be an advocate of the Tank Corps although he had returned to service in the Calvalry. He was fearful of being passed over as being too old, but was promoted to Brigadier General in 1940 and then Major General in 1941 and awarded command of the First Armored Corps. Patton established the DTC and was its first commanding officer. He established the 14 week training program which included individual and small unit field exercises and finally divisional exercises.

This site is an immense desert wilderness, occupying 31,500 square miles. It includes a portion of the Mojave Desert east of Indio to the Colorado River and north from Yuma, Arizona to Searchlight, Nevada. It measures 238 miles by 116 miles and was well used by the Army for a short period during World War II. Fourteen camps were established, each 3 miles by 1 mile wide, each housing approximately 15,000 men. It opened on April 30, 1942 and was declared surplus on April 1, 1944. It had hard use training 23 divisions out of the Army's total of 85 divisions. More than 10% of all service personal serving in World War II were trained at the DTC.

Patton had driven and trained his men hard and when I Corps left in the late summer of 1942, Patton abandoned for later use and recycling some 230 broken down armored vehicles, and 270 general purpose vehicles. By 1943, the DTC was changed into a training area so vast that it was a separate Theater of Operations where equipment was tested and tactics and military doctrines developed.

It was beyond the scope of the author's commission to treat with this, but one cannot fail to be impressed that the DTC was a tribute to American energy and genius in opening a huge camp shortly after the start of the war, training an immense number of soldiers, moving them overseas (fully trained and equipped) and landing them on the beaches of North Africa by November 1942.

—Norman Marshall