

America's Atomic Army: the Historical Archaeology of Camp Desert Rock

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Abstract

Established in 1951, Camp Desert Rock served as the training ground for America's "Atomic Army." For the next six years, U.S. ground troops traveled to the Nevada desert to participate in military maneuvers during atmospheric atomic weapons testing. Nearly 60,000 soldiers received physical and psychological training in atomic warfare.

Abandoned when atmospheric testing ended, Camp Desert Rock was dismantled and its buildings moved to other locations. Today, the camp appears as a sterile expanse of desert marked by rock-lined tent platforms, concrete foundations, and trash scatters. Although visually unimposing, the site is rich with the history of America's nuclear testing program.