

# Agua Caliente





## DOME VALLEY CEMETERY

ROW 1	<b>Ida May Dunning</b> 8-15-14 2-5-73		<b>Ignacio Perez</b> 7-31-12 1-9-88 Beloved husband dad ?							
ROW 2	X		Husband Father <b>Robert Perez</b> 2-3-76 7-25-76	<b>Joe H. Nunn</b> 8-30-30 10-21-74 Sgt. USAP						
ROW 3	X		X	<b>Teresa Caratersen</b> 12-1933 1-1935	X	<b>Jose Conde</b> 7-7-1883 10-20-1966	X	<b>Dolores Conde</b> 1893-1978		
Row 4	<b>Marie Ambisa Oruzeta</b> 4-15-1916		<b>Dolores Conde</b> 18? 11-21-1910	<b>Rosa Sandes</b> 18? 4-15-1915	<b>Serefia Conde</b> 18? 2-22-1927 <b>Geron? Cruz</b> 1856-1925 X	1880-1942	<b>Jesus Conde</b> 12-24-1929 <b>Jesus Cruz</b>	2-1925	<b>Andra Conde</b> <b>Fran Cruz</b> 1-20-1907-11-30-1980	
ROW 5	X		X	X						
ROW 6	X		X	X			X		X	
ROW 7	X X	X	X	<b>Elmer Amabisca</b> 12-11-1855 6-14-1902 11-2-1910	<b>Gregortha Amabisca</b> 12-2-1910	X	<b>Amilisia</b> born died	<b>Inez Amabisca</b> 1848-1911	X	X
ROW 8	X	X	<b>Josefa Amabisca</b> 3-29-1836 3-17-1927	X	X					
ROW 9	X	X	X	X						
ROW 10	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
ROW 11	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
ROW 12	X	X	X	X	X					
ROW 13	X	X	X	<b>Lee Bailey</b> Arizona Sgt. 330 Ftch Co WI Ap 30-1894 Nov 30-1966						
ROW 14	X		<b>Staner Duane Eddy</b> 2-27-1952 5-22-1974	<b>Bill Mellison</b> died 6-20-1974	<b>Bill Sherman McDowell</b> S1 US Navy WWII 5-30-1921					
ROW 15	X		<b>Cromwell</b>							
ROW 16	<b>Burton</b>	X	X							

## Agua Caliente: Once prominent and now forgotten

[BY CHUCK WULLENJOHN - SPECIAL TO YUMA SUN](#)

2011-05-22 15:38:01



The bright Arizona sun relentlessly beats down on the ruins of adobe and stone buildings that once bustled with life, attracting visitors from around the nation to the healthful waters of a bountiful hot spring.

Agua Caliente, Spanish for “hot water,” lies barely outside the Yuma County line, 12 miles north of isolated Sentinel on Interstate 8, forgotten by most but boasting a rich historical legacy that began hundreds of years ago when the natural spring was discovered by local Native Americans.

Emitting hundreds of gallons of heated mineral-rich water each day, Agua Caliente's springs were savored by Indians who found the waters soothing and healing. Later, when people of European stock came to call Arizona their own, they took notice and made a point of venturing there.

The area was undeveloped during these early years, with visitors soaking in informal pools of water and sleeping in tents or buckboard wagons. In 1897, a 22-room adobe hotel was built to cater to travelers, many of whom arrived by train from nearby Hyder, which was served by several daily eastbound and westbound trains. The outflow of water from the springs was harnessed around this time, with pipes leading to a large outdoor pool where people could easily enjoy the therapeutic liquid.

The resort remained a popular destination for many years, and Agua Caliente was prominently listed on road maps and in visitor guides. It is said that President Franklin Roosevelt visited the resort, as did numerous Hollywood movie stars.

Transcontinental passenger trains operated by the Southern Pacific Railroad stopped in Hyder each day, with the railroad's nationally distributed timetables noting that Agua Caliente was located nearby. Railroad passenger service continued in Hyder until the late 1950s.

An upsurge of activity came with World War II as the Army established two training camps in the forlorn desert surrounded by bare hills outside Hyder at which thousands of soldiers prepared for duty overseas. Purposely situated in a rough environment to prepare soldiers for the unforgiving conditions of combat, the camps featured no electricity, refrigeration or running water. Everyone lived in tents.

Camps Hyder and Horn were established in the fall of 1943. They were two of 15 desert camps built to harden and train troops in what became known as the California-Arizona Maneuver Area. The desert training center was a simulated theater of operations that included portions of California, Arizona and Nevada.

Thirteen infantry and seven armored divisions plus numerous smaller units trained in the harsh environment. Major units stationed at Camps Hyder and Horn were the 77th, 81st and 104th Infantry Divisions.

Troops assigned to Camps Hyder and Horn arrived mostly by train either in Hyder or nearby Sentinel, which consisted of a yellow clapboard railroad station, a few adobe and board structures, and a corral clustered around a few spindly trees and other desert growth. The first arrivals went into action to establish the camps shortly after their arrival in April 1943, clearing vegetation, blading roads, erecting

tents, digging latrines and much more.

Engineers laid out firing ranges and other training courses. They drilled a well near the Hyder railroad siding that had a flow rate exceeding 120,000 gallons of fresh water per day. A huge shower facility went up nearby.

Eventually, more than 13,000 men came to call Camps Hyder and Horn their temporary home, though summer temperatures rose far higher than most were accustomed to. The camps spread over several miles on either side of town.

Large-scale maneuvers, foot marches, night patrols and rugged individual training took place amid the out-of-the-way landscape. Soldiers found the standard Army ration of one quart of water per day far too little in the harsh conditions and quickly learned to take advantage of whatever shade they could find beneath any desert cliff or shrub.

One of the problems in the early months was the woeful scarcity of recreational activities. Urban destinations were miles away, and many became discouraged during the long weeks of high heat they were forced to endure. An outdoor theater featuring first-run movies went up to show films after dark and athletic programs featuring baseball and boxing were formed.

Post exchanges stocked beer and soft drinks, along with limited amounts of ice to cool them. A newspaper went into operation in mid-1943 and officers constructed clubs out of adobe bricks for their own use. And the relaxing hot spring waters at Agua Caliente, used for hundreds of years, were visited and enjoyed by all.

As the war wound to a close, Camp Hyder and Camp Horn were abandoned. Little remains today, as active farming in the area has reclaimed the land. The 1897 hotel in Agua Caliente went out of business in the 1950s after the hot spring waters bubbling to the surface diminished and reappeared only intermittently. Some say it resulted from dozens of wells drilled by farmers to irrigate agricultural fields that disturbed the underground plumbing system, while others claim it was the ill use of dynamite blasting.

Agua Caliente's whitewashed hotel remains today, baking in the sun. A caretaker lives in back and the windows have been carefully closed, as if someday to reopen. Nearby guest quarters constructed from stone and adobe have crumbled into ruins, though some walls and foundations remain. An active farm directly across the road hosts various animals and expansive fields, as it has for many years.

Little more than one-half mile away on a raised mound along the side of the main road is the old town's cemetery. A brief stroll among the 46 gravesites, all of which are ringed with desert stones, causes somber visitors to think of the lives of the brave people who once lived in this remote portion of Arizona, as well as contemplate their own personal mortality.

Here are the graves of infants who lived only months, as well as fathers and mothers who passed away between 1900 and the mid-1980s. Most of the individual crosses and markers have vanished or deteriorated over the years, such that most graves are marked only by a sun-baked ring of stones.

One granite marker from 1974 reads, "Came to Hyder in '65, but didn't leave alive." Another grave is the final resting place of a miner named "Placer Mike" who was killed at Yuma County's King of Arizona mine.

Agua Caliente today is haunted by desert winds that blow through the area and the many miles of deserted terrain around it. Hyder is a community hanging on for existence, on the verge of becoming a ghost town itself.

But it is good to remember the past — of those who came before and those who helped win the biggest war in human history and save the world from fascist rule. If you ever visit the ruins of Agua Caliente or any other ghost town, treat it reverently. The people who once walked there were just like you and me. What you see is what their dreams have become.

*Chuck Wullenjohn writes for The Outpost, the newspaper at Yuma Proving Ground.*

## Agua Caliente: Once prominent and now forgotten

1 of 3



The bright Arizona sun relentlessly beats down on the ruins of adobe and stone buildings that once bustled with life at Agua Caliente.

Photo by Chuck Wullenjohn/YPG

## Agua Caliente: Once prominent and now forgotten

2 of 3



A brief stroll among the 46 gravesites, all of which are ringed with desert stones, causes somber visitors to think of the lives of the brave people who once lived in this remote portion of Arizona

Photo by Chuck Wullenjohn/YPG

**Agua Caliente: Once prominent and now forgotten**

3 of 3



A soldier gets a haircut at a camp set up during World War II near Agua Caliente.

Loaned photo