

1941 - Oasis Palms Benefits from WWII Population Growth in California

In the wake of the catastrophic attack on [Pearl Harbor](#), the world seemed engulfed in turmoil, but amidst the chaos, Curtis Smith emerged as a beacon of hope for the Mojave Desert. News had spread like wildfire about the Army's ambitious plan to establish a [Desert Training Center](#) for General Patton's troops. Curtis, a man of unwavering determination, saw this as an opportunity to breathe life into Oasis Palms, a chance to secure a vital project that could bring about a much-needed economic revival.

Curtis embarked on a passionate campaign to persuade the powers that be that Oasis Palms was the ideal location for a training center. He envisioned a thriving hub of activity, where soldiers would converge to hone their skills, bringing with them a surge of life to the businesses in the town. While the main facility for the 3rd Armored Division, [Camp Young](#), was eventually established over 100 miles to the

south in Desert Center, Curtis's relentless efforts bore fruit as a sub-camp was established right in the heart of nearby Goffs. [Camp Goffs](#) quickly took shape, complete with a hospital, an ammunition depot, and even an airfield, becoming a bustling hub for training over 15,000 troops between 1942 and 1944.

The ripple effects of this military presence extended far beyond the confines of the training camp. Oasis Palms found itself at the crossroads of Route 66, a major artery connecting Los Angeles to Goffs. The constant flow of military convoys and travelers along this iconic route injected newfound vitality into the town's economy. Oasis Palms became a pit stop, a haven for those seeking respite from the arduous journey.

During World War II, [California underwent a remarkable transformation](#). Its population swelled, driven not only by the servicemen stationed at the military bases and training centers but also by a wave of workers from all corners of the United States who flocked to support the burgeoning defense industries. It was a time when the Golden State emerged from the depths of the Great Depression, and

although Oasis Palms didn't quite return to its boomtown glory, it managed to maintain a steady stream of visitors, drawn by both train and automobile along Route 66, infusing the town with much-needed revenue.

In 1941 Curtis Smith's son Louis, a.k.a "Lefty" (1918-1978) joined the U.S. Air Force and became a pilot. Assigned to the [12th Air Force](#) he was stationed in England and then deployed in the deserts of North Africa as part of the force being built up for [Operation Torch](#). Louis was assigned his nickname "Lefty" while stationed in England, not because he was left-handed but because of the English pronunciation of his rank as "Leftenant". Lefty flew multiple missions in a [P-38 Lightning](#) out of [Tafraoui Airfield in Algeria](#). The primary function of the P-38 in North Africa was to escort bombers, but the fighters also targeted transport aircraft, and later in the campaign, they were sometimes tasked with ground-attack missions.



Lt. "Lefty" Smith returned from WWII and operated the Mobil Gas Station in Oasis Palms where he eventually mounted a surplus P-38 as a canopy over the pumps.



After the War, Lefty returned to Oasis Palms and operated the Mobil gas station on the edge of town with the name "Lefty's P-38 Lightning Fast Service" painted across the top of the building. A consummate showman, to promote business Lefty Smith aimed to attract post-war tourists to Oasis Palms. To achieve this, he acquired a decommissioned P-38 Lightning aircraft from the [Cal-Aero Field](#) near Chino and Ontario, California. Lefty ingeniously incorporated the P-38 as the station's awning over the gas pumps, a patriotic display of his American airborne pride.

Billboards on Route 66 were adorned with promotions for this remarkable spectacle. Loewy's design team at Studebaker reported that renowned industrial designer [Raymond Loewy](#), who

happened to pass through Oasis Palms on his way to Los Angeles, was so inspired by Lefty's "flying" P-38 above the town that it influenced the design of the front end of the [1950 Champion](#). Lefty's showmanship and flair for promotion ushered in a new golden age of tourism for Oasis Palms.