

## THE COMBAT CENTER'S AMBASSADORS

Thelma and Louise are a pair of female desert tortoises that serve as ambassadors for education and conservation at the Combat Center.

Named by a Boy Scout troop, Thelma and Louise are sisters born in 1998. They were raised in captivity and adopted by the Combat Center's Commanding General in 2006. Today they weigh about 7.5 pounds each. Desert tortoises are herbivores and eat a variety of desert plants.

Their primary residence is at TRACRS, the Combat Center's facility for headstarting desert tortoises. Their second, temporary residence is at the Archeology and Paleontology Curation Center's Tortoise Garden, Bldg. 1091 on Mainside.



*Thelma and Louise enjoy primrose blooms, a common desert plant.*

## ARMORED THREAT & THREATENED ARMOR



The Mojave Desert is a harsh environment that puts warriors and their armor to the ultimate test during training. When Marines fire and maneuver, they often find an armored threat — the threatened desert tortoise — already hiding the high ground. The Marine Corps is committed to protecting threatened and endangered species while maintaining mission readiness. At the Combat Center, that means both armored threat and threatened armor are prepared for future challenges.



**The Marines**  
*We're Saving A Few Good Species*



*The Combat Center's "Tortoise and Tank" poster illustrates commonalities between the tortoise and the modern tank.*

### REMEMBER

Enjoy desert tortoises and other precious living resources in the wild by remaining a safe distance away. Desert tortoises are most active during spring and fall. At other times they are likely in their burrows underground.

**Do not disturb desert tortoises you see in the wild.**

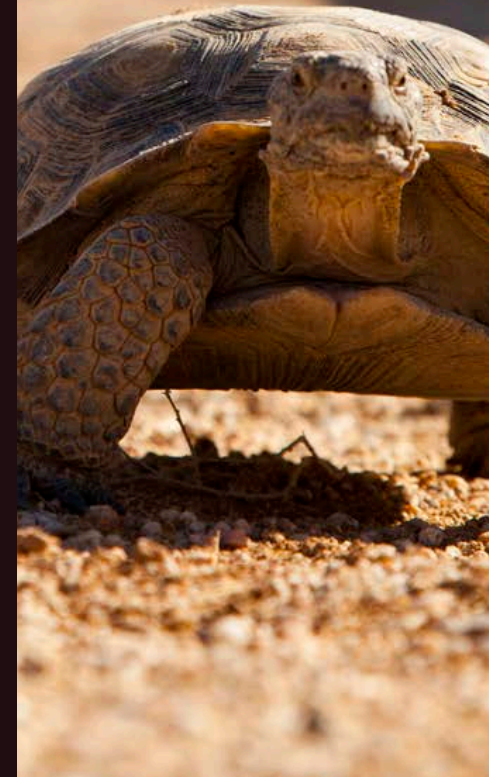
When aboard the Combat Center, if you see a desert tortoise that may be in trouble, remain with the animal and contact BEARMAT or PMO (830-6800) as soon as possible.



*This brochure was printed on 100% recycled paper using soy ink.*



**MARINE CORPS AIR GROUND COMBAT CENTER  
DESERT TORTOISE**





**The Department of Defense and the U.S. Marine Corps understand that the lands they use for training are part of the public trust. They are committed to being good stewards of the lands placed in their care. Part of the stewardship responsibility is to protect and promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species found on military installations.**

**The desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) was listed as a threatened species in 1990 and is federally protected under the Endangered Species Act. Agassiz's desert tortoises are native to the Mojave Desert within California, Nevada, Utah and Arizona. The species has lived in the area that is now the Mojave Desert for millions of years. It has adapted to the harsh, changing conditions, but has difficulty coping with the combination of habitat loss, off-road vehicles, predators, diseases and other impacts.**

**By setting aside restricted areas of high-quality habitat, collaborating with the scientific community, and conducting training and other outreach with all personnel, the Combat Center has played a key role in protecting and enhancing recovery of this intriguing desert icon.**

*Every individual who uses the Combat Center's expansive training areas goes through a seminar on desert tortoise and wildlife awareness. Signage reinforces this training.*



### Wildlife Awareness Training and Outreach

The Combat Center trains its personnel to be sensitive to the desert tortoise and other species as part of its protection efforts. The Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs (NREA) Division is staffed with experts in the fields of environmental management and conservation.



Devoted to providing resources and expertise that allow the Combat Center to consider all aspects of the environment in the planning and implementation of advanced training and exercises, these professionals train everyone who goes to the installation's training areas, including Marines, sailors, other service members and civilians, on what to do if they encounter a desert tortoise or other wildlife.

Staff trains more than 30,000 individuals each year through this program. In addition to this training, the Combat Center has numerous outreach events, programs and materials to promote environmental and desert tortoise awareness on the installation and in the community.

*Above: Those who learn about the tortoise at the Combat Center's programs and events can receive this sticker as a colorful reminder of their training.*

*Top, left to right: A research assistant checks the radio signal transmitted from a newly released desert tortoise. A biologist holds a young desert tortoise during a visit to TRACRS. Col. James F. Harp, previous Chief of Staff, releases a tortoise into a ready-made burrow. This tortoise was one of 35 released from TRACRS in 2015.*

### Desert Tortoise Research and Conservation

In 2006, the Combat Center established Tortoise Research and Captive Rearing Site (TRACRS), a juvenile headstart program and facility. Through TRACRS, the Combat Center collaborates with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, University of California, Los Angeles and other biologists to study and enhance the desert tortoise population aboard the installation.

This long-term program assesses how to protect hatchlings and juveniles until they grow resilient enough to endure the harsh physical environment, resist most predation by common ravens and coyotes, and mature to fully functional adults that produce offspring to further enhance populations.

By headstarting tortoises, TRACRS may offset population declines that occur in other areas of the desert. Over the first 10 years of headstarting the Combat Center raised more than 475 juveniles with annual survivorships of 85 to 96 percent, compared to survivorship of 40 percent or less in the wild. Resilient tortoises are released into large areas of good habitat on the installation. These areas are restricted and access is limited to research-related activity.