

Museum News: Hi Jolly and the Red Ghost

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A strange event that took place in this area and the Southwest was the Great Camel Experiment.

Captain George H. Crosman of the U. S. Army in 1843 issued a report suggesting that camels would make a better pack animal than horses and mules, since they had been in use in desert areas of the Middle East and China since time immemorial. Possessing broad, padded feet suited to traveling over desert sands and a meager need for water, and well suited to carry great loads, camels were greatly recommended for U. S. Army service.

When Jefferson Davis, a senator from Mississippi, got hold of the report, he was convinced of its wisdom, and when appointed Secretary of War under Franklin Pierce in 1853, he convinced Congress to fund the Great Camel Experiment with a \$30,000 appropriation.

Major Henry C. Wayne, assigned to recruit the camels and Arab men to drive them and train the soldiers, arrived in the Mediterranean in 1855 with his assistant, Lieutenant David Dixon Porter. They purchased 77 camels from Tunisia, Malta, Greece, Turkey, and Egypt, and hired five camel drivers. The camels and attendants were shipped to Indianola, Texas, ultimately landing in Camp Verde, Texas, and officially dubbed the Camel Corps. Initial testing showed the camels could carry heavy loads and travel over ground which regular pack animals found difficult.

The first big trial was an expedition in 1856 to survey lands between Fort Defiance, Arizona, and the Colorado River in California. Using a caravan of 25 camels, the mission was a success.

The next trial was to survey a shorter route to Fort Davis, Texas, in 1859, under the leadership of Lt. Edward Hartz and Lt. William Echols. The team eventually surveyed much of the Big Bend area by camelback and a second survey was made in the Big Bend under Lt. Echols.

Though the camels were a success, horses and mules were terrified of the massive animals. The camels were obstinate, traveled at their own pace and would not keep up with the horses. However, the general consensus was that the animals would be useful to the Army transport system.

Unfortunately, at the approach of the Civil War, the program was forgotten. The new Union Secretary of War Edwin Stanton proposed to eliminate the Camel Corps. Lt. Beale offered to board them on his private property, but the Secretary was determined to close the program. Many of the animals were sold, but a few escaped into the deserts of the West and British Columbia.

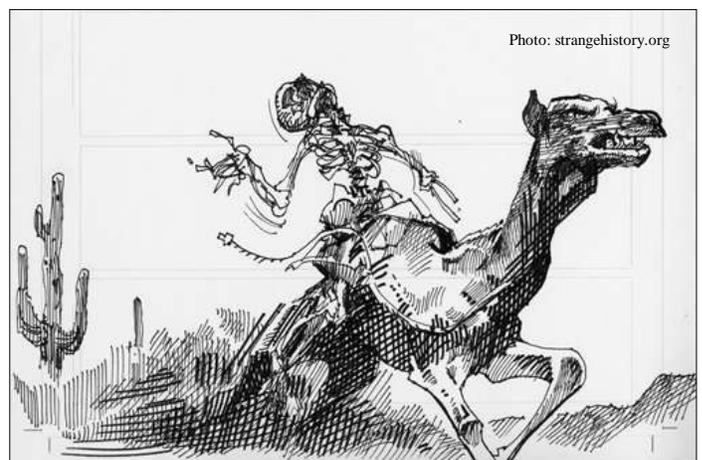
Hadji Ali, one of the camel drivers from Syria, was called "Hi Jolly" by the troops, who had trouble with his Arabic name. Hi Jolly became a favorite of the soldiers when the caravan came under attack by Indians. He unsheathed his curved Arabian scimitar and charged the Indians on camelback, yelling at the top of his lungs with his flowing red cape flapping in the desert wind. The terrified Indians scattered before the screaming Arab and his strange beast. After his retirement from his duties, Hi Jolly spent the rest of his life in Quartzite, Arizona, with his two lovely, but illegal, wives.

One of the camels, Douglas, ended up in Mississippi. He became the mascot for his Confederate comrades and assigned the job of hauling instruments for the regimental band. Douglas was ill-tempered and belligerent and did not like being led by a rope or tied down, often breaking free of his tether. He never wandered far, though. The horses, however, did not like him and once stampeded, injuring several and killing two.

In spite of this, Douglas became a war hero. He accompanied General Sterling Price into the Battle of Iuka, Mississippi, in September of 1862, and participated in the Battle of Corinth. Sadly, he was shot by a Union sharpshooter at the Siege of Vicksburg. Outraged by his senseless murder his Confederate comrades wanted vengeance. His commander, Colonel Bevier, picked six of his best snipers and succeeded in bringing down the villain.

The wildest Camel Corp story, however, is about the Red Ghost. Some twenty years after the release of the camels, a woman in Arizona was found trampled to death at a remote ranch after she had gone to fetch water from a spring. Another woman who lived on the ranch had stayed in the house with the children and heard the dogs barking, then the scream of the victim. She looked out and saw a huge animal run by the window with something on its back. Authorities found large, cloven footprints by the body and wisps of strange red hair in the brush at the scene.

The next to be attacked were two prospectors, whose tent was destroyed while they slept. As they clambered from the wreckage, they saw a huge red creature running off in the moonlight.



A few months later a rancher spotted the beast and saw that it was a camel with a saddle and what looked like a skeleton tied to it. He fired shots and it disappeared into the desert.

The camel was spotted a few weeks later by prospectors who also saw the skeleton. When they fired shots, the animal bolted and something rolled off its back and hit the ground. Investigating, they found a skull with bits of dried flesh and hair still attached.

When local folks saw it, they were terrified and named it The Red Ghost. Over the next few years the Red Ghost was seen again and again at various locations, and his legend grew.

Finally, the Red Ghost was brought down by a rancher who caught it grazing in his garden. When he examined the body he found a skeleton tied to the saddle. Soon, a story arose that the body was that of a young soldier with the Camel Corps who couldn't stay in the saddle. His buddies tied him into the saddle so securely that he couldn't get loose. But, the camel was spooked and ran off into the desert with his rider screaming for help, never to be seen again, alive.

Some say that in the Arizona desert on a dark night, one can hear the screech of a camel, the scream of a woman and the sound of trampling cloven feet. Believe it, or not.

The last American camel supposedly died in 1934 at Griffith Park in Los Angeles. "Topsy" had wandered from Arizona into California and was captured, to live out her days in peace and plenty. She was well taken care of, but at 80+ years of age she became so crippled, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, that zookeepers had to put her down. Interestingly, the average camel lives 40 to 50 years.

Topsy's remains can be found in Quartzite, Arizona interred in a vault that is a part of Hi Jolly's pyramid grave marker.

