

Terrell County Memorial August, 2015
Sanderson, Texas

Museum News

Hi Jolly and the Red Ghost



The Red Ghost

Truly, truth is stranger, more outrageous than fiction. One of the stranger events that took place in this area and the greater Southwest was the Great Camel Experiment.

Captain George H. Crosman of the U. S. Army was the first to urge substituting camels for mules and pack horses in 1843. He issued a report to the U.S. government suggesting that the camel, the penultimate desert animal, 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.

Camels have broad, padded feet enabling them to easily travel over desert sands, have a meager need for water and are large, strong and well suited to carrying heavy loads. They were thought to be the perfect vehicle for the U. S. Army transport service in the dry Southwest.

As with many good ideas for govern-

THE CAMELS ARE COMING!

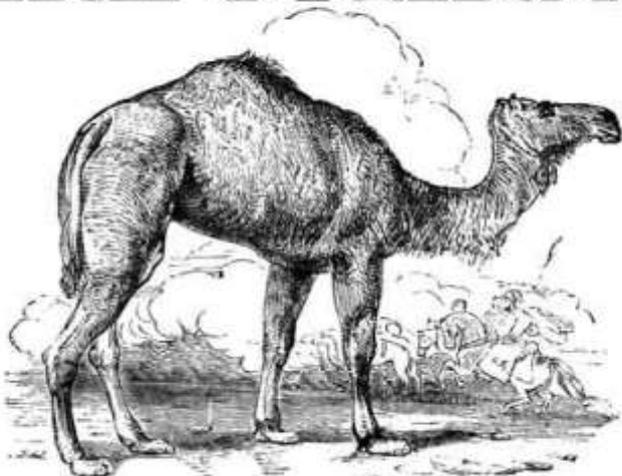


Photo: peashooter85.com

SEE THE U.S. CAMEL CORPS!

ment, Crosman's report was ignored for five years until Jefferson Davis got hold of it. A senator from Mississippi at the time, Davis was convinced of its wisdom. When he was appointed Secretary of War under Franklin Pierce in 1853, Davis convinced Congress to fund the Great Camel Experiment with a \$30,000 appropriation.

Major Henry C. Wayne was assigned to recruit the animals, and to hire Arab men to train the soldiers in their care and feeding and to drive the camels.

Arriving in the Middle East in 1855, Wayne and assistant, Lieutenant David Dixon Porter, purchased 77 camels from Tunisia, Greece, Malta, Egypt, and Turkey, and hired five camel drivers, including one Hadji Ali from Syria.

The camels and attendants were shipped to Indianola, Texas, ultimately landing in Camp Verde, Texas, and officially dubbed the Camel Corps. Tests showed that the camels could carry heavy loads and travel over ground which regular pack animals

found difficult.

In 1856, Lt. Edward Fitzgerald Beale led the first camel group to survey lands between Fort Defiance, Arizona, and the Colorado River near Benicia, California. The caravan of 25 camels was a success.

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

Though the camels were a success, there were problems with the other animals that accompanied the missions. The horses and mules were terrified by the massive animals. The camels, being somewhat obstinate, traveled at their own pace and would not keep up with the horses. But, the general consensus was that the animals were useful to the Army transport system.

Bigger problems soon derailed the

program. At the approach of the Civil War, the program was forgotten. Jefferson Davis, its biggest and most influential supporter, left to lead the Confederacy. The new Union Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, began a push to eliminate the Camel Corps. Lt. Beale became concerned for the animals and offered to board them on his private property, but the Secretary ordered them sold. Many were purchased by private owners, but a few escaped into the West and British Columbia. The Camel Corps was no more, and the camels and their attendants scattered across the west.

Hadji Ali, the camel driver from Syria, was called "Hi Jolly" by the troops, who had trouble with his Arabic name. Hi Jolly enamored himself of his comrades when the caravan was under attack by Indians. Drawing himself up to his full size, he unsheathed his long, curved Arabian scimitar and charged them on camelback, giving a hearty Bedouin yell at the top of his lungs, with his flowing red cape flapping in the desert wind. The terrified Indians scattered, never having seen a screaming Arab or a camel before. A museum display at the 11th Armored Cavalry Museum at Fort Irwin, California, is dedicated to Hi Jolly. When the camels were turned loose, camel driver Hi Jolly spent the rest of his life in Quartzite, Arizona, with his two lovely, but illegal, wives.

Meanwhile, one of the camels, "Old Douglas," ended up in Mississippi. He became the regimental mascot for his Confederate comrades in Company A of the Forty-third Mississippi Infantry and was assigned the job of hauling instruments for the regimental band. Old Douglas was bad-tempered and belligerent and especially did not like being led by a rope or to be tied down. He often broke free of his tether. He never wandered far, though. Horses,

however, did not like him, and he once caused a stampede that injured many and killed two.

Old Douglas, however, became a war hero. He accompanied "Old Pap," General Sterling Price, into the Battle of Iuka, Mississippi, in September of 1862, and participated in the Battle of Corinth. With Minnie balls and grape-shot whizzing right and left, he managed to come out of the battles unscathed.

Sadly, Old Douglas's luck ran out. He was killed by a Union sharpshooter at the Siege of Vicksburg and was unceremoniously eaten by the Union troops.

Outraged by his senseless murder and the blatant cannibalism, his Confederate comrades pledged vengeance. His commander, Colonel Bevier, picked six of his best snipers and they succeeded in bringing down the villain.

Though his body is gone, Old Douglas does have a memorial stone at Vicksburg's Cedar Hill Cemetery.

The wildest, most improbable story, however, is about the Red Ghost.

This story claims that 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 furiously, then the ear-piercing scream of the victim. She looked out and saw something huge and red run by the window, with something on its back. Authorities investigated and found large, cloven footprints by the body and wisps of strange red hair snagged 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, recognized that it was a camel and that it had a saddle with what looked like a skeleton tied to it. Firing shots at it, the great, reddish-colored beast disappeared at great speed into the desert.

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

Now the camel was spotted everywhere with the headless skeleton in the saddle. The local folks 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 out of proportion with the facts.

Finally, the Red Ghost was brought down by a rancher who caught it grazing in his garden. When he examined the body he found that someone, indeed, had tied a human corpse to the saddle.

Soon a story arose which explained that the body was that of a young soldier with the Camel Corps who had a problem learning to ride his beast and staying in the saddle. Pranking buddies tied him into the saddle so securely that he couldn't get loose. But, inevitably, as in all stories of this sort, the camel was spooked and ran off into the desert with his unwilling rider screaming for help, never to be seen until long years later when the Red Ghost was brought to ground in the rancher's garden patch.

Some say that still, 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 pounding, trampling cloven feet. Believe it, or not.

The last camel in the Great American Camel Experiment died in 1934, at Griffith Park in Los Angeles. Topsy, as she was called, 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 with arthritis, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, that zookeepers had to put her down. Of note is the fact that the average lifespan of camels is 40-50 years.

Finally, if you wish to make a pilgrimage to Topsy's grave you must travel to Quartzite, Arizona, to the grave of Hi Jolly. Topsy's ashes were shipped there and interred in a vault that is a part of Hi Jolly's pyramid grave marker.



Photo: TinKan: virtualtourist.com



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