

FIRST DRAFT

Camel Corps experiment ran into humps in the road

Decades before the U.S. Army attempted to use bicycles to move soldiers in the West, it tried another, more ancient form of transportation: camels.

Problem was, the soldiers and civilians associated with the camels didn't have much affection for them.

Camels were a public nuisance because of their smell,

claimed a lawsuit in California, where 37 camels were held during the Civil War.

They were also cantankerous creatures. A former slave from Texas recalled years later that he helped Confederate soldiers push one camel off a cliff because the animal was "naturally hard to get along with."

Perhaps those objections could have been overcome. But the Civil War intervened, and the experiment was abandoned. Many of the Army's camels in Texas ended up with the Confederate Army.

When the war had ended, the remaining camels were held in Texas and California. There was little enthusiasm for them in the post-war Army. Most were sold at auction, primarily to circuses, though a few went to miners and ranchers.

It was a sad ending for animals that had sparked great enthusiasm when they first arrived in the United States.

That was in May 1856, when nine dromedary (single hump) and 23 Bactrian (two-hump) camels, along with one hybrid and one camel calf reached Indianola, Texas, aboard the ship Supply.

That was two decades after camel use by the U.S. Army had first been proposed, and eight years after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo added more than a half-million square miles of territory to the United States, primarily in the desert Southwest.

One of the early supporters of the Camel Corps was Jefferson Davis, first as a U.S. senator from Mississippi, then as U.S. Secretary of War, before he became president of the Confederacy.

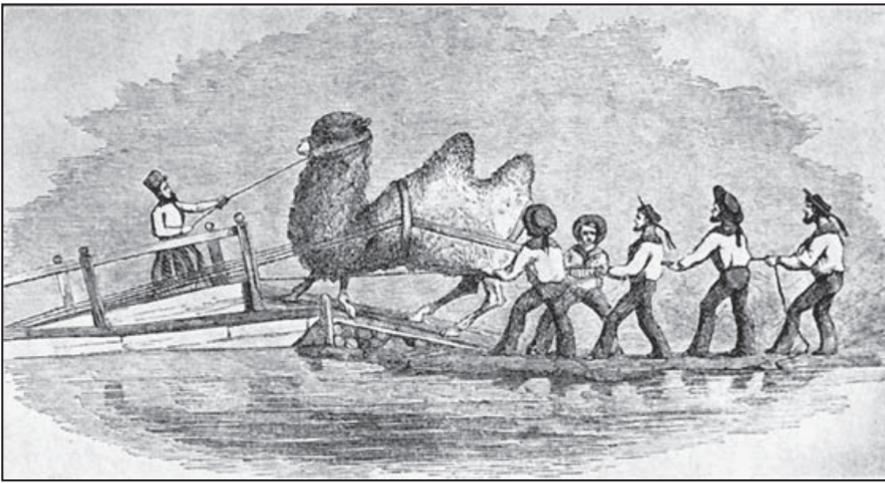
In 1855, Secretary of War Davis sent Army Maj. Henry Wayne and Navy Lt. David Dixon Porter to Cairo, Egypt, and Constantinople (now Istanbul), Turkey, in search of camels.

After 87 days at sea, in specially made stalls aboard the Supply, the camels were thrilled to step onto Texas soil.

"On being landed, and feeling once again the solid earth beneath them, the camels became excited to an almost uncontrollable degree, rearing, kicking, crying out, breaking halters, tearing up pickets, and ... demonstrating their enjoyment of the liberty of the soil," Wayne wrote.

Porter arrived later in 1856 and returned with another 41 camels.

It was hoped the camels could be used by cavalry troops in battle. But the primary purpose for the camels was to haul freight. Davis thought they could haul goods to military posts in far-flung regions of the



PUBLIC DOMAIN PHOTOS

This drawing shows the loading of a camel onto a ship for the U.S. Army's Camel Corps, 1855 or 1856.



A drawing of Edward Beale when he was a midshipman with the U.S. Navy.

Southwest, where roads were poor or nonexistent.

As cavalry animals, the camels proved a disappointment. They were not as nimble as horses. They grew excited and hard to manage. And, despite their legendary endurance, when they got excited they quickly experienced shortness of breath.

Horse-trained cavalry troopers experienced motion sickness in the rolling gait of the camels. They also despised the animals' smell, their orneriness, and the fact that camels would often try to bite them.

Discouraged, Wayne reported that camels wouldn't work to carry troops into battle. But he remained convinced of their usefulness for freight-hauling.

He staged demonstrations in which camels carried loads of more than 1,200 pounds apiece — far more than a horse or pack mule — and proved they could travel over the rough Texas ground while loaded faster than mule-drawn wagons.

But a more difficult test was needed. And in 1857, the Army decided to add 25 camels to an expedition that was to survey a road across what's now Arizona. The expedition began at Camp Verde, north of San Antonio, and was to travel more than 1,300 miles across desert country to Fort Mojave, north of what is now Lake Havasu on the Colorado River.

Assigned to lead the expedition was a former military man, Edward Fitzgerald Beale. In 1853, Beale had led a railroad survey expedition from St. Louis to Los Angeles.



This monument in Quartzite, Arizona, is for Hi Jolly, whose real name was Hadji Ali. He came to the U.S. with the camels and accompanied Edward Beale on his 1857 expedition.

That expedition traveled through Colorado, went over Cochetopa Pass, then down the Gunnison River to the Uncompahgre Valley, the Grand Valley and headed west across Utah.

Beale spent nearly two weeks in the Uncompahgre Valley, hunting and trading with Ute Indians in the summer of 1853.

When he began his 1857 journey across Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, Beale was not initially impressed with the camels. They had trouble keeping up with the wagons, he said.

But two weeks later, he reported the large beasts had gotten accustomed to the terrain and had no problems keeping up with the wagons.

Also, despite what many others said, Beale wrote: "Certainly there never was anything so patient and enduring and so little troublesome," as the camels. The animals were "so perfectly docile and quiet that they are the admiration of the whole camp," he added.

Near the modern town of Winslow, Arizona, the expedition halted, low on water and more than 20 miles from any spring or river. The mules on the journey became frantic for water.

But, Beale said, "The camels appeared to view this proceeding with great contempt, and kept quietly browsing on the grass and bushes."

The head camel driver on the expedition was a young Syrian man named Hadji Ali, who had arrived in Texas with the first shipment of camels. His name was soon changed to "Hi Jolly" by the soldiers.

After he died in 1902 in Arizona, a monument to him was

erected in Quartzite.

The expedition reached Fort Mohave in mid-October, successfully completing the road survey. Parts of what became known as the Beale Road were later incorporated into the Route 66 highway. Portions of the road remain as primitive as in Beale's day. They can be visited in the Kaibab National Forest in Arizona.

After completing the survey, Beale continued on with the camels to Fort Tejon, about 300 miles away in California. When he headed east, he left most of his camels at Fort Tejon.

After receiving a report from Beale, then Secretary of War John B. Floyd declared, "The entire adaptation of the camels to military operations on the plains may now be taken as demonstrated."

Floyd sought an appropriation to purchase 1,000 camels in 1858 and again in 1859, both times without success. So, although the Army continued to own some camels until 1866, the Camel Corps was disbanded and the camel experiment largely forgotten.

Sources: "The United States Army Camel Corps 1856-66," by John Shapard, *Military Review*, August 1975; "Edward Fitzgerald Beale," *Journal of Sierra Nevada History and Biography*, Winter 2013. "Beale Wagon Road Historic Trail No. 61," *Kaibab National Forest*; "One of America's first Syrian immigrants helped conquer the West — with camels," by Naomi Gingold, *PRI's The World*, May 15, 2017.

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The Daily Sentinel (ISSN 1445-8962)
Printed editions published Wednesday thru Sunday, electronic editions published every morning at 734 S. Seventh Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501.
Periodical Postage paid at Grand Junction, CO.
Carrier home delivery prices: 13 weeks - \$65.00, 26 weeks - \$130.00, 52 weeks - \$260.00.
Weekend delivery packages: Wednesday thru Sunday - \$244.40, Friday thru Sunday - \$197.60.
Saturday & Sunday - \$163.80, Sunday only - \$163.80.
Weekend Delivery includes the following date in 2018: Nov. 22.
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Montrose RVs burglarized

Montrose Police Department and Montrose Regional Crime Stoppers are seeking information about the burglaries of two businesses that sell recreational vehicles and trailers.

Twenty recreational vehicles at Affordable Trailers, 2760 N. Townsend Ave., and four recreational vehicles at Humphrey RV Trailers, 4088 N. Townsend Ave., were broken into during the evening of Nov. 7 or early morning of Nov. 8, according to the Montrose Police Department.

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