

## The Time Camels Came to Texas

By Coley Turner

For a fun look at a legendary Texas animal, let's journey back to the nineteenth century. Almost 150 years ago, southeastern Arizona lived in fear of a mysterious beast that had emerged from the desert to terrorize their towns. Leading from the body of a woman who was fetching water were giant footprints none could recognize. Long strands of coarse red hair, for which it was dubbed 'The Red Ghost', hung from cacti nearby.

Months after the initial attack, a group of prospectors had their tents trampled in the night, but caught a glimpse of the culprit by moonlight. They said that it was 10 feet tall and ridden by the devil himself. One cowboy claimed to have chased it only for it to vanish into thin air, and another told a newspaper he saw it kill and eat a grizzly bear.

While these stories were exaggerated, The Red Ghost was very real, and not an apparition at all. It was later sighted by US Army Veteran Cyrus Hamblin, who recognized it due to his service. The Red Ghost was a dromedary camel, and was also a veteran of the US Army.

Years earlier, Jefferson Davis, who was serving under President Franklin Pierce, was frustrated with the limitations of horses and mules when surveying the area now known as Death Valley. Davis, upon reading of the hardiness of the camels in the Middle East, saw a solution.

With the help of legendary western explorer Edward F. Beale, 34 camels arrived in Indianola, Texas on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1856. Though they excelled at every task set to them, America never warmed up to them. Their praises were sung by the more open-minded recruits, but the vast majority could not part with their horses for the huge, unfamiliar animals. The camel's smell was often cited as a reason to stick with their horse companions. The Camel Corp was short lived, and the animals were scattered to the winds within ten years of their formation.

Some of the Texas camels were sold to the circus, others set loose, but the fate of many remained a mystery, including how the Red Ghost came to have a passenger. While it wasn't the devil riding the camel, the prospectors were right about seeing a figure on its back.

In 1893 in Ore City, Texas farmer Mizoo Hastings shot and killed the Red Ghost from his cabin window, and found the remains of a man tied to its back. Some theorize the man was tied there in order to overcome a distaste of camels, but something happened to spook the animal and it was unable to be captured. Whatever the reason, Hastings had solved the mystery of the strange Red Ghost.

Sightings of camels in eastern Arizona and western Texas persisted even into the 1900s, but none have been confirmed in a very long time. If you find yourself in the area, you may want to keep an eye out for red hairs hanging from cacti - or large cloven hoofprints in the sand... you never know where a camel will be lurking.



This is one of two known verified photos of a member of the US Camel Corps- though this Camel came to America via Indianola, Texas, it is pictured here at Fort Tejon, California. Rudolph D'Heureuse, who published a series of forty-one photos in 1863 ref Sorenson, Michael K.. A Most Curious Corps. Military Images Magazine. Archived from the original on 2014-07-28. Retrieved on 13 February 2013.</ref>, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons



“Army Camel Corp Training”, circa 1916. Precious few photos of the US Camel Corp have survived, if they were ever taken at all. This photo depicts Army Camel Corp training in

Mengele Park, Australia- though it is likely an accurate representation of our Texan camel experiment as well. unknown, Fairfax Archive, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons