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UNCLE SAM'S CAMEL CORPS

FRED S. PERRINE

It is hard for this generation to realize, in the present day of aeroplanes and automobiles, the transportation problems faced by Uncle Sam in the great Southwest, three-quarters of a century ago. Guarding the then frontier against the raids of the Apaches, Comanches and other savage tribes, and locating and building roads thru that vast country to the Pacific coast, was indeed a problem.

One of the greatest troubles experienced was the transportation of troops and supplies across the arid plains of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California, and the various mountain chains of the three latter states, or rather, territories.

Prominent among the leaders of a new scheme of transportation were Major Henry C. Wayne, U. S. A., and Edward F. Beale, formerly an officer in the Navy, but at that particular time, Superintendent of Indian Affairs in California.

For years Major Wayne had been an exponent of a system of army transportation in which camels or dromedaries were to be used as a means of conveying troops and supplies across the desert plains of the Southwest, from the Mississippi River to California. He was ably seconded by Superintendent Beale, who as a member of Commodore Stockton's command, had made several trips across the continent, to and from Washington, D. C., with dispatches for the government, and who undoubtedly realized, more than any one else the necessity of a better means of transportation for the troops and their supplies, than the horse and mule trains then being used.

Enlisting the support of Hon. Jefferson Davis, who was then Secretary of War, and who was heartily in accord with the experiment, Congress was appealed to for

an appropriation to purchase camels and dromedaries, and to provide funds for carrying out the experiment. For several years Secretary Davis made recommendations to Congress, and at last an appropriation of \$30,000.00 was made, which was approved on March 3, 1855.

No time was now lost, and on May 10, 1855, Major Wayne was ordered to proceed to the Levant; Lieutenant David D. Porter, then in command of the U. S. Storeship "Supply," which was at that time in New York harbor taking in supplies for the Mediterranean squadron, received instructions to meet Major Wayne at Spezzia, after discharging cargo, and to co-operate and act jointly with him in the purchase of such camels and dromedaries as they were able to obtain.

Major Wayne's instructions were very explicit. He was to obtain all the information that was possible in England, and especially from the French War Ministry, who had been using camels in Africa for some time. He visited the Zoological Gardens in London where several camels were in captivity, then proceeded to Paris, where he secured all the information that was available. In the meantime Lieutenant Porter had arrived at Spezzia, and learning that Major Wayne would not arrive for at least a week, decided to go to Pisa, where there was a herd of about 250 camels, the property of the grand duke. Gleaning all the data that he could regarding the habits etc., of the camel, he returned to Spezzia, where he was met by Major Wayne. Upon comparing notes they decided that there were a great many things regarding camels that they did not know, and in order to secure this knowledge first hand they sailed for Tunis, July 30, 1855, where they purposed to buy one camel, so that they could study its habits and its management on shipboard. Arriving at Tunis they made their purchase of a sample camel, and were very agreeably surprised when they were advised by the Bey of Tunis, that he would be very much pleased to present to them as a gift to the President and the people of the United States,

a fine camel. On the 9th of August they received two camels as gifts, instead of one, both stallions, one full grown and the other young.

With the three camels on board the ship set sail for Malta, Smyrna, and finally arrived at Constantinople. Reporting from this place Major Wayne states that on the voyage the camels had given them less trouble than horses would have done, but that one of them showed symptoms of the itch, a very common affliction among camels.

After making a trip to the Crimea, where they received considerable information from British officers, they returned to Constantinople, where it was decided to sell the camel which had developed the itch, and also the one which they had purchased in Tunis. Accordingly they were landed and sold to a butcher "for purposes best known to himself" for 1096 piastres equal to about \$44.00.

While at Constantinople our officers were informed that the Sultan wished to present to them, four fine camels. There was such a delay, however, in getting them from the interior, that the ship was compelled to sail for Alexandria, Egypt, without them. In Egypt, it was expected that they would be able to purchase ten dromedaries and four camels of burden. Major Wayne bought five dromedaries at Cairo, trusting to luck to get a permit to ship them, there being an embargo on their exportation from the country. He applied for permission to export 20 camels and after much correspondence permission was granted to ship two. After a great deal of wire pulling he received a permit to ship two males and two females, and it was not until Consul General Edwin DeLeon took a hand in the matter that permission was granted for the exportation of ten camels. In his report Major Wayne states "Yesterday, at Mr. DeLeon's request, I gave him two Minie rifles, as he said he had promised them to the viceroy on the 30th ultimo. To make the gift complete I added a bullet-mould

and a swedge." This is undoubtedly, the answer to the question, "How did he get the permit?"

After the question of the permit was settled, the viceroy of Egypt decided that he would like to present to the United States six of the very finest dromedaries in Egypt. Let us see what Lieutenant Porter has to say about this very valuable present, in his report to the Secretary of War:—

It was very gratifying to me to hear that we were to receive six dromedaries from his highness the viceroy's own stock. Of course I expected nothing but the very best blood of Oman or Nubia, knowing that the eastern potentates take a pride in making presents of the choicest kind. I felt that you would be very much disappointed in our bringing home so few dromedaries, and I was very glad to get the six that were promised. The selection of the animals was placed in the hands of the governor of Alexandria; he passed the matter on to the next in office, and he in turn passed it on still to a "cavass" or under officer, who went to work to make a handsome profit out of the business. After more than a week's delay, and many inquiries on my part as to when we might expect them, I was at last informed that the dromedaries were ready, to be delivered to any one I might send for them. I sent an officer to receive them, who returned in a few minutes and informed me that the animals were wretched in appearance, and so rotten with disease, that he would not take the responsibility of accepting them without further orders. To avoid all mistakes, I went and inspected them myself, and found them infinitely worse than they had been represented; they were not dromedaries at all, but the common street camel of Alexandria, the most ill used and wretched looking beast in the world. What made the matter worse, two of them had been purchased by Major Wayne, in Cairo, and rejected, on their arrival in Alexandria, because they turned out to be diseased, and they were about the best of the lot presented.

The whole affair, at first, looked like a studied insult, for the purpose of turning the expedition into ridicule. I promptly refused to receive the present, and the accom-

panying correspondence took place, which will explain the whole affair to you.

I felt that there was some improper course pursued by the subordinates of the pasha, and I thought it my duty to expose it. Mr. DeLeon approved of my course, and warmly seconded my remonstrances. These letters will tend to show how many impediments are thrown in the way of strangers in the prosecution of any purpose in Egypt. The well intended liberality of his highness the viceroy is often turned aside by his subordinates, who thereby reap some small advantage themselves, at the risk even of meeting with severe punishment. This piece of trickery caused another delay of a week; but when it was brought to the notice of his highness the viceroy, he put the matter in proper hands, and in seven days a fair lot of dromedaries were brought down from the interior, and six were selected out of fifteen, two males and four females.

The "Supply" sailed from Alexandria for Smyrna, with nine dromedaries, six of which had been presented by the viceroy of Egypt, and the Tunis camel. At Alexandria three Arabs were hired to accompany the expedition to America, and serve for one year. The care of the camels was under the direction of Albert Ray, wagon and forage master, who had served in the Mexican war, and who had enlisted with Lieutenant Porter for this particular purpose. Mr. G. H. Heap, who had been sent ahead from Alexandria to Smyrna to purchase the balance of the cargo, had succeeded in his duty, and on the arrival of the "Supply" at Smyrna, the camels and dromedaries purchased by him were embarked.

The roll call of this first cargo of camels was as follows:—

1 Tunis camel of burden	male.
1 Senaar dromedary	male.
1 Muscat dromedary	female.
2 Siout dromedaries	males.
4 Siout dromedaries	females.
1 Mt Sinai dromedary	male.
2 Bactrian camels	males.

- 1 Booghdee or Tuilu, male, produce of the Bactrian male and the Arabian female.
- 4 Arabian camels of burden males.
- 15 Arabian camels of burden females.
- 1 Arabian camel, 24 days old male.

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These camels were to be landed at Indianola, Texas, where the expedition expected to arrive about April 15, 1856.

On the 13th of April, 1856, the "Supply" put into Kingston, Jamaica, where they remained about two weeks. The arrival of the "Supply," at Kingston created quite a furor, as few of the inhabitants had ever seen a camel, and on one day more than 4000 people visited the menagerie abroad the "Supply." The voyage so far had been very stormy, and a severe gale and head winds had prevented their stopping at the Canary Islands, as was the original intention.

On April 29, 1856, they made Pass Cavallo, and on the 1st of May were met by the steamer "Fashion," Captain Baker, with two schooners in tow. After making the attempt to transfer one of the camels, they gave it up as a bad job, as there were too many chances of injuring the camels on account of the roughness of the sea. It was decided therefore to make for Balize at the mouth of the Mississippi, and so on the 10th of May the camels were transferred to the "Fashion" in the south west passage of the Mississippi River. On May 14, 1856, the cargo was safely landed at "Powder Horn," Indianola, Texas, thirty-four camels being brought ashore, being one more than they had started with.

On the voyage six calves were born, of which four died, and one of the original thirty-three died. This left thirty-two of the original stock, and two calves, all of which were landed safely.

The cost of the expedition up to date had been about

\$8000.00 leaving \$12,000.00 placed to the credit of Major Wayne, still to be expended. Owing to the very favorable reports which had been made by both officers, together with the fact that more animals were needed to complete the experiment, and also because the appropriation had been only partly expended, Lieutenant Porter received orders dated June 26, 1856, to return to the East for another cargo. He was accompanied by Mr. G. H. Heap, who had proven so valuable on the first expedition.

We will leave the second expedition here and take up the story of the first cargo which had been landed at Indianola. On June 4, Major Wayne left with the camels and after thirteen days travel arrived at San Antonio. They had been loaded lightly for the trip and all arrived safely, and without having caused any trouble. On this trip a female camel was born, which unfortunately, survived only one day.

A camping place had already been arranged at the head waters of the San Pedro, about two miles from town. This site was owned by the corporation of San Antonio, and was occupied "free of any charge." A few days later Major Wayne reported that the proximity to town was not beneficial to either the men or animals, and the camp was moved out to the Medina to the ranch of Major Howard of San Antonio, with whom temporary arrangements had been made. After several weeks of investigation a permanent camp was made at Green Valley, and named Camp Verde, where buildings were erected to shelter the animals. During this interval, two of the animals had died, both females, one evidently from "a heavy blow or blows inflicted on the neck of the animal" and the other from causes unknown.

And now we come to a very interesting item, not only an historical item, but one which shows that every effort was made to put the camel in as favorable light as possible, with the "powers that were." Major Wayne wrote to Secretary Davis that he was enclosing "herewith a pair of

socks knit for the President by Mrs. Mary A. Shirkey, of Victoria, Texas, (lately of Virginia) from the pile of one of our camels." There is no record to show whether President Pierce received these socks, or if Secretary Davis confiscated them for his own use.

During the year 1856, several expeditions were made with the first lot of camels, and the reports made by the several officers in charge, showed that they were satisfactory in every respect, and were superior to the horse and mule trains, with which they were tried out.

Lieutenant Porter, reporting from Smyrna, Nov. 14, 1856, states:—

We shall sail tomorrow for the United States. . . . Mr. Heap has purchased a beautiful lot of animals, all young. . . Six of the camels have been presented by the Sultan, through our Minister at Constantinople. . . We shall sail with forty-four camels in all. . . I think our present home voyage will be about the same as last, and if the steamer will be ready on the 20th of January, I hope by that time to get to the mouth of the Mississippi.

Owing to storms, head winds and bad weather, Porter did not arrive at his destination until January 30, and on February 10, 1857, forty-one camels were landed at Indianola in good condition, three having died on the voyage.

In all seventy-five camels and dromedaries, reached the United States in safety, enough to make the experiment. They were tried out in different ways, and on different expeditions in the Southwest, and every officer who was connected with these expeditions reported very favorably on their use.

The following news item dated Los Angeles, Cal., Nov. 23, 1857, and appearing in the Portland, Ore., *Oregonian*, Dec. 26, 1857, gives an idea of the general opinion of the different officers, who had come in contact with the Camel Corps:—

'The camels are coming;' and the camels have come.

On the 9th inst., just as the express wagon wheeled out of one end of town with the Los Angeles budgets for San Francisco, two tall forerunners of the "Dromedary Line," ridden by Lieut. Beale and companion, came trotting in with a speedy and somewhat altitudinous motion, at the other end with their Atlantic budgets. Their approach made quite a stir among the native population, most of whom had never seen the like, and by the time the docile creatures were kneeling at the door of the hotel for their masters to dismount, the caravan was perfectly surrounded and obscured. After a days stoppage they took up their burdens and set out with their "long measure" trot for Fort Tejon, where I believe the remainder of the train, twenty-five in number will bring up. This mode of traversing the great plains and mountains will succeed. One of the company informed me that these animals would climb a mountain with a load on its back, where a mule could not get up without a load; even getting down on their knees to make the ascent of the steepest places. They thrive on grease-wood, eat the cactus without burning off the prickles, and live well where our domestic animals would die.

While a great majority of the Army officers, who had come in contact with the camels were very much in favor of their being retained in the service, the "mule-skinners" of the Army did not share their opinion, and abused the animals in many ways.

At the beginning of the Civil War, the camel stations in Texas passed into the hands of the Confederates, from whom they received scant attention. The writer has found only one record showing that they were made use of by them. A paragraph taken from the Portland, Ore., *Oregonian* of Nov. 20, 1865, reads as follows:—

A correspondent asked the other day, what had become of the camels the U. S. had in Texas before the war. We have come upon traces of one of these animals which seems to have joined the rebels. The *Memphis Argus* says:— The first effort to introduce the camel into this country was in process of successful experiment when the war came and put a stop to it. One of the camels originally imported for the purpose fell into the hands of one of

Sterling Price's Captains of infantry, commanding a company from Noxubee County, (Miss.), who used it all through the war to carry his own and the whole company's baggage. Many a time on the march he might have been seen swinging easily along under a little mountain of carpet sacks, cooking utensils, blankets etc., amounting in all to at least 1200 lbs.—*New York Post*.

Many were allowed to escape from the different camps, and they wandered over the plains and desert places of the Southwest. There are numerous recorded instances where soldiers or hunters have seen or pursued them; these instances occurring with decreasing frequency as late as 1893. In 1901 wild camels were seen in the deserts of Arizona, and Sonora, Mexico.

One band of three wandered up into Arkansas, during the Civil War, where they were captured by Union forces, and sent to a point on the Des Moines River in Iowa, where they were later ordered to be sold at public auction.

On Sept. 9, 1863, the last of the herd in California, thrity-five in number, were ordered sold at public auction, and were purchased by Samuel McLaughlin, in whose care they had been for some time. It is probable that most of the animals found their way into menageries and zoological gardens.

At the close of the Civil War, the camels remaining at Camp Verde, Texas, numbered forty-four, and in March 1866, were ordered sold at auction. The bids were opened at New Orleans, and were respectively \$5.00, \$10.00, and \$31.00 each. They were sold to Col. Bethel Coopwood at \$31.00 each, and delivered to him at San Antonio, Texas, and he kept them in that vicinity until the end of the year, when they were driven into Mexico.

In January, 1867, twelve of them were sold to a circus, and the remainder appear to have been, during the next fifteen years, disposed of in the same manner.

As late as 1903, the *San Antonio Express* speaks of having observed in one of the midway shows which had exhibited in that city, a camel which carried the U. S. brand.

Of the seventy-five camels imported by the War Department nothing but the skeleton of one of them remains in the possession of the government. This animal was killed by one of its mates at Fort Tejon, California, and its skeleton reposes in the National Museum at Washington, D. C.

UNCLE SAM'S CAMEL CORPS

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