



California Missions
Keeping the Past Present

California Stories

How the Camels Came to California

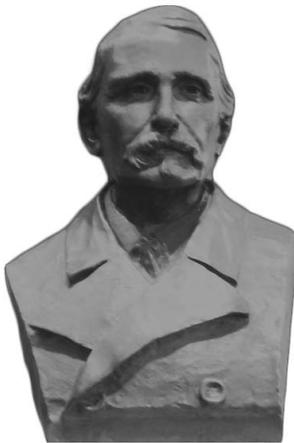


The California Stories are a collection of interesting and historical stories from early California and the California Missions written by David J. McLaughlin.



How the Camels Came to California

This is the story of the United States Army's experiment with camels and the lives of two key players in that saga.

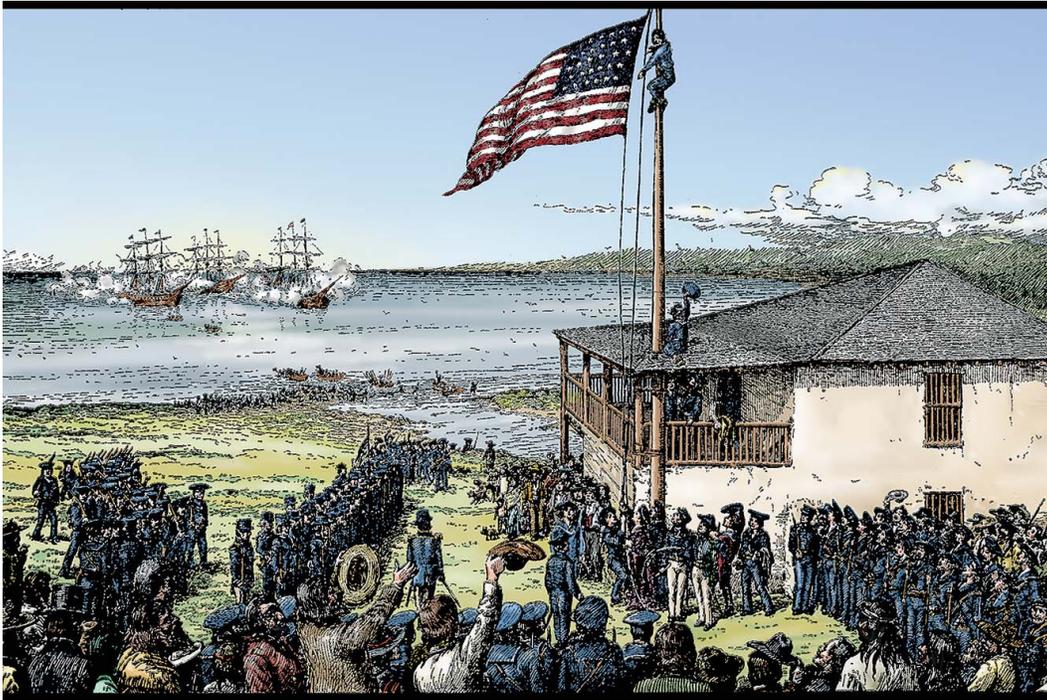


*Edward Fitzgerald Beale
(1822-1893)*

A young U.S. Navy officer was the man who brought the first camels to California in 1857 introducing another colorful character into the annals of the West.

The story starts in the critical months before the Bear Flag Revolt and the United States occupation of California. A young U.S. Navy officer, Edward Fitzgerald Beale was entrusted with the delivery of sensitive dispatches to Washington from Commodore Robert Stockton, the head of the United States Pacific Squadron. Beale came from a long line of distinguished navy officers. Both his father and grandfather had served with distinction and both had been awarded the Medal of Honor.

Lt. Beale went on to play a critical role in the subsequent conflict with Mexico. He and Kit Carson crept through enemy lines to bring reinforcements to General Stephen Kearney during the Battle of San Pasqual in 1846. After the conclusion of fighting in California, the United States invaded Mexico and successfully concluded the conflict.



*United States Flag at Monterey, a drawing by Alexander Harmer
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After the war, Beale continued to be at the center of events in California. He delivered the official dispatches on the discovery of gold back east. He is best remembered as the man who brought the first camels to California. In 1857, Beale led a surveying expedition from El Paso, Texas to California, using 25 camels imported from Tunis.



The "Camel Corp" on its way to California, after a painting by William Ahrendt

The camels were capable of traveling for days without water, carried much heavier loads than mules, and could thrive on forage that mules wouldn't touch.

This experiment introduced another colorful character into the annals of the West, a Syrian camel driver named Hadji Ali, who was brought to the United States to train our soldiers to handle camels and who accompanied Lt. Beale on the first camel expedition.

Hadji Ali's easygoing nature - and American's ignorance of Arabic - left him with the nickname "Hi Jolly".



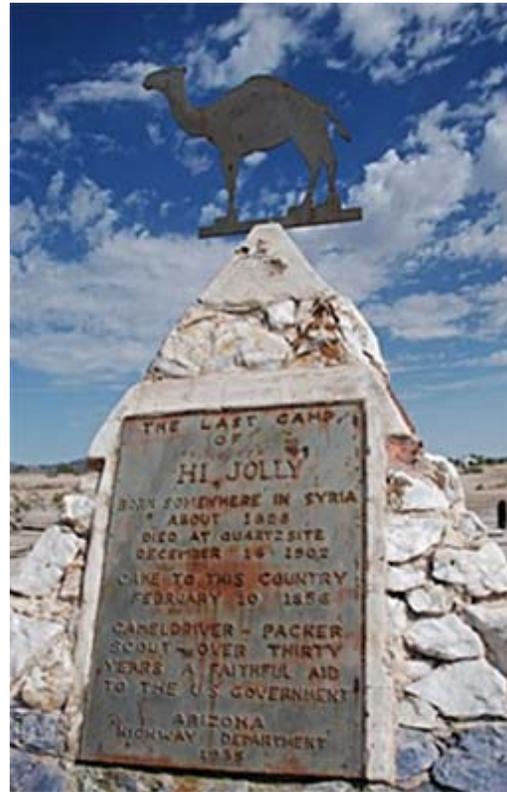
Hi Jolly took part in numerous camel projects throughout California and Arizona over the next few years. The Army continued the experimental use of camels until shortly after the start of the Civil War. They concluded that camels were not suitable as mounts. Soldiers disliked their strong smell, the camels had a tendency to bite and spit and they frightened horses.

Hi Jolly remained in the United States, where he prospected for gold, hauled freight and scouted for the United States Army. He became a United States citizen in

1880 and married Gertrude Serna of Tucson with whom he had two daughters. A monument to this Arab pioneer was erected in 1935 in Quartzsite, Arizona.



Gertrude Serna and Hadji Ali



Monument in Quartzsite, AZ