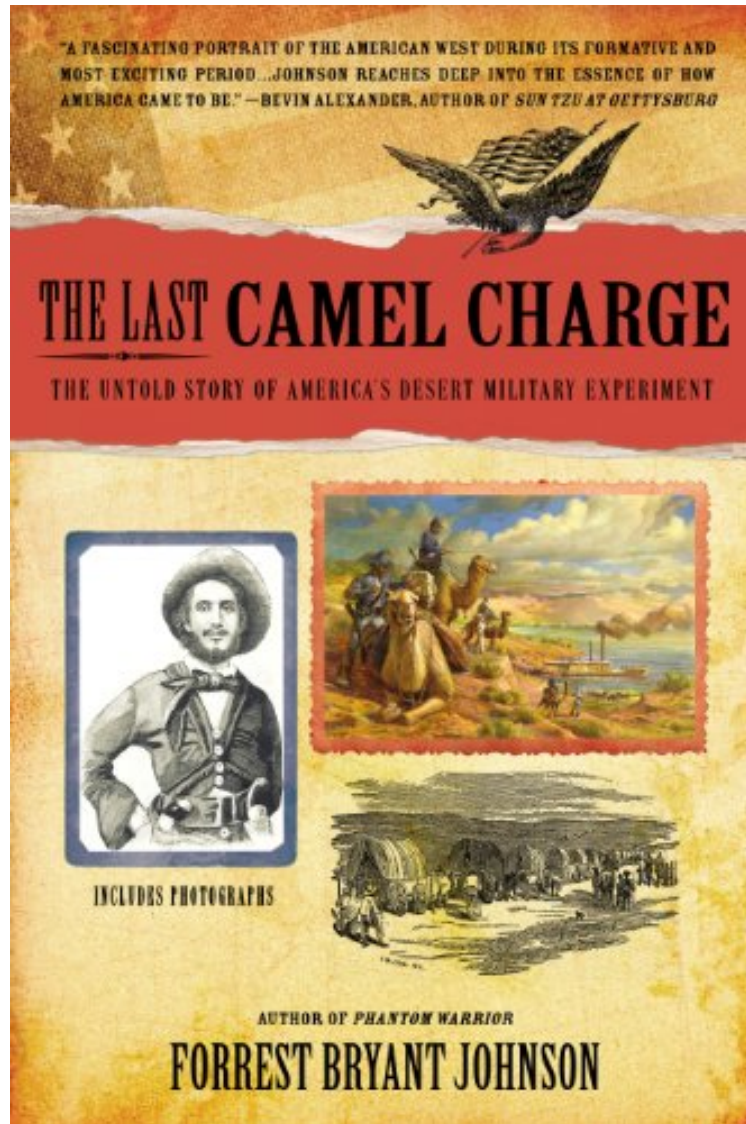


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## The Last Camel Charge: The Untold Story of America's Desert Military Experiment

Forrest Bryant Johnson

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**Forrest Bryant Johnson : The Last Camel Charge: The Untold Story of America's Desert Military Experiment** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Last Camel Charge: The Untold Story of America's Desert Military Experiment:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Most History Books Get It WrongBy FredTownWardIf you've ever studied any history mentioning the US government's experiment in using camels just prior to the Civil War, chances are you were told it was a failure, but as this fast moving, draws you right in, reads like a novel history amply

demonstrates, the camel experiment was a complete and total success, exceeding even proponents' wildest hopes. The Problem was the acquisition of a vast unwatered desert region as part of the settlement ending the Mexican-American War, territory that the Army would need to be able to control. The new national border would need to be patrolled, forts would need to be built and kept supplied, wild places would need to be explored and mapped, roads would need to be surveyed and built, and a watch at the very least would need to be kept on two restive populations: the various Indian tribes and the Mormons, especially as large numbers of settlers began to head west through this region to California, and for this task the horses, donkeys, and mules that served quite well in other parts of the country were not entirely up to the task. To take one example it took two additional mule-drawn wagons just to haul the food and water necessary to get one mule-drawn wagon full of supplies through to Camp later Fort Yuma on the Colorado River. It is not known who deserves the most credit for suggesting the use of camels (several people seem to have come up with the idea independently), but it wasn't until March 3, 1855, that Congress finally authorized \$30,000.00 for the purchase and importation of camels, and thanks to good bargaining and future Admiral David Dixon Porter's brilliantly designed system for protecting them in transit, America successfully imported two shiploads of camels, having 70 healthy camels to test by the time the second shipload arrived on February 10, 1857. Now the experiments could begin, and the results were overwhelming. Camels could carry 2 to 4 times as much as any horse, mule, or donkey. Food did not need to be hauled for camels, since they actually preferred the native desert plants to grass. (About the only plant camels were known to refuse to eat was soap weed, a plant dangerous for infantry and animals to walk through because of its thorns, but since camels reacted to it by stomping it flat, they made a safe path for men and horses to follow.) Water did not need to be hauled for camels, since they carried their own internal supply, which they used very sparingly, and when water ran short, camels could (if allowed to) find unknown water sources if there were any within twenty miles or so, and they always knew whether the water was safe to drink or not. (When the Owens Survey Expedition, sent out to fix the position of the Nevada-California borderline, wandered into Death Valley and got lost, it was the camels who prevented the human expedition members from sharing the fate of the expedition mules and so many other previous visitors by continually finding water safe enough to drink.) Hauling wagon loads of supplies on their backs, camels could go where no wagons could, over almost any terrain (sand, mud, snow, rock) while maintaining a steady pace. Only sharp rocks and extremely slippery footing fazed them at all, and leather "shoes" tied around their feet solved the former while giving camels their heads solved the latter (when camels considered the footing too slippery, unprompted they'd get down on their "knees" and crawl fully loaded until the footing improved). Though obviously unused to it, when confronted with crossing swift and dangerous rivers, the camels ruminated a bit, seeming to consider, then proved themselves stronger and better swimmers than horses, mules, or donkeys. Contrary to rumor, camels proved quite docile and easy to control IF treated well. If not treated well, camels are quick to retaliate: spitting, biting, removing fingers. Fortunately, the camel drivers hired and imported along with the camels already knew this, and the Americans listened and learned quickly. Camels proved quite calm and steady under fire, content either to charge right at an enemy or to wait out a battle tied to a bush, though if left too long they tended to eat the bush they were tied to. In practice the panicked reaction some horses, mules, and donkeys had upon first meeting and/or smelling camels quickly subsided as they realized that camels were not predators, and they were soon all happily herded together. Finally, when unburdened, camels could run much faster than horses, up to around 45 mph, and safely hold it for about 70 miles, something that proved to be critical during the titular charge. Virtually every man who ever served with camels came to admire them and were effusive in their praise so why did the experiment come to an end? Primarily because of the Civil War, which rather obviously occupied the Army's attention with other things for quite a while. The experiment could have and should have continued afterwards, but with the transcontinental railroad going through and so many of the camels' advocates having served the Confederacy, the enthusiasm was gone. Camels would continue to be imported into the US in small numbers from time to time for various reasons, but unlike in Australia, which today is the home of a massive feral camel population, "wild" camels never reached a critical mass here like "wild" horses did. "Wild" camels were spotted from time to time into the middle of the 20th Century, but the small numbers of "wild" camels people still run across today might well be descended from later imports. In any case camels are still with us in America, living examples of the quintessentially perfect desert mount or beast of burden down to this very day. Author Forrest Bryant Johnson seamlessly interweaves the story of the camel experiments with the historical events of the time that justified, influenced, or interfered with them, and proves himself a masterful storyteller of the critical events from the abject horror of the Mormon perpetrated Mountain Meadows Massacre, arguably the worst wagon train massacre in all of western history, including treatment of women more in keeping with the practices of the Imperial Japanese Army in Nanjing than with a religious group that could rightly point to a history of being persecuted, to the thrilling camel charge of the title, against odds upwards of 50 to 1. It ought to be a movie or at least a docudrama. Defects? Really just the one. How could the Berkley Publishing Group POSSIBLY publish a book chock full of interesting historical tidbits and strange historical bedfellows like this one and not include an index? Hopefully, this will be fixed in some future edition. Note: An excellent recent middle grader provides a fictionalized account of this grand experiment from the POV of one of the camels: *Exiled: Memoirs Of A Camel*. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. *Amazing Story of the US*

Camel Corps By Nick Howes Somewhere in Texas there's a herd of wild camels. Unlike Bigfoot, a clear photo exists and can be found in the photo insert section of this book which recounts the amazing true story of their ancestors, brought to the US by the Army in the years before the Civil War. If you thought it was the giggle factor that killed the project, guess again. The camels were a huge success...easily outlasting horses and mules on the trail, enthusiastically eating cactus and plants other animals wouldn't touch, even able to lead the way to water in the midst of the desert. They could carry a huge amount of supplies, trod soil surfaces horses and mules couldn't negotiate, didn't freak in gunfights like horses and, as recounted here, with a mounted charge, terrified an overwhelming number of hostile Mojave arrayed against them. At this point, the Mojave knew camels only as slow, plodding load-carriers, not as cavalry. So what did the experiment in? Divisions caused by the oncoming Civil War. It poses an fascinating "what if?" scenario. An interesting book on a footnote to American history. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The story of the U.S. Army Camel Corps. And Mormons in Utah. And weapons of the OLD WEST. And the Bishop and Beale Company... By James D. Crabtree While this book has some good information the narrative wanders off on so many tangents that it is very difficult to keep track of everything and everyone brought into the story, especially when so many of the topics have so little to do with the camel experiment. And the author frequently uses the term "news media" several times. What news media? There were certainly newspapers. I don't think anyone got their info directly from the telegraph. A good book but not a great one.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the U.S. Army was on the verge of employing a weapon that had never before been seen on its native soil: a cavalry mount that would fare better than both mules and horses in the American Southwest... Against the Mojave in the Arizona Territory, against the Mormons in Utah Territory, during the early stages of the Civil War, the camel would become part of military history and a nearly forgotten chapter of Americana. This is the true story of that experiment and the extraordinary group of people who it brought together. The Last Camel Charge gives them their due as a vital piece of American history. INCLUDES PHOTOS