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## WHERE IS THE FLYING DUTCHMAN OF THE DESERT?

### Summary

In this mystery of the desert, a soldier refused to ride the camels brought to the United States in the 1800s. His commanding officer ordered other soldiers to tie him to the saddle. The legend tells that the camel ran toward Death Valley and that the soldier died, leaving a skeleton tied to the camel. In this version, the camel and soldier disappear, with the reader left to wonder what happened to them. Some people say they still see the camel riding through Death Valley. RL3.

### Presentation Suggestions

The narrator can be to the side. Sargent Philips should be in the center, perhaps sitting on a high stool. Private Henry should be on one side of Sargent Philips and Privates Jackson and MacNeil should be on the other side. Private Henry should leave the stage after the camel begins running away. Additional students could take the role of soldiers in non-speaking roles. To add action, the soldiers could come to attention and salute Sargent Philips at appropriate points of the story.

### Props

Students can be dressed in blue close to indicate uniforms. Add a bandana and hat for the privates to how as clues to the whereabouts of the camel and Private Henry. A mural could represent Death Valley or a desert environment.

### Delivery

Sargent Philips should sound stern and commanding. Private Henry should sound firm, but not insolent, in his refusal to ride the camel.

## Related Book

Wood, Ted. *Ghosts of the West Coast: The Lost Souls of the Queen Mary and Other Real-Life Hauntings*. New York: Walker and Company, 1999.

## Characters

Narrator  
Sargent Philips  
Private Henry  
Private Jackson  
Private MacNeil  
Soldiers (non-speaking, optional)

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## WHERE IS THE FLYING DUTCHMAN OF THE DESERT?

**Narrator:** Can you see it? There on the crest of the hill? It's a camel running as fast as it can. Look at the strange white marks on its side. Some say those are the legs of a dead soldier. Or is it really a ghost? The story of this mystery begins almost 150 years ago when the U.S. army used camels instead of horses.

**Sargent Philips:** Attention, men! Private Henry, I've been told you refuse to ride the camels. Is that true?

**Private Henry:** Yes, sir. I don't like those nasty beasts. They spit and they smell!

**Sargent Philips:** I don't care if you like them or not! You are part of this corps and you'll ride a camel if I tell you to. The government didn't buy camels because they are appealing. They bought them because of their durability. Like the other men, you will ride.

**Private Henry:** No, sir. I'm sorry, but I won't.

**Sargent Philips:** We'll see about that. Private Jackson, Private MacNeil, take Private Henry and tie him to that camel. He'll learn to ride it, and I'll hear no more about it.

**Narrator:** The camel knelt down so that Private Henry could be lifted into the saddle. But just as they finished tying Private Henry down, the camel unexpectedly rose to his feet. It spit and twisted, trying to dislodge the soldier.

**Sargent Philips:** Hold those reins tighter! What is wrong with that camel? He's acting crazy.

**Private Jackson:** He knows Private Henry is tied to him. He's fighting against the ropes.

**Sargent Philips:** I don't care why he's fighting! Hold on to his reins and begin to walk him. He'll get used to it soon enough.

**Private MacNeil:** I can't hold on! He's angry. When camels are angry, they use all their strength to fight back.

**Narrator:** The camel continued to resist, and the men let go of the reins. The camel took off in a full run. Before the soldiers could even react, the camel and his captive rider were out of sight. They raced toward Death Valley.

**Sargent Philips:** Get mounted and go find that stupid animal. Bring them back here!

**Private Jackson and Private MacNeil:** Yes, sir!

**Narrator:** For three days the soldiers rode over every mile around their camp. They searched without stopping. But they never did find the camel and the young soldier.

**Private Jackson:** Sargent, we've looked everywhere for miles, but there's no sign of the camel and Private Henry.

**Private MacNeil:** It's as if they just disappeared off the face of the earth!

**Sargent Philips:** What kind of soldiers are you that you can't find one camel and its rider? Are you sure you've tried hard enough?

**Private Jackson:** Sargent, every path we've taken has led us nowhere. Even if we find a clue, we don't find the camel.

**Private MacNeil:** That's right, sir. We found this bandana on one trail. And on another trail, we found this hat. Still, we couldn't find the camel or Private Henry.

**Private Jackson:** We've searched for three days. By now, even if we could find the camel, Private Henry would be dead. He hasn't had any food or water all this time.

**Private MacNeil:** The temperatures have been more than 95 degrees during the day. There's no way he could have survived.

**Sargent Philips:** I suppose you are right. Still, I want you to search for one more day. I don't suppose the camel will return on its own.

**Private Jackson:** No, sir. I hear that once a camel gets loose, it doesn't come back. Camels aren't tame enough to return. Our only hope was to find them before they had been gone too long.

**Narrator:** No one ever found the camel and Private Henry. But many have seen them. They ride along the ridge so they say. People who see them call the camel the Flying Dutchman of the Desert because he runs so quickly once he is spotted. Can the camel still be alive, running along that ridge? Or is that a ghost reminding us that life in the early days was difficult, even for a camel?

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