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BEALE

Rancher, Sailor, Soldier, ... Camel Driver

Beale Air Force Base, near Sacramento, bears the name of a legendary American of the 19th century—a hero in war, explorer and frontiersman, close friend of the famous, advisor to presidents, rancher, multimillionaire, and diplomat extraordinaire.

Who exactly was Edward Fitzgerald Beale?

Beale—"Ned" to his friends—was the son of George Beale, a prominent naval officer in the War of 1812. The son, too, became a naval officer, sailing to Russia, Brazil, and Europe. He also acted for a time as naval spy in London for President James Polk.

While on detachment from his ship in San Diego, he fought in the 1846-48 Mexican War, emerging as a hero in the Battle of San Pasqual. He became famous in 1848 for carrying east the first gold samples from the California strikes.

Beale left the Navy in 1851 and settled in California. He became the state's first superintendent of Indian Affairs, and was made a brigadier general in the California Militia.

In the late 1850s, he surveyed Beale's Wagon Road, a 1,000-mile trail from New Mexico to California. For this, he enlisted as pack animals 25 camels imported from Egypt and Turkey. Beale thought highly of "this noble and useful brute," but his view was not universally shared.

In the 1860s, Beale founded Tejon Ranch in California, at the time the largest private landholding in the United States. (He kept some of the camels there.) He soon became one of the nation's richest men.

In his lifetime, Beale received personal appointments from five Presidents: Andrew Jackson (to Philadelphia Naval School); Millard Fillmore (as Indian Affairs superintendent in California); James Buchanan (to map the wagon road); Abraham Lincoln (as surveyor general of California and Nevada); and Ulysses S. Grant (as US envoy to Austria-Hungary). He had other famous friends (see right).

In retirement, Beale lived at Decatur House, near the White House, until his death in 1893. The men who witnessed his will were Grant and Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman.

The name of Beale was also lent to a famous street in San Francisco and a mountain chain in California.

Camp Beale, established by the Army in World War II for armor training, passed officially to the new US Air Force and became a full-fledged air base in 1948. It long served as a Strategic Air Command facility and now is home of Air Combat Command's 9th Reconnaissance Wing.

EDWARD FITZGERALD BEALE

Born: Feb. 4, 1822, Washington, D.C.

Died: April 22, 1893, Washington, D.C.

College: Philadelphia Naval School

Service: US Navy, California Militia

Grade: Lieutenant (Navy); brigadier general (Militia)

Honors: US ambassador

Occupations: Naval officer, surveyor, rancher, diplomat

Famous Friends: Kit Carson, Buffalo Bill Cody, Ulysses S. Grant, Franz Josef

BEALE AIR FORCE BASE

State: California

Status: Operational

Opened: (by Army) October 1942

Original Name: Camp Beale

Closed: (by Army) May 1947

Reopened: (by USAF) January 1948

Named as AFB: April 1951

Area: 36 sq mi / 23,000 acres

Nearest City: Sacramento

Current Owner: Air Combat Command

Former Owners: Air Training Command, Continental Air Command, Strategic Air Command

Home Of: 9th Reconnaissance Wing

1. U-2 Dragon Lady at Beale AFB, Calif.
2. An artist's conception of the Beale camel train deployed to survey the 1,000-mile trail from New Mexico to California.
3. U-2 pilots with a spyplane at Beale.
4. Edward Fitzgerald "Ned" Beale.