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The Turkish Bushwhacking of Hi Jolly and Greek George

By Steve Frangos

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From time to time every Greek American hears tales of Turkish attempts to rewrite history. I usually just ignore these stories. Denying the Asia Minor Holocaust took place or that the Ottoman troops did not intentionally (and under orders) set fire to Smyrna are so incredible only a bankrupt society held together by foreign aid could even offer such laughable lies to the world. But now the Terrible Turks want to falsify Greek-American history and use it to revitalize their failing film industry. That the Turks still try and make money off the history of the various peoples they attempted to exterminate is especially droll. Usually such events involve classical or Byzantine art objects stolen from northern Cyprus or Anatolia. I love reading the headlines stating that the Turks want ‘their’ stolen culture returned! Or their various efforts too make tourist dollars off of Santa Claus (a.k.a. St. Nicholas of Myra) or a Cappadocia theme park that touts the lost culture of the peoples Ottoman troops drove from that very region. Clearly even after the Turks killed or exiled all those they could blame for their own political, economic and cultural woes they still need the “riaya” (e.g. the ‘cattle’ which is the Ottoman name for all the non-Muslims they ruled over) to turn a buck.

According to “An Izmiri Camel Herder in The Wild West” not only were Philip Tedro and Greek George Caralambo, “Ottoman citizens,” but Turkish and American film makers are now in the process of making a documentary and a feature length film on the lives of these two men (www.turkofamerica.com.)” The express reason for this entire venture is that “Turkish cinema should return to its roots, and bring stories that concern Turkey’s own history to the viewers.” For those of you who were asleep that day in Greek school, George Caralambo (also known as Greek George) and Philip Tedro (known as Hi Jolly) were part of the United States Army’s attempt at introducing camels as dray animals in the American southwest. Since the late 1850s, there have been government reports, newspaper accounts, and books about Tedro, Caralambo and the six other Greeks who accompanied them as fellow-drovers. In our time of global computer connections, when I am asked about Tedro, Caralambo and the rest, I usually refer my questioners to simply look up these men on any of the various websites that deal with this ill-fated Army experiment. But unfortunately, the Turks have also discovered Tedro and his crew and their goal is nothing less than to make these pioneers their own. But as with liars and cheats every where, and at all times, they can not help but give themselves away. If you are not already familiar with the story of Philip Tedro and the rest the easiest way to recognize a Turkish influenced website (such as the wikipedia.com entry on Hi Jolly) is the teeth-rattling English-as a-second-language

prose. Please, don't take my word for it. I invite all of you to visit www.turkofamerica.com for yourselves. Be aware however that while the general story of Philip Tedro, George Caralambo and the rest is related the basic facts are mostly scrambled. Or they just lie. Take for instance the claim that "Haci Ali, who had served as an exploration guide for the military, a camel herder, and a miner, had brought his children up as Muslims." Not only is there absolutely no historical evidence that Tedro brought his children up as Muslims' all available documents report that Tedro when he married identified himself as an ethnic Greek. In time Tedro abandoned his wife and two daughters. Later when Tedro attempted to reconcile with his wife and family they rejected him. This is not perhaps what one wants to hear about our Western 'Heroes' but it is a very common human story nonetheless. Apparently it was a 'news' story by Murat Bardarci in the Turkish press that 'broke' this story to the Turkish reading public. I have not read this account. All I can hope is that Bardarci's article was closer to the generally accepted facts than what we see in the www.turkofamerica.com website. Whatever the case may be it was Bardarci's article that "caught the attention of Turkish filmmakers Cengiz Ketenci and Sahin Alparslan. These filmmakers, who struck an agreement with film scenario writer Yigit Guralp, then decided on Yucel Yolcu as their director. The film, which to include (sic) both Turkish and American actors... The Turkish film production studio Istanbul Mass Media will be shooting the film on Haci Ali's life, to be entitled "Kahraman Serif," or "The Heroic Sheriff" in the historical Colorado town of Buckskin Joe. The film's American partner is Producer Group Studio's, from Colorado Springs (www.turkofamerica.com)."

Now I would like to quote at some length from the "An Izmiri Camel Herder in The Wild West" account. I do this for two reasons. First I feel that some of my own writings on Philip Tedro and George Caralambo were drawn upon for the travesty seen on the www.turkofamerica.com website. And unlike the author of the "Izmiri Camel Herder" account I want to fully 'credit' him or her for whatever follows. Second, nothing gives away a bald-faced liar than their own words. Okay, so what exactly is the "story" of the proposed films? "Producers of "The Heroic Sheriff" say they want to make an entertaining cowboy film, which is why they may not stay completely true to Haci Ali's life story. The real story of Haci Ali's life is going to come to the screen first as a documentary. The cinema film will be the next step, after this documentary. Shooting for "The Heroic Sheriff" will begin this July [2007], and plans are to have the film in cinemas by early 2008. The film will tell the story of the journey from Ottoman lands to the US, as well as the stories of three Ottoman citizens, each different from one another, who accompany the camels. In the film scenario, the heroes (the three Ottoman citizens) bring the camels to Texas to sell them, and once there, the US government buys 29 of them, but refuses one of them based on its ill health. The three Ottoman citizens then return to the Ottoman Empire to bring back the payment for the 29 camels, and to return the one ill camel. But while sleeping on the banks of a river before returning, the three are robbed. Knowing that they can't return to tell the Ottoman Sultan this bad news, the three immediately go looking for the thieves in the nearest town. This town is a lawless place typical of the Wild West stories. The three Turks waste no time getting to work in this town, where the sheriff is an old man who has trouble enforcing the law. The three Turks are busy searching for their camels, while offering up big money for

the bandits who stole their goods. They become the nightmare of the thieves, and the favorites of the elderly sheriff and his beautiful daughter. Just as they finally get back their money and are set to return though, the old sheriff is murdered, and the plans of the three Turks are disrupted. They accept the request by the sheriff's distraught daughter that one of them stay on as the new sheriff of the town. The three Ottomans, before returning to their lands, face the final giant task of saving the town itself. Filmmaker Sahin Alparslan says that the fact that stories about the first Turks in America are not known very well made the idea of making this film even more attractive. Alparslan notes that the film gives a message of peace, justice and order, as the three Ottomans save the town they are in from bandits and lawlessness. He notes that the plans are to have "The Heroic Sheriff" enter cinemas in eight different countries simultaneously. Film scenario writer Yigit Guralp is of the belief that a new door into different realms has been opened, especially for those who think that Turkish films have run out of new topics. Guralp, who wrote the script for "Sinav," notes that while Western style films were shot in the Turkish film industry between 1965-1972, not one of them offered the kind of story that "The Heroic Sheriff" does. Cengiz Ketenci, another filmmaker, notes that civilizations are always shifting, and that it was important to tell the story of a country just trying to stand up on its legs during a period of the Ottoman Empire's decline. Ketenci, commenting on interest shown in Turkish-made films, said "Turkish cinema should return to its roots, and should bring stories that concern Turkey's own history to the viewers. The individuals who came out of the consumer society in the 1980s have returned to their origins (www.turkofamerica.com).” The Hi Jolly Graveyard in Quartzsite Arizona is the only cemetery named after a Greek in North America. Yet now the Turks want to desecrate this Greek-American grave site as they have so many thousands of other Armenian, Greek, Sephardic Jews graves sites. Hitler, taught the Turks well. If you lie, then do so in a Big Way. That way you have a better chance of having your blatant distortions of history, believed.