

One of the most popular urban myths to come out of the occupation of Iraq is the picture of the infamous camel spider held by US troops accompanied by various claims of its abilities. This usually takes the form of an email with said picture detailing all sorts of fantastic claims.

According to the legend they can grow to be as large as dinner plates, reach speeds up to 25 MPH, making screaming noises as they run, jump several feet in the air, they eat the stomachs of camels and lay their eggs there, hence the name "camel spider", they are venomous, and their venom contains a powerful anaesthetic that numbs their victims. U.S. soldiers were said to have been attacked by camel spiders at night but remained completely unaware of their plight until they awakened in the morning to find chunks of their flesh missing.

All of which either exaggerated or completely false. Hell, if they could do that entire if might be worthwhile breeding and training them to fight the war for us!

Camel spiders (which aren't even spiders actually) are be found in sandy desert regions, and do grow to be quite large (about a 5"-6" leg span), but nowhere near as large as dinner plates; they can move very quickly in comparison to other arthropods (around 10 MPH), but nothing close 25 MPH; they make no noise; and they capture prey without the use of either venom or anaesthetic.

They use good old speed and spidey sense and the bite of powerful jaws to feed on small prey such as other arthropods, lizards, and possibly mice or birds. But certainly not the flesh of the West's finest.

The good people at snopes and National Geographic have further details of these lovely buggers.

It appears that at least this threat from the Middle East has followed us home, as feared by George W. Bush. The family of a British paratrooper was forced to evacuate their home after a camel spider killed their dog, only four days after the trooper's return.