THE REAL WAR HORSES – FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH -WW1

PART ONE - THE HEARTBREAKING STORY OF THE HORSES OF WW1

PART TWO - THE FOUR-LEGGED MARINE WHO BECAME A KOREAN WAR HERO

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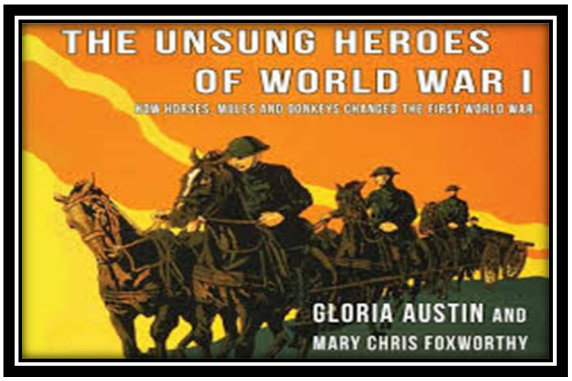
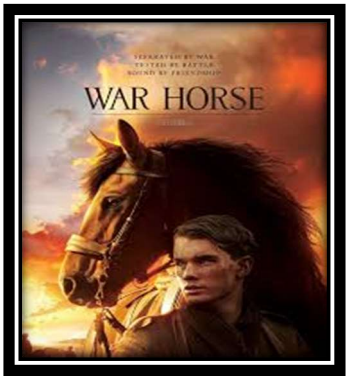


The above photo by artist Fortunio Matania is a powerful illustration of the anguished love of a soldier for his dying horse. The painting was used for fundraising during World War 1 by the Blue Cross in animal charity that contributed greatly to improving the welfare of horses serving in the war and continues to help horses today.

Galloping into enemy machine gun fire and almost certain death, they led the cavalry charges. Struggling through thick, sometimes belly-deep mud, freezing rain, and shell fire, they hauled heavy artillery. Exhausted and malnourished, they continued to supply the soldiers in the trenches with food, water, and ammunition.

Throughout the Great War, horses fought and labored alongside the soldiers, sharing many of the same hardships and dangers.



For nearly a century, the role of the horse in World War I remained largely unrecognized, but the *2011 release of director Steven Spielberg's film epic War Horse*, based on the 1982 Michael Morpurgo novel of the same name, has publicized to an unprecedented degree the contributions of the horse in war.

The sacrifice of the ten million men who lost their lives during the conflict, which endured from 1914 to 1918, is well known. Less well known is the price paid by the estimated eight million horses that perished in the Great War, a fact lamented by Private James Robert Johnston, a horse transport driver who served with the 14th Canadian Machine Gun Company, in his memoir, Riding into War: "Very little has been said about the horses and mules that were used and *what they suffered is beyond all description."*

The First World War represents the end of an era for the use of horses in armed conflict. It was the last time the horse would ever be used on a mass scale in modern warfare, as well as the last great cavalry charge in history – that of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade at Moreuil Wood – which was also one of the decisive battles in World War I. In short, it was the last time that the horse would play such an instrumental role in shaping the outcome of so devastating a conflict.

With the outbreak of war in July 1914, initially the British government, believing that the war would be of short duration, acquired approximately 100,000 to 150,000 horses from home shores.

However, as the war dragged on, the increasing need for more animals prompted the British Remount Department to expand their search to look overseas, importing hundreds of thousands of horses and mules from Canada, the U.S., Australia, and Argentina. They were shipped to Europe, 600 to 800 animals in each transport, a costly enterprise and filled with risk, due to the danger that the ships might be torpedoed by German submarines.

The horses that landed safely in Europe were rushed to remount depots where they were trained to perform in a specific capacity based on their type. Heavy draft horses were used to transport the larger guns and heaviest wagons; light drafts and mules supplied the front lines with lighter guns, ammunition, and supplies; and riding horses were reserved for the cavalry and officers. Upon completing their training, the horses were transported to the field where they began active service.

For the horses and mules serving on the Western Front, life was hard and fraught with danger, and thus usually quite short. Shelter (from the elements and from bomb and shell splinters) was provided whenever possible, but such occasions were very rare.

Most commonly the animals were picketed in open fields, which exposed them during the winter months to many miseries which are described by Lieut-Colonel David Sobey Tamblyn, a veterinary surgeon who served with the Third Canadian Division, in his book The Horse in War published in 1923. "Nothing more distressing could be witnessed than a concentration of transport animals, during wet seasons, in fields where the mud was over their knees and hocks," he said.

Under these conditions debilitated horses, which were propped up by the mud, died on their feet."

Pack horses carried rations, ammunition, and other supplies from the rear to the soldiers in the trenches on the front lines. Photo: Canada Department of National Defense / Library and Archives

Photos (above and below): "The terrain over which the horses travelled can only be described as a quagmire," said veterinary surgeon Lieut-Colonel David Sobey Tamblyn. "Horses became mired to such an extent that it was a case of being humane to destroy them, for it was impossible to extricate any horse without riding three or more." Photos: New York Times Co., 1919; Provided courtesy of Great War Primary Document Archive: Photos of the Great War, www.gwpda.org/photos

The situation was made worse by the mandatory body clipping of the horses by veterinarians as a preventative measure against afflictions such as mange and lice, which were running rampant through the army.

Unfortunately, because horse blankets were not always available, this practice resulted in a greater number of horses dying from exposure. Finally, in 1918, clipping was limited to the horses' legs and stomachs only.

Another major concern facing horse caretakers was the possibility that their charges might starve to death. *Feed was incredibly scarce, and Tamblyn wrote about seeing horses choking while trying to eat their blankets and hay nets in an attempt to satisfy their hunger.*

Even if a horse escaped dying of starvation, disease, or exposure, the likely possibility that he might fall victim to a bomb, shell, gunfire, or gas attack still remained. Little could be done about the latter; gas masks for the horses were issued but proved so cumbersome to put on that they were rendered largely ineffective. In the end, the only course of action really available to the soldiers was to flee the clouds of gas with their horses as quickly as possible.

For the most part, men were similarly helpless when it came to protecting the horses against shell fire. Tamblyn recalled a young Canadian bugler who persevered in his efforts to cover some transport horses with earth as a makeshift dugout to protect them against bomb and shell splinters before digging himself a small hole in the ground.

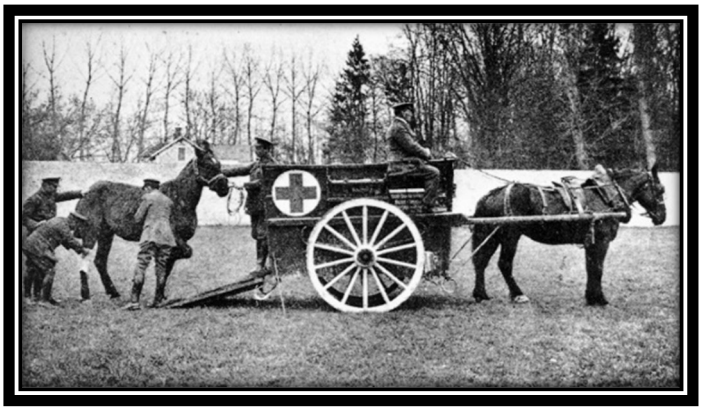
The next morning Tamblyn passed by the same place and saw that the bugler had been killed by a bomb in the night, "while the horses he had helped to protect escaped injury, due in a great measure to his manly labor the previous night. It seemed to me that this lad's first thoughts were for the horses, a spirit which is bred in men who love animals."

Photo (above): An estimated eight million horses on all sides and on all fronts died during the four years of the First World War. Photo: Library and Archives Canada / PA-207908

Dugouts were constructed out of timber, sandbags, and earth helped protect the soldiers and horses from bomb and shell splinters. Photo: National Library of Scotland

It wasn't just the bombs and shells themselves that could kill or maim horses and men. The craters these left in the ground, combined with the ever-present mud, presented a danger of their own.

Johnston described the footing at Passchendaele, France, as "one continual series of shell holes filled with water, and to slip into one of them was quite serious. In the first place a lot of them were so big a man and horse would be drowned if he slid into one of them*." Men and horses alike succumbed to this grisly end more often than might be thought.* Major Williams, an officer with the Canadian Army, witnessed one such occasion on which a mule carrying ammunition slipped into a shell hole and sank out of sight. "Before ropes could be passed around him, to assist in extricating him from his terrible predicament, it was realized that relief was impossible, *so a kindly bullet ended his troubles just before his head went below the sticky surface.*



Horses injured in battle were removed from the field by veterinary ambulances and rushed to veterinary base hospitals. Photo courtesy of Blue Cross Pet Charity

For General Jack Seely, British Commander from 1915 to 1918 of the three regiments that composed the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, the shell holes and muck at Passchendaele almost meant the end of his beloved charger, Warrior. "There were many dead horses lying about which had foundered in the mud, and could not be extricated," he described in his book My Horse Warrior. "All of a sudden Warrior went deep into the mud up to his belly." With the help of three other men, Seely was able to help Warrior reach solid ground, but he deemed the event "a narrow escape."

The gas masks designed for the horses were largely ineffective; the time it took a soldier to correctly fit a cumbersome mask to his horse was much better spent herding the animal away from the cloud of poison gas. Photo: Canada Department of National Defense / Library and Archives Canada / PA-005001

Warrior, a bay Thoroughbred gelding bred from Seely's favorite mare, carried Seely safely through all the major battlefields on the Western Front to become one of the very few horses that survived the Great War. This, and his immense popularity with the men under Seely's command, made him something of a legend. According to the horse's obituary which ran in the Times of London, "Warrior had so many narrow escapes from death in the last war that the Canadian cavalry used to call him 'the horse the Germans can't kill."

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Warrior proved himself to be most aptly named on many occasions, most notably at Moreuil Wood on March 30, 1918, when he and Seely led the great cavalry charge against the machine guns and superior numbers of a German offensive. The Canadian cavalry – both men and horses – suffered terrible losses, but ultimately they took Moreuil Wood and the German advance was halted.

Horses on the Western Front often sheltered in the trenches alongside the soldiers.

Seely's description of his horse's bravery during the charge is quite incredible: "He was determined to go forward and with a great leap started up hill.

All sensation of fear had vanished from him as he galloped on at racing speed. There was a hail of bullets from the enemy as we crossed the intervening space and mounted the hill, but Warrior cared for nothing."

Similar tales of the bravery of war horses are widespread, although the fear they must have felt is unimaginable.

"The war-horse must still know the nameless terror of the battlefield, and suffer, and be maimed and killed for the benefit of Man," wrote Colonel the Right Hon. Mark Lockwood in "How the Horse was Cared for at the Front" in The War Illustrated.

"Imagine the terror of the horse that once calmly delivered a shopman's goods in quiet suburban streets as, standing hitched to a gun-carriage amid the wreck and ruin at the back of the firing-line, he hears above and all around him the crash of bursting shells*...He knows nothing of duty, patriotism, glory, heroism, honor – but he does know that he is in danger."*

In the face of such danger, the bond between horse and soldier was often so strong, that the horses frequently looked to the men for comfort and reassurance. Johnston recalled one instance in which he and his saddle horse, Split Ear, came under heavy shell fire: “When I decided to stay, there was still a lot of shelling going on and I tried to get my horse to follow the other horses, but he would not leave.

Two or three times I led him a short way and when I turned back, he would follow me, like a dog would do. At last I got a piece of stick, and gave him a couple of slaps and he walked away. When one realizes that a horse is terrified of shellfire, they must have a lot of confidence in a man, or whatever feeling you want to call it. Guess it was mutual and we did not want to be parted.”

The trust the horses showed in the men was justified by the extraordinary lengths taken by many of the soldiers to ensure the safety and well-being of their four-legged charges.

“A story is told by a gunner of the Royal Horse Artillery of a man who gave his life for a horse,” wrote Tamblyn. “In one of the desperate attacks along the Aisne, a party of ours was nearly cut off, and had to retreat in hot haste. As we cleared out, there was a man of the Gloucestershire’s who noticed that a horse which had been struck by a shell was in great pain, and was neighing piteously for water. There was none about, and with the Germans closing in, it was as much as a man’s life was worth to stay another minute. This brave chap knew this as well as anyone, but he wanted to make the poor animal comfortable before he cleared off, so he hunted around until he found water*. We had to retire, and did not know what happened to him until the next day, when we re-took the position and found the Gloucester lad and the horse both dead.”*

The dedication of the men to the horses was an expression of the great faith they had in their animals. “I believe my saddle horse knew more than I did, and it is one of the reasons why I lasted as long as I did,” said Johnston. “He took care of me.” And Johnston was certainly not alone in his sentiments.

Many, many soldiers of the First World War expressed immense gratitude for the so many horses and mules that gave so much in return for so little.

It might be wished that the million or so horses and mules listed in service to the British and Commonwealth forces at the end of the war in November 1918 had returned home to live out their days in green fields. Alas, this was very rare. *Many of the animals were auctioned off locally, and tens of thousands were sold to the Belgian government for meat, a sorry reward for such loyal and devoted service which seems best captured by the inscription on a memorial at St. Jude on the Hill* in Hampstead, England, erected in honor of the horses killed during the First World War: *“Most obediently and often most painfully they died – faithful unto death.”*

DUMB HEROES

The following poem is an excerpt from “Dumb Heroes” By T.A. Girling, Captain, Canadian Army Veterinary Corps, from A Book of Poems for The Blue Cross Fund

They are shelling on Hell Fire Corner, there’s shrapnel just bursting in the Square,
And their bullets drum as the transports come with the food for the soldiers there.

The halt till the shelling is over, the rush through the line of fire,
The glowing light in the dead of night, and the terrible sights in the mire.

It’s the daily work of the horses and they answer the spur and rein,
With quickened breath, ‘mid the toll of death, through the mud, and the holes, and rain.

There’s a fresh treated wound in the chestnut, the black mare’s neck has a mark,
The brown mule’s new mate won’t keep the same gait as the one killed last night in the dark.

And they walk with the spirit of heroes, they care not for medals or cross,
But for duty alone, into perils unknown, they go, never counting their loss.
There's a swift painless death for the hopeless, with a grave in a shell-hole or field,
There's a hospital base for the casualty case, and a Vet for those easily healed.

PART TWO

THE FOUR-LEGGED MARINE WHO BECAME A KOREAN WAR HERO

SGT RECKLESS WAS THE ONLY ANIMAL EVER AWARDED AN OFFICIAL RANK IN THE US MARINE CORPS

NEWLY PROMOTED S/SGT RECKLESS, USMC

UPDATED AUG 29, 2018

The United States Marine Corps has endured few firefights as savage as the Battle for Outpost Vegas in *the waning months of the Korean War*. With a roar that sounded like "twenty tornadoes tearing at a countryside," according to one serviceman, more than 500 mortar and artillery rounds per minute deluged the mountaintop ridge where the Recoilless Rifle Platoon of the 5th Marines attempted to repel a Chinese assault on March 27, 1953. So much ordnance howled overhead that radar screens could only display a giant, useless blur and incoming and outgoing shells collided in mid-flight.

As the sky fell on the Marines defending Outpost Vegas—so named because it would be a gamble to hold—they rejoiced as the silhouette of their beloved comrade emerged once again from the shroud of smoke that cloaked their position. All day long, their fellow Marine had traversed the "smoking, death-pocked rubble" to deliver fresh ammunition along with a badly needed boost of morale.

Traveling alone on 51 rounds trips through a no-man's land of rice paddies and scaling a 45-degree incline with bowed head and quivering legs, the solitary figure fought the natural instinct to flee and relied on training and *fortitude to deliver nearly 9,000 back-breaking pounds of ammunition from the supply point to the gun teams.*

The platoon knew their heroic compatriot was no ordinary Marine—*and it wasn't just because she was a horse.*

A calming presence amid the chaos erupting around Outpost Vegas, the mighty mare named "Reckless" lugged six rounds, then eight, at a time up the mountain and evacuated wounded Marines back down the slope for medical treatment—*even after sustaining two shrapnel wounds* that would earn her a pair of Purple Hearts. On one trip, Reckless even donned flak jackets and shielded four Marines up the mountain.

"Horses are flight animals, but Reckless ran toward the danger because she knew the guys needed her," says Robin Hutton, author of Sgt. Reckless: America's War Horse.

One of those guys was Sgt. Harold Wadley, who was astounded at the sight of the riderless horse. "I looked back at the eastern skyline through all the smoke and swinging flare light and could hardly believe my eyes," the Battle of Outpost Vegas veteran recalled at the unveiling of a statue of Reckless at Camp Pendleton in 2016*. "Surely an angel must have been riding her."*

Although she excelled at the job, Reckless was not bred to be a beast of burden. Born at a Seoul racetrack, the chestnut brown filly originally named "Ah Chim Hai" (meaning "Flame of the Morning") was destined for a racing career until the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950. In need of money to pay for a prosthesis for his sister who lost a leg in a land mine explosion, the horse's owner reluctantly sold his filly for $250 to Lieutenant Eric Pedersen of the Recoilless Rifle Platoon in October 1952.

Pedersen wasn't searching for a mere mascot, however, but a workhorse who could carry 24-pound ammunition shells and other supplies across the rugged, remote terrain of the Korean Peninsula that was inaccessible to trucks*. Marines christened their new recruit "Reckless" not for her wild abandon but for the work she would do in resupplying recoilless rifles, known as "reckless rifles" in Marine jargon.*

For weeks after the horse's purchase, Technical Sergeant Joe Latham put Reckless through an equine version of boot camp that he dubbed "hoof camp." Latham acclimated the horse to the extreme noise of battle and led her up and down hills to get used to the weight of the ammunition on her back.

Sgt Reckless with a recoilless-rifle

"He taught her to step over communication lines and barbed wire," says Hutton. "He yelled, 'Incoming!' and she would run to a bunker and get down. She learned how to lay down in a trench for cover." The horse could find her way to her fellow Marines all by herself and even understand hand signals.

To view a 10-minute video about Sgt Reckless **….*copy and paste the below link into your browser***

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w3PekI7QzcE

In spite of having the stature of a pony, the racehorse quickly proved an extraordinary war horse. "The Marines became her herd, and she would follow them everywhere. She became one of the guys," Hutton says.

Reckless slept in the Marines' tents and dined with them in the mess hall. Proving that she had an iron stomach that matched her steely determination, Reckless ate bacon, scrambled eggs, and coffee for

breakfast, and liked to snack on candy bars and Coca-Cola—not to mention hats, blankets, and poker chips. “It was crazy what she ate,” Hutton says. “She had this wonderful sturdy constitution and disposition.”

Reckless wasn’t against downing a couple of cold ones with her fellow Marines, either. In fact, on the day after an armistice silenced the guns over Korea, the horse was seen staggering around camp after perhaps having one too many the night before when celebrating with the platoon. (Fittingly, an Illinois brewery now serves a Sgt. Reckless American pale ale.)

So beloved was Reckless that she was promoted to sergeant on April 10, 1954, becoming the only animal ever awarded an official rank in the Marine Corps

Days later a profile of the war horse penned by Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Geer, a talented writer and Hollywood scriptwriter, *appeared in the Saturday Evening Post*. The piece catapulted Reckless to fame and sparked a campaign for her to return to the United States like her fellow Marines.

When the military balked at the idea for fear it would be seen as a publicity stunt or a waste of money, a friend of Geer’s who owned a shipping company arranged for the horse’s transportation across the Pacific*; the scriptwriter paid $1,200 in shipping expenses out of his own pocket*. “He was her champion,” Hutton says. “Because of him she got back to America.”

Sgt. Reckless arrived in the United States in November 1954 and was stationed at California’s Camp Pendleton where she was twice promoted to staff sergeant and bore three colts and a filly. *Her death in 1968 was front-page news, and, befitting her rank, Sgt. Reckless was buried with full military honors.*

“She was as famous as Lassie and Rin Tin in her day, but she vanished from history,” Hutton says*. Like many other Korean War veterans, Sgt. Reckless became overshadowed by the events of World War II and the Vietnam War.*

Thanks in part to Hutton’s book, however, there has been a resurgence of interest in Sgt. Reckless in recent years*. Life-sized bronze statues of the horse were unveiled at Virginia’s National Museum of the Marine Corps and Heritage Center in 2013 and at Camp Pendleton in 2016, with another planned for Kentucky Horse Park’s International Museum of the Horse.*

It’s an honor well-deserved, Hutton says. “She wasn’t a horse. She was a marine.

U.S. Marine Corps Staff Sgt. Reckless preparing to go to Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California after serving in the Korean War with the 5th Marine Regiment. (Courtesy of the United States Marine Corps Archive)

Reckless developed arthritis in her back as she aged and injured herself on May 13, 1968, by falling into a barbed wire fence. She died under sedation while her wounds were being treated. At the time of her death, she was estimated to be 19 or 20 years old.

The final moments of Camp Pendleton's monument dedication ceremony saw the presentation of South Korea's Ambassador for Peace Medal to Reckless alongside her statue. Made of barbed wire and mortar shells from the DMZ, the medal honors and remembers veterans who served in Korea.

Military Decorations Bestowed On Staff Sgt. Reckless

Purple Heart with Gold Star
Presidential Unit Citation with 1 Bronze Star
Navy Unit Commendation
Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal
National Defense Service Medal
Korean Service Medal with 3 Bronze Stars
Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation
United Nations Service Medal Korea

PDSA Dickin Medal was awarded posthumously in England on July 2016. The medal is recognized worldwide as animals' Victoria Cross. It acknowledges outstanding acts of bravery or devotion to duty by animals serving with armed forces or civil defense units in any theater of war throughout the world.

Ambassador for Peace Medal was awarded at the monument dedication ceremony on October 26, 2016, at Camp Pendleton. It is an honor bestowed by the Republic of Korea to Americans who served in the Korean War.