

= Sergeant Reckless =

Staff Sergeant Reckless , a decorated war horse who held official rank in the United States military , was a mare of Mongolian horse breeding . Out of a race horse dam , she was purchased in October 1952 for \$ 250 from a Korean stableboy at the Seoul racetrack who needed money to buy an artificial leg for his sister . Reckless was bought by members of the United States Marine Corps and trained to be a pack horse for the Recoilless Rifle Platoon , Anti @-@ Tank Company , 5th Marine Regiment , 1st Marine Division . She quickly became part of the unit and was allowed to roam freely through camp , entering the Marines ' tents , where she would sleep on cold nights , and was known for her willingness to eat nearly anything , including scrambled eggs , beer , Coca @-@ Cola and , once , about \$ 30 worth of poker chips .

She served in numerous combat actions during the Korean War , carrying supplies and ammunition , and was also used to evacuate wounded . Learning each supply route after only a couple of trips , she often traveled to deliver supplies to the troops on her own , without benefit of a handler . The highlight of her nine @-@ month military career came in late March 1953 during the Battle for Outpost Vegas when , in a single day , she made 51 solo trips to resupply multiple front line units . She was wounded in combat twice , given the battlefield rank of corporal in 1953 , and then a battlefield promotion to sergeant in 1954 , several months after the war ended . She also became the first horse in the Marine Corps known to have participated in an amphibious landing , and following the war was awarded two Purple Hearts , a Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal , was included in her unit 's Presidential Unit Citations from two countries , as well as other military honors .

Her wartime service record was featured in The Saturday Evening Post , and LIFE magazine recognized her as one of America 's 100 all @-@ time heroes . She was retired and brought to the United States after the war , where she made appearances on television and participated in the United States Marine Corps birthday ball . She was officially promoted to staff sergeant in 1959 by the Commandant of the Marine Corps . She gave birth to four foals in America and died in May 1968 . A plaque and photo were dedicated in her honor at the Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton stables and a statue of her was dedicated on July 26 , 2013 at the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico , Virginia .

= = Origins = =

Sergeant Reckless was chestnut colored with a blaze and three white stockings . Her date of birth and parentage are unconfirmed , but she was estimated to be around three or four years old when she was purchased by members of the United States Marine Corps in October 1952 . She was sold to the Marines by her owner , a young Korean stableboy called Kim Huk Moon , though that was not his real name . The horse was originally named Ah Chim Hai in Korean , which translates to " Morning Flame " or " Flame @-@ of @-@ the @-@ Morning " , also reputed to be the name of her dam , a racehorse at the track in Seoul . Moon sold the horse , whom he had nicknamed " Flame , " to Lieutenant Eric Pedersen for \$ 250 in order to buy a leg prosthesis for his sister , who had stepped on a land mine . The horse 's breeding was thought to be primarily Mongolian though she did have some features , particularly the shape of her head , that were similar to horses of Thoroughbred lineage . She was small , standing only 14 hands (56 inches , 142 cm) and weighing 900 pounds (410 kg) .

= = Military service = =

In October 1952 , Pedersen received permission from Colonel Eustace P. Smoak to purchase a horse for his platoon . Based in mountainous terrain , Pedersen needed a pack animal capable of carrying up to nine of the heavy 24 @-@ pound shells needed to supply the recoilless rifles used by his unit , the Recoilless Rifle Platoon of the 5th Marine Regiment . The day after he received permission , on October 26 , 1952 , Pedersen , Sergeant Willard Berry , and Corporal Philip Carter

drove a jeep with a trailer to the Seoul racetrack . Pedersen paid for the horse with his own money . Moon was reluctant to sell the horse , though he needed to , and cried when " Flame " departed . The Marines renamed her " Reckless " as a contraction of the name of the Recoilless rifle and a nod to the daredevil attitude associated with those who used the gun .

Her primary trainer and the person Reckless was closest to was platoon Gunnery Sergeant Joseph Latham . Private First Class Monroe Coleman was her primary caretaker . In addition to Pedersen , Latham , and Coleman , Lieutenant Bill Riley and Sergeant Elmer Lively were also involved with the training and care of Reckless . Pedersen had his wife ship a pack saddle from their home in California so Reckless could better fulfill her primary role as a pack animal . The recoilless rifle platoon had its own medical corpsman , Navy Hospitalman First Class George " Doc " Mitchell , who provided the majority of medical care for Reckless .

The Marines , especially Latham , taught Reckless battlefield survival skills such as how not to become entangled in barbed wire and to lie down when under fire . She learned to run for a bunker upon hearing the cry , " incoming ! " The platoon called it her " hoof training " and " hoof camp " . The horse was initially kept in a pasture near the encampment . Reckless had a gentle disposition and soon developed such a rapport with the troops that she was allowed to freely roam about the camp and entered tents at will , sometimes sleeping inside with the troops , and even lying down next to Latham 's warm tent stove on cold nights . She was fond of a wide variety of foodstuffs , entertaining the platoon by eating scrambled eggs and drinking Coca @-@ Cola and beer . Food could not be left unattended around her . She was known to eat bacon , buttered toast , chocolate bars , hard candy , shredded wheat , peanut butter sandwiches and mashed potatoes . However , Mitchell advised the platoon that she not be given more than two bottles of Coke a day . Her tastes were not confined to foodstuffs ; she once ate her horse blanket , and on another occasion ate \$ 30 worth of Latham 's winning poker chips .

Reckless 's baptism under fire came at a place called Hedy 's Crotch , near the villages of Changdan and Kwakchan . Though loaded down with six recoilless rifle shells , she initially " went straight up " and all four feet left the ground the first time the recoilless rifle was fired . When she landed she started shaking , but Coleman , her handler , calmed her down . The second time the gun fired she merely snorted , and by the end of the mission that day appeared calm and was seen trying to eat a discarded helmet liner . She even appeared to take an interest in the operation of the weapon . When learning a new delivery route , Reckless would only need someone to lead her a few times . Afterwards she would make the trips on her own . There was a standing order not to ride Reckless , but in early December 1952 , someone violated that order and took Reckless on a ride that included a sprint through a minefield . She was not injured during the unauthorized ride .

Her most significant accomplishment came during the Battle of Panmunjom @-@ Vegas (also known as the Battle of Outpost Vegas / Vegas Hill) over the period March 26 ? 28 , 1953 , when she made 51 solo trips in a single day , carrying a total of 386 recoilless rounds (over 9 @,@ 000 pounds , carrying 4 to 8 24 @-@ pound shells on each trip) covering over 35 miles that day . The whole Battle of Vegas lasted 3 days . She was wounded twice during the battle : once when she was hit by shrapnel over the left eye and another time on her left flank . For her accomplishments during the Battle of Vegas Hill , Reckless was promoted to corporal .

When not on the front lines , Reckless packed other items for the platoon , and was particularly useful for stringing telephone wire . Carrying reels of wire on her pack that were played out as she walked , she could string as much wire as twelve men on foot . She became the first horse in the Marine Corps known to have participated in an amphibious landing when the 5th moved from Camp Casey to Inchon , planning to participate in amphibious landings hundreds of miles south of Inchon . The commanding officer of the transport halted loading operations when he saw the platoon on the dock with Reckless . He refused to take her on board his clean ship , which had won an award for being the cleanest ship in the previous two years . However , once the Marines produced the loading plan the ship 's commanding officer had approved which specifically listed Reckless and her equipment , she was allowed on board . Once the ship was underway , she became sick , making a mess on the ship 's decks during the first part of the voyage . She could not be disembarked due to a storm , but soon became accustomed to the motion of the ship at sea and had no more problems .

The 1st Marine Division was moved to a rest area soon after the move , and while there some platoon members posed with Reckless and a sign challenging the Thoroughbred Native Dancer to a race . They called their race the " Paddy Derby " and the field " Upsan Downs . " The conditions were : 1 @. @ 5 miles over paddies and hills , carrying 192 pounds of ammunition , and no riders . The Marines never received a reply . Native Dancer came in second in the Kentucky Derby , but went on to win the Preakness Stakes and Belmont Stakes .

Randolph M. Pate , then the commander of the 1st Marine Division , gave Reckless a battlefield promotion from corporal to sergeant in a formal ceremony , complete with reviewing stand , on April 10 , 1954 , several months after the war ended . She was also given a red and gold blanket with insignia . Reckless was promoted again , to staff sergeant , on August 31 , 1959 , at Camp Pendleton , CA . This promotion was also awarded by Pate , who had by then advanced to Commandant of the Marine Corps . Pate personally presided over this promotion ceremony and she was honored with a 19 @-@ gun salute with a 1 @, @ 700 @-@ man parade of Marines from her wartime unit . She was an early example of an animal holding official rank in a branch of the United States military .

= = Retirement = =

For her exemplary service to the Marine Corps , Reckless was awarded two Purple Hearts (for the wounds received during the Battle of Vegas) , a Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal , a Presidential Unit Citation with bronze star , the National Defense Service Medal , a Korean Service Medal , the United Nations Korea Medal , a Navy Unit Commendation , and a Republic of Korea Presidential Unit Citation . She would wear these awards on her horse blanket , plus a French Fourragere that the 5th Marines earned in World War I.

An article in The Saturday Evening Post , published on April 17 , 1954 , while Reckless was still in Korea , resulted in a campaign by American supporters to get the Marines to bring her to the United States . An executive at Pacific Transport Lines , Stan Coppel , read the article and offered to let Reckless ride free on one of his company 's ships from Yokohama to San Francisco . Prior to her departure for America , a ceremony , including a band , for Reckless ' rotation to the United States was held during half time of a football game between the Marine Corps and Army . Reckless left Korea for Japan aboard a 1st Marine Aircraft Wing transport plane . She then sailed from Yokohama on October 22 aboard the SS Pacific Transport , due in San Francisco on November 5 , 1954 . A typhoon delayed the ship 's arrival until the evening of November 9 . Reckless and her caretakers stayed aboard until the next morning . Reckless got sick during the storm and was once knocked out of her stall onto the deck by the storm , which happened near the end of the trip .

Reckless 's entry into the United States was not without its challenges . The Customs Bureau was not much of a problem but the United States Department of Agriculture insisted a medical check and lab tests be completed before she disembarked from the ship once it reached San Francisco , which would make her late for the Marine banquet where she was to be the guest of honor . The Marines contacted Agriculture Department officials in Washington , D.C. who agreed to allow her off the ship after her blood was drawn for lab tests , with the understanding that if she had glanders or dourine , she would be destroyed or sent back to Japan . Many of the Marines who actually knew her were incensed at what they considered an affront to her honor when they learned that dourine was an equine sexually transmitted disease . The night before she arrived , she once again ate her blanket , but a new one with ribbons and insignia was made just in time for her disembarkment . She was led off the ship by Lieutenant Pedersen and set foot on American soil in San Francisco on November 10 , 1954 , coincidentally the birthday of the Marine Corps . For the Marine Corps Birthday Ball held that day , she rode an elevator , and then ate both cake and the flower decorations .

Reckless was kept by Pedersen 's family for a brief time before moving to a more permanent home with the 5th Marines , 1st Marine Division at Camp Pendleton . A second article about Reckless appeared in The Saturday Evening Post on October 22 , 1955 . These two articles and the book Reckless : Pride of the Marines (1955) were written by the commander of the 2nd Battalion , Lieutenant Colonel Andrew Geer , who kept notes about Reckless during the war . She made

several public appearances , including Art Linkletter 's show House Party , but had to cancel an appearance on The Ed Sullivan Show due to the typhoon . Ed Sullivan had wanted her to appear on his November 7 show and was willing to pay the costs to get her there right after the scheduled , and delayed , November 5 arrival . Reckless never did appear on Sullivan 's show .

Reckless was well cared for and treated as a VIP during her time at Camp Pendleton . The Marine Corps was also careful not to allow her to be exploited by commercial interests . She produced four foals there : colts Fearless (1957) , Dauntless (1959) , and Chesty (1964) ; her last foal , a filly born circa 1965 ? 1966 , died a month after birth and was unnamed . Her offspring Chesty was named after Chesty Puller , one of the few Marines ever allowed to ride Reckless . Puller was a Marine Corps lieutenant general and the most decorated United States Marine of all time . Reckless retired from active service with full military honors at Camp Pendleton on November 10 , 1960 . She was provided free quarters and feed in lieu of retirement pay , per Marine Corps documents .

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 . There is a plaque and photo commemorating her at the Camp Pendleton stables . The first race at Aqueduct racetrack , New York , was designated " The Sgt Reckless " on November 10 , 1989 . In 1997 , Reckless was listed by LIFE magazine as one of America 's 100 all @-@ time heroes .

A statue by sculptor Jocelyn Russell of Reckless carrying ammunition shells and other combat equipment was unveiled on July 26 , 2013 , in Semper Fidelis Memorial Park at the National Museum of the Marine Corps , one day before the 60th anniversary of the Korean War . There is a lock of her tail hair in the base of the statue . The statue 's plaque includes a quote from Sergeant Harold Wadley , who served in battle alongside Sergeant Reckless : " The spirit of her loneliness and her loyalty , in spite of the danger , was something else to behold . Hurting . Determined . And alone . That 's the image I have imprinted in my head and heart forever . "

= = Awards and decorations = =