

Sgt. Reckless - Marine War Horse

BLUF: Sergeant Reckless is a Marine Corps legend from the Korean War. Purchased for \$250, she earned fame as an armament supply packhorse between 1952 and 1953. Reckless participated in the Battle for Outpost Vegas in March 1953, where she was wounded twice. Reckless remained with the Marine Corps until her death in May 1968, though she retired as a staff sergeant in 1960. Reckless became the first horse in the Marine Corps known to have participated in an amphibious landing, and following the war, she was awarded two Purple Hearts and a Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal. Many sources list Reckless as a Mongolian pony; however, she was a Halla horse. This type of horse is a cross between a Jeju and a thoroughbred.

LEADERSHIP TRAITS DISPLAYED: Justice, Judgment, **Dependability, Initiative,** Decisiveness, Tact, Integrity, **Endurance, Bearing, Unselfishness, Courage, Knowledge, Loyalty,** and **Enthusiasm.**

SETTING THE STAGE: As the Korean War entered its second year, both sides had reached a stalemate near the 38th parallel. The topography was challenging for the Marines as they moved heavy armaments and ammunition up and down the sloping terrain. First Lieutenant Eric Pedersen, commanding officer of a 5/1 Recoilless Rifle Platoon, believed that a pack animal would solve the geography problem for the Marines.

On 26 October 1952, Pedersen went to the Seoul Racecourse looking for a pack animal to solve his dilemma. Pedersen paid \$250 of his own money for a chestnut mare. Her owner, Kim Huk Moon, sold the horse to Pedersen because he desperately needed the funds. His sister, Chung Soon, lost a leg when she stepped on a land mine. Kim wanted to purchase an artificial leg for Chung.

Though initially named "Morning Sun" or "Flame of the Morning" in the Korean language, the mare was named "Reckless" by the Marines. Since she was slated to haul recoilless rifles ammunition for the platoon, the name "Reckless" resembled recoilless. Her primary trainer, and the person Reckless was closest to, was platoon GySgt. Joseph Latham. Private First Class Monroe Coleman, however, was her primary caretaker. In addition to Pedersen, Latham, and Coleman, 2ndLt. Bill Riley and Sgt. Elmer Lively were also involved with the training and care of the mare.

THE STORY: The baptism of fire for Pvt. Reckless came to a place called Hedley's Crotch, near Changdan and Kwakchan. She first experienced the sound of a recoilless rifle during the battle. Though loaded down with six recoilless rifle shells, all four hooves left the ground when she heard the blast. When she landed, she started shaking, but Coleman calmed her down. The second time the gun fired, she snorted but remained calm. Reckless appeared to take her mission in stride by the end of the day and proceeded to eat a discarded helmet liner. It turns out that Reckless also enjoyed scrambled eggs, beer, Coca-Cola, and poker chips. When learning a new delivery route, Reckless would only need someone to lead her a few times. Afterward, she would travel solo up and down the route. There was a standing order not to ride Reckless, though a Marine violated the order in December 1952. He rode Reckless at a sprint through a minefield. The Marines' punishment was forfeiture of his daily rations to Reckless, which she accepted gladly. Gen. Lewis Puller was the only other Marine to ride Reckless.

Her most noteworthy accomplishment came during the Battle of Panmunjom-Vegas over the period 26 to 28 March 1953. Reckless made 51 solo trips in a single day, carrying 386 recoilless rounds covering over 35 miles. The trips equated to over 9,000 pounds, which included four to eight 24-pound shells on each trip. She was wounded twice during the battle, including when she was hit by shrapnel over her left eye and another time on her left flank. For her actions during the battle, Reckless was promoted to corporal and received two Purple Heart awards.

Reckless packed other items for the platoon when not on the front lines and was particularly useful for stringing telephone wire. Carrying reels of wire attached to her pack, Reckless could string as much wire as twelve men on foot. She became the first horse in the Marine Corps known to participate in an amphibious landing when the regiment moved from Camp Casey to 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. After the Marines produced the loading plan, he approved her on board, which specifically listed Reckless and her equipment. Once the ship was underway, she became sick, making a mess on the ship's decks during the first part of the voyage.

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 famous thoroughbred horse Native Dancer to a race. They called their race the "Paddy Derby," and the field was named "Upsan Downs." The Marines never received a reply, though Native Dancer came in second in the Kentucky Derby and won the Preakness Stakes and Belmont Stakes.

AFTERMATH: In 1954, Reckless received a promotion to the rank of sergeant. 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." After the war, she was brought to the U.S., making appearances on television and participating in "Marine Corps Birthday Ball" celebrations. Reckless was officially promoted to staff sergeant by Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Randolph M. Pate before she retired in 1960. She gave birth to four foals in the U.S., though only three survived (Fearless, Dauntless, and Chesty). She passed away in 1968 while being treated for injuries due to a fall.

Reckless received numerous awards, including the Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal, a Presidential Unit Citation with a bronze star, and the Dickin Medal, known as the Victoria Cross for Animals, in 2016. Also, Reckless became an inaugural recipient of the "Animals in War and Peace Medal of Bravery," which is the American version of the Dickin Medal in 2019.

QUESTIONS

1. What were the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of Reckless?
2. Why was Reckless an essential participant at the Battle of Panmunjom-Vegas?
3. What makes Reckless such an endearing character of Marine Corps history?

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