

Horse at center of unlikely war story honored with statue

By San Diego Union-Tribune, adapted by Newsela staff

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CAMP PENDLETON, Calif. — Reckless wasn't just a horse. She was also a Marine. This hero horse, who shed blood alongside U.S. Marines in the Korean War, has been honored with a statue at Camp Pendleton.

The mare known as Staff Sergeant Reckless became famous during the Korean War, but her story has since faded from public memory.

A Los Angeles-area screenwriter is trying to revive Reckless's story. Robin Hutton wrote the 2014 book "Sgt. Reckless, America's War Horse," and led a three-year effort to set up a statue at Camp Pendleton. Reckless lived out her retirement years at this Marine Corps base camp.

"I thought, this is the greatest horse story I had never heard about," Hutton says. She is pitching the story to movie studios as well.

U.S. Military Aids South Korea

Hutton sees Reckless as a way to teach the history of the Korean conflict, often called the "forgotten war." This war began in 1950 when North Korea invaded South Korea. With the backing of the United Nations, the U.S. came to the aid of South Korea. The soldiers who fought in this conflict are now dwindling in number.

In October, a few dozen Marines who fought in Korea gathered at Camp Pendleton to honor the horse.

Reckless' war story was an unusual one. In late 1952, a young officer named Eric Pedersen was given permission to buy a pack animal that could carry heavy ammunition to Marines on the firing line. He purchased a small Mongolian mare for just \$250. Named Reckless, the horse proved her worth beyond price.

Reckless' main job was transporting cylindrical shells, which would be shot from a huge rifle. Each shell weighed more than 20 pounds. The Marines tied four to six rounds of ammunition to Reckless's back.

"Could Hardly Believe My Eyes"

In March 1953, when the enemy overran the Marines' location, Reckless made 51 trips to resupply the guns during battle. She carried 386 rounds totaling more than 9,000 pounds and trekked over 35 miles up and down steep ridges. The horse also transported wounded Marines back from the battlefield.

"I looked back at the eastern skyline through all the smoke and could hardly believe my eyes," recalls Harold Wadley, a soldier who served with the horse. He described seeing her coming up, all alone, over the edge of the mountain to help the soldiers.

Reckless was wounded twice, on the forehead and in the hindquarter. She received the Purple Heart, an award for wounded soldiers.

What special US Military award did Reckless receive and why?

Horse Treated As Another Marine

Wadley says he sees more than a horse carrying ammunition when he looks at the new statue.

"To me, she represents a whole lot more than herself. When I see her, I know that's our 5th Marine Regiment, and all the guys we lost," Wadley says.

Michael Mason, an officer during Korea, remembers lighter moments, too.

At 6 a.m. each day, Reckless would stick her nose in his tent. His bunkmate was one of the unit's cooks, and the horse would yank at the blanket on the cook's bed until he got up and fed her.

“We treated her as though she was another Marine. She was one of us,” Mason said after the ceremony at Camp Pendleton. “After all, she outranked most of us.”

Another Statue In Virginia

That kind of horse deserves a statue, or even two. The first statue, made by artist Jocelyn Russell, was erected in 2013 at the Marine Corps Museum in Quantico, Virginia.

The Camp Pendleton statue was made by the same artist. It is about 12 feet high. The cost was \$185,000, most of which was raised through donations.

The U.S. military has a long record of using animals for their strength and superior senses.

The Marines have employed donkeys as pack animals as recently as the post-9/11 wars.

The military largely stopped using animals in combat after World War II, however, according to Hutton. This makes Reckless a rarity.

Carrots, Parades And Colts

Reckless’s story almost did not have a happy ending, according to Hutton.

The mare stayed behind in Korea after the war ended. It took an article in the Saturday Evening Post to generate enough public feeling to bring her to the United States. Eventually, she was placed at Camp Pendleton. She lived a life full of carrots and parades, and gave birth to three colts, named Fearless, Dauntless and Chesty. The last was a tribute to Chesty Puller, a fellow Korean War veteran.

Reckless died in May 1968, and was buried at the base stables with full military honors. The story of her life made the front page of the San Diego Union newspaper.

Using evidence from the text, explain why Reckless was the pride of the Marines?

Her memorial reads, “Reckless. Pride of the Marines.”

What does this article have to do with Veteran’s Day?

When is Veteran’s Day? _____

Why do we have a day set aside to honor Veterans?