

Sergeant Reckless

Staff Sergeant Reckless (c. 1948 – May 13, 1968), a decorated [war horse](#) who held official rank in the United States military,^[2] 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.^[3] 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](#).^[2] 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.

Staff Sergeant Reckless










Staff Sergeant Reckless in retirement.

Breed	Mongolian
Discipline	Pack horse
Sex	Female
Foaled	c. 1948
Died	May 13, 1968
Country	Mongolia
Color	Chestnut
Owner	Kim Huk Moon/ United States Marine Corps

Military career

Allegiance	 United States
Branch	United States Marine Corps
Years of service	1952 - 1960
Rank	Staff sergeant
Battles/wars	Battle for Outpost Vegas
Awards	 Dickin Medal

 Purple Heart (2)
 Navy Presidential Unit Citation (2)
 Navy Unit Commendation
 Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal
 National Defense Service Medal
 Korean Service Medal (4)
 United Nations Korea Medal
South Korean Government Service Medal ^[a] ^[1]
Animals in War & Peace Medal of Bravery
Children
Four children
Last updated on: April 4, 2020.

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](#).^[4] 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](#). On May 12, 2018, a bronze statue of Sergeant Reckless was placed and dedicated in the Kentucky Horse Park, Lexington Kentucky.^{[5][6]}

Origins

Sergeant Reckless was [chestnut](#) colored with a [blaze and three white stockings](#).^[4] 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 (김혁문 or 김흑문),^[7] though that was not his real name.^[8] The horse was known as originally named "**아침해**" (Ah Chim Hai, Korean pronunciation: [a tsim hæ]) in [Korean](#),^[9] which translates to "Morning Sun" or "Sun-of-the-Morning", also known as "**여명**" (Yeo Myeong) in [Korean](#), which translates to "light of dawn", "Morning Flame" or "Flame-of-the-Morning"^{[10][11][12]} also reputed to be the name of her [dam](#), a [racehorse](#) at the track in Seoul. Kim Huk-moon sold the horse, whom he had nicknamed "Flame", to Lieutenant Eric Pedersen^[b] for \$250 in order to buy a leg [prosthesis](#) for his sister, who had stepped on a [land mine](#).^[3] 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).^{[14][15]}

Military service



Reckless with her primary trainer, Platoon Gunnery Sergeant Joseph Latham

In October 1952, Pedersen received permission from [Colonel](#) Eustace P. Smoak to purchase a horse for his platoon.^[4] Based in mountainous terrain, Pederson 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.^{[4][10][11]} The day after he received permission, on October 26, 1952,^[10] Pedersen, Sergeant Willard Berry, and Corporal Philip Carter drove a jeep with a trailer to the Seoul racetrack.^[16] Pedersen paid for the horse with his own money.^[17] Moon was reluctant to sell the horse, though he needed to,^[3] and cried when "Flame" departed.^[18] 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.^[19]

Her primary trainer and the person Reckless was closest to was platoon [Gunnery Sergeant](#) Joseph Latham.^[20] Private First Class Monroe Coleman was her primary

caretaker.^[4] In addition to Pedersen, Latham, and Coleman, Lieutenant Bill Riley and Sergeant Elmer Lively were also involved with the training and care of Reckless.^{[14][4][8]} 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.^[21] 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.^[22]

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.^[14] She learned to run for a [bunker](#) upon hearing the cry, "incoming!"^[4] The platoon called it her "hoof training" and "hoof camp". The horse was initially kept in a pasture near the encampment.^[14] 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,^[23] sometimes sleeping inside with the troops, and even lying down next to Latham's warm tent stove on cold nights.^[4] She was fond of a wide variety of foodstuffs, entertaining the platoon by eating scrambled eggs and drinking [Coca-Cola](#) and beer.^[23] Food could not be left unattended around her.^[24] 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.^[4] Her tastes were not confined to foodstuffs; she once ate her [horse blanket](#),^[11] and on another occasion ate \$30 worth of Latham's winning poker chips.^{[4][23]}



Reckless under fire in Korea

Reckless's baptism under fire came at a place called Hedley's Crotch, near the villages of Changdan and Kwakchan.^[25] 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.^[4] She even appeared to take an interest in the operation of the weapon.^[25] 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.^[26] 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](#).^[27] She was not injured during the unauthorized ride.^[28]

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.^{[14][4][23][29][c]} 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.^[11] For her accomplishments during the Battle of Vegas Hill, Reckless was promoted to corporal.^[30]



Reckless beside a 75mm

recoilless rifle

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.^[4] 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.^[23] 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,^[31] which had won an award for being the cleanest ship in the previous two years.^[32] She was allowed on board after the Marines produced the loading plan, approved by him, which specifically listed Reckless and her equipment.^[31] 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.^[4] 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", the field "Upsan Downs", and the conditions differed from a typical horse race: 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](#), and went on to win the [Preakness Stakes](#) and [Belmont Stakes](#).^{[33][34]}

[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.^[35] She was also given a red and gold blanket with insignia.^[36] Reckless was promoted again, to staff sergeant (E-6), on August 31,

1959, at Camp Pendleton, California. This promotion was also awarded by Pate, then the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Pate personally presided over the ceremony, and Reckless was honored with a 19-gun salute and a 1,700-man parade of Marines from her wartime unit.^[37] She was an early example of an animal holding official rank in a branch of the United States military.^[24]

Retirement



Sergeant Reckless at her stateside rotation ceremony, 1954. PFC William Moore is holding her. He accompanied her on the trip to America.

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](#).^[4] She would wear these awards on her horse blanket, plus a [French Fourragere](#) that the 5th Marines earned in [World War I](#).^[10]

An article in *The Saturday Evening Post*, published on April 17, 1954, while Reckless was still in Korea,^[8] 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](#).^[4] 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.^[35] She then sailed from Yokohama on October 22 aboard the *SS Pacific Transport*, due in San Francisco on November 5, 1954.^[11] 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

I was surprised at her beauty and intelligence, and believe it or not, her esprit de corps. Like any other Marine, she was enjoying a bottle of beer with her comrades. She was constantly the center of attraction and was fully aware of her importance. If she failed to receive the attention she felt her due, she would deliberately walk into a group of Marines and, in effect, enter the conversation. It was obvious the Marines loved her.

—*Lieutenant General Randolph McC. Pate*^[4]

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.^[38] 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 disembarkation. She was led off the ship by Lieutenant Pedersen and set foot on American soil in San Francisco on November 10, 1954,^[39] 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.^[4]



Sergeant Reckless at her promotion to Staff Sergeant, 1959

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.^[4] 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.^[24] 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.^[38]

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.^[40] 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.^{[14][4]} Her offspring Chesty was named after [Chesty Puller](#), one of the few Marines ever allowed to ride Reckless.^[4] Puller was a Marine Corps [lieutenant general](#) and the most decorated United States Marine of all time.^[41] Reckless retired from active service with full military honors at Camp Pendleton on November 10, 1960.^{[4][24]} She was provided free quarters and feed in lieu of retirement pay, per Marine Corps documents.^[37]



Reckless's son, Fearless, in 1959.

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.^[42] At the time of her death, she was estimated to be 19 or 20 years old.^[4] There is a plaque and photo commemorating her at the Camp Pendleton stables.^[10] The first race at Aqueduct racetrack, New York, was designated "The Sgt Reckless" on November 10, 1989.^[4] In 1997, Reckless was listed by *LIFE* magazine as one of America's 100 all-time heroes.^[37]

Monuments

A monument 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.^[43] 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."^[44]

There are five additional monuments to Sergeant Reckless around the country by artist Jocelyn Russell: Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, Oceanside, CA (October 26, 2016); Kentucky Horse Park, Lexington, KY (May 12, 2018); National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame, Ft. Worth, TX (November 13, 2019), Barrington Hills Farm, Barrington Hills, IL (September 2019); and the World Equestrian Center, Ocala, FL (December 2020) .^[45]^[46] They are similar to the one located at the National Museum of the Marine Corps.^[46]

A memorial to Sergeant Reckless at [Yeoncheon Gorangpogu History Park](#) (Near Battlefield of [Outpost Vegas Battle](#)) was dedicated in 2018^[47]^[48]

Awards and decorations

Source:^[44]



Purple Heart w/1 award star	Navy Presidential Unit Citation w/1 service star	Navy Unit Commendation	Marine Corps Good Conduct Medal	French Fourragère
National Defense Service Medal	Korean Service Medal w/3 bronze service stars	Korean War Service Medal ^[d] ^[1]	United Nations Korea Medal	

On 28 July 2016, Sergeant Reckless was posthumously awarded the [Dickin Medal](#) for her service between 1952 and 1953.^[49] In November 2019 she became the first recipient of the new American equivalent of the Dickin Medal, the [Animals in War & Peace Medal of Bravery](#).^[50]

In popular culture

- *Reckless 1953*: Horse Musical Show by [Korea Racing Authority](#).
- *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*: Lieutenant Peanut Butter from [S01E13](#) is inspired by Reckless.
- "Sergeant Reckless and Terry Google" is the name and subject of S3 E3 of The Technical Difficulties' game show *Citation Needed*.

See also

- [Horses in warfare](#)
- [Judy \(dog\)](#)
- [Wojtek \(bear\)](#)
- [Unsinkable Sam](#)

Notes

- a. Kind of service medal: Unknown
- b. Sometimes misspelled as "Pederson"^[13]
- c. Sometimes erroneously reported as 5 days.^[29]
- d. Kind of service medal: Unknown

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21. Geer 1955, pp. 142–143.
22. Geer 1955, pp. 120, 161.
23. Litalien 1984, p. 30.
24. Kilgannon 2012.
25. Geer 1955, pp. 143–144.
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31. Geer 1955, pp. 189–191.
32. Geer 1955, p. 191.
33. Geer 1955, pp. 191–193.

34. [Baltimore Sun 2013](#).
35. [Geer 1955](#), Introduction, pp. 208–210.
36. [Geer 1955](#), Introduction, pp. 200–202.
37. [Sgt Reckless video 2010](#).
38. [Geer 1955](#), pp. 211–217.
39. [Geer 1955](#), Author's Note, p. 124.
40. [Geer 1955](#), pp. 223–224.
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42. [Tuscaloosa News 1968](#).
43. [Bartel 2013](#).
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Further reading

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- Clavin, Thomas (2014). *Reckless: The Racehorse Who Became a Marine Corps Hero*. New American Library. ISBN 9780698137202. OCLC 883309525 (<https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/883309525>) .
- Giaffo, Lou (2013). *Gooch's Marines* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=mXcTGInloHkC&q=reckless+huk+moon&pg=PA199>) . Pittsburgh, PA: Dorrance Publishing. pp. 199–200. ISBN 978-1-4349-3399-7.
- Hutton, Robin L. (2014). *Sgt. Reckless: America's War Horse*. Regnery History. ISBN 9781621572633. OCLC 870288383 (<https://www.worldcat.org/oclc/870288383>) .

External links

Wikimedia Commons has media related to ***Sergeant Reckless***.

External image

 [SSGT RECKLESS – Process and progress \(http://www.wildlifebronzes.com/jocelyn/RECKLESS/go\)](http://www.wildlifebronzes.com/jocelyn/RECKLESS/go) slideshow by Jocelyn Russell.

- [Web site associated with Hutton book \(http://www.sgtreckless.com/Reckless/About_Reckless.html\)](http://www.sgtreckless.com/Reckless/About_Reckless.html)
- [Sergeant Reckless and her foal Fearless at Camp Pendleton \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z67u5AG6BTM\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z67u5AG6BTM)
- [Sergeant Reckless – Korean War Horse Hero video \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ylo3ZfA9da0\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ylo3ZfA9da0)

- [Woodland man tells story of Korean war horse, Marine mare \(https://news.yahoo.com/video/woodland-man-tells-story-korean-025427310.html\)](https://news.yahoo.com/video/woodland-man-tells-story-korean-025427310.html)
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