

# Sergeant Reckless

## Sergeant Reckless

Most Famous Marine of Her Time

By James G. Fausone

[Sergeant Reckless](#) was one of the most famous Marines of her time. Like Rin Tin Tin and Lassie, this horse became a beloved figure to all who served with her. Bred as a racehorse for the Seoul racetrack; her original name, "*Ah Chim Hai*" translates to "*Flame of the Morning*".

Alas, Reckless was not meant for racing. Once the [Korean War](#) began, her owner struggled. When his sister lost a leg in an explosion, he knew he had to sell Reckless for his sister's prosthetic. Reckless was sold for \$250 to Lt. Eric Pederson of the Recoilless Rifle Platoon. She was renamed Reckless for her wild nature and later task of resupplying recoilless rifles, AKA "*reckless rifles*".

She was a fast learner and although she had the stature of a small pony, she excelled at training. Nicknamed "Hoof Camp", Technical Sergeant Joe Latham ran her training. He trained her to step over communication lines and barbed wire, acclimated her to the loud sounds of war, and trained her to carry heavy loads up and down hills in preparation to carry ammunition and wounded soldiers. She even learned what different hand signals meant for the Marines.

Sergeant Reckless might not have been bred for it, but she was an incredible war horse. Carrying more than 9,000 pounds of ammunition in 51 trips in the [Battle of Outpost Vegas](#) alone, she was more than an asset, she was one of the Marines. Moving to sites on her own, not fearing the battle playing out ahead, she was the difference between life and death for these men and women fighting on the front lines.

She never took herself too seriously though. As a Sergeant, she was always getting into mischief. Her favorite snacks included pickles and pancakes which she would get from the company men. For drinks, she preferred either Coca-Cola or beer. Yes, you read that right, this horse loved beer. One time, Sgt. Reckless drank so much ale that she was found the next morning stumbling across camp, still drunk from the night before. Even after retirement, Reckless loved trying human food. As the guest of honor at the Marine Corps 179th birthday dinner, she was spotted indulging in a piece of cake.



Sergeant Reckless being fed cake by the wife of Lt. Eric Pederson (center) during Marine Corps 179th birthday dinner where the sorrel mare was guest of honor. (Credit: Bettmann Archive/Getty Images)

When the war ended, Sgt. Reckless was stuck in Korea; the American public had no idea. Until a drawing of the war horse by Lt. Col. Andrew Geer appeared in the Saturday Evening Post. Americans were outraged and demanded she be brought back. The military was concerned about the budget bringing a horse back to U.S. soil, even if it was a Sergeant. While they debated the merit of bringing her back, Geer's friend decided he would be the one to take action. He owned a shipping company and with Geer paying \$1,200 out of pocket, he was able to bring Geer's comrade home.

Finally back in America, Sergeant Reckless was able to live at Camp Pendleton in California, where she was promoted to Staff Sergeant. She had three colts and a filly in her lifetime before passing away in 1968. Her death was front-page news as she was buried with full military honors.

After Staff Sergeant Reckless passed away, her [name began to fade into history](#). She became overshadowed by the horrors of World War II and the Vietnam War. It seemed the world was doomed to forget about the honorable horse who had saved so many during the Korean War. One woman changed that, thrusting Reckless back into the spotlight. Robin Hutton decided to write a book about the brave animal, ["Sgt. Reckless: America's War Horse"](#). The book was a great success and it inspired so many younger generations to learn more about the military's famous animals. From Cher Ami to Staff Sergeant Reckless, animals have impacted our military in countless ways, and will remain essential to our nation for generations.



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

### About the Author

*Jim Fausone is a partner with **Legal Help For Veterans, PLLC**, with over twenty years of experience helping veterans apply for service-connected disability benefits and starting their claims, appealing VA decisions, and filing claims for an increased disability rating so veterans can receive a higher level of benefits.*

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