- Moshe Miller

SERGEANT
RECKLESS

STAFF SERGEANT
RECKLESS

5th Marine Regiment - 1st Marine Division
1948 - 1968

Korean War Hero

She wasn't a Horse --
She was a Marine!

There has only been one animal in the history of the United States Armed Forces to hold an official rank. She even received a pension! Sergeant Reckless was a little war horse that fought with real bravery during the Korean War and made a huge impact on the lives of her fellow Marines. This is her little-known story.

Machine gun fire whizzed overhead, as the boom of mortar cannons shook the air. Smoke, fire and the scent of gunpowder dominated the hilly landscape. A lone, intrepid soldier of the United States Marine Corps, carrying 200 pounds of gigantic artillery shells, scrambled up an incline that was so steep it seemed as if it was at a 45-degree angle—for hundreds of feet. After delivering the critical munitions to battle-weary men, an injured soldier was strapped onto the Marine's back and they headed straight back toward the relative safety of the ammunition supply point.

This Marine repeated the same routine from morning to night, sustaining bodily injury, bringing essential supplies and helping many wounded soldiers during what was to become the bloodiest day of the entire war. Later, this Marine corporal was to become one of America's most celebrated war heroes.

Unlike any of the others, though, Cpl. Reckless was a horse.

Korea under Siege

In the closing month of World War II, shortly before Japan's surrender, the Soviet Red Army swept down into the Japanese-ruled Korean peninsula from the north, quickly crushing the opposition and advancing to occupy strategic cities.

Korea, after having been an independent kingdom for centuries, had been annexed by the Empire of Japan in 1910. During the November 1943 Cairo Conference, the Allied Powers agreed that when Japan was ultimately defeated, she would be stripped of all colonies she had acquired by force—and Korea would be guided toward independence.

Days after they had dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, US officials read reports of the Soviets' advance with great concern. Perhaps the Russians would occupy the entire peninsula—putting Korea under sole Communist control after the war. Although the Americans and Soviets were allies in the world war, they were ideological adversaries and would quickly become Cold War enemies.

In August 1945, the Americans unilaterally decided on a line to divide Korea into American and Soviet zones of occupation, the 38th parallel of latitude north. At that moment, it was just a line drawn on a map; no US troops had landed in Korea yet, though the Soviet army was already marching on Pyongyang (later to become North Korea's capital city). Six days after Japan's unconditional surrender on September 2, the Americans landed troops on Korea's shore and moved to fill in the vacuum of power south of the 38th parallel.

The United Nations put Korea under a five-year trusteeship administered by four powers: the US, UK, USSR and the Republic of China (democratic at that time). The trusteeship was supposed to lead up to independence. Predictably, the Americans and Soviets did not play nicely. They could not come to an agreement about how elections were supposed to be held. This led to separate election processes in the north and the south, and separate leaders. Communist strongman Kim Il-sung ruled the north, and the ardent anti-communist

US Marines in Korea on the move, 1951.

(but also ruthless) politician Syngman Rhee became president of the south. Each side claimed sovereignty over the entire Korean peninsula.

For several years after Korea's split, Kim lobbied the Soviets for permission to launch an invasion of the south. By 1950, he received Stalin's blessing and the support of (newly communist) China. At dawn on June 25, 1950, the Korean People's Army flooded across the 38th parallel from the north, igniting the Korean War. Armed with powerful Soviet equipment, they quickly overwhelmed the South and occupied Seoul. The United Nations immediately condemned the invasion and jumped into the war on the side of South Korea. Besides the South Korean Army, the United States Armed Forces made up the bulk of the UN coalition, with 326,863 troops sent over the course of the war. The UK sent the next-highest number, over 14,000 troops, and 19 other countries contributed smaller numbers of fighters, as well.

The UN armies overwhelmed the North Koreans and pushed their army all the way back toward North Korea's border with China, occupying the capital Pyongyang along the way. But then, the Chinese entered the war. With might in sheer numbers, the Chinese pushed the Americans back south. Eventually, a more stable battlefront emerged, snaking back and forth along the 38th parallel.

A small unit of US Marines lies in the snow with rifles ready at a curve in a road near Yudan in the Chosin Reservoir area, northwest of the port of Hungnam, Korea, Nov. 29, 1950. They are shown at their snowy post as the 1st and 7th Marine Regiments were retiring under heavy pressure by three enemy divisions. One soldier, right, has a bayonet fixed on his weapon.

The Reckless Rifle

A critical armament in the Americans' effort to hold back forces from Communist China from penetrating into South Korea was the recoilless rifle. When positioned on high ground, the big guns could shoot their 75 mm shells several thousand yards with utmost precision,