

Manny Kicks Long Ear Lore

By Chris Stuckenschneider

CHAPTER 7: Mules Earn Their Stripes

Frivolity won't earn you respect—time to get back in the harness, to turn a deaf ear to the flat screen and stack of "Francis the Talking Mule" DVDs. Pull up a hay bale. I'm about to impart important info on military mules.

Oh, our aching backs. Anytime I think I've had a rough day, I contemplate Army mules, how they've borne the brunt of loads that would buckle a fox trotter's knees.

From the Civil War to the war in Afghanistan, mules from the United States have made their mark, carrying food and supplies to campsites where troops could be hunkered down for months at a time. Mules also transported heavy artillery over Rocky Mountain passes and through humid jungles tangled with foliage.

Before helicopters were used, mules transported soldiers to field hospitals for surgery and care.

Mules were used extensively in World War I from 1914-1918. A couple of men made mule history back then. Believed to be the largest mule dealers in the world, Guyton and Harrington shipped more than 350,000 mules and horses to Great Britain and France from Lathrop, Mo. The community became known as "The Mule Capital of the World."

Imagine the work required for this effort—the barns that needed to be built, the ferrisers and trainers that had to be hired, the feed required to sustain the animals. A dozen men scoured the countryside to find enough hay to keep the mules fed. Others searched the states for quality long ears to send overseas.

Mules also have helped train troops stateside, like at Fort Carson, Colo., from 1942 to 1956. The Army base, just south of Colorado Springs, offered soldiers real-life scenarios in terrain they would experience in other countries. It's all about practice when you're learning maneuvers. Military mule Hamilton T. Bone, dubbed Hambone for short, knew all about that.



ARMY MONTAGE SHOWS HAMBONE JUMPING OVER COLORADO'S PIKES PEAK

MULE BEATS HORSES

Barred from competition with his social betters, he is still Army's best jumper at Camp Carson

Were it not for his plebeian ancestry the long-eared animal shown on the opposite page would be winning jumping contests in horse shows all over the country. The animal's name is Hambone, and although Hambone's mother was a fairly respectable mare, his father was an ass. That makes Hambone a mule, unfit to jump against high society thoroughbreds. Hambone is the property of the United States Army and has attracted attention throughout the world. He is a member of the Hamilton T. Bone family.

Now mules don't get a lot of respect, as previously noted—but a mule that's white suffers great spite. They pick up grass stains and mud as easy as a little leaguer in a back lot game. Hambone was thusly afflicted, until he became the cream of the crop with the 4th Field Artillery Regiment at Fort Carson.

Hambone was a bit of a rascal as an adolescent, harder than most to train. Folks didn't think he'd make much of himself. Perhaps the long ears just needed the structure the Army provided because he shone like a superstar, serving in two missions overseas in World War II, getting movie parts in Hollywood and offering service at Fort Carson, where he lived most of his life.

Hambone became a household word when he was featured in an issue of "Life Magazine," which was popular then. Hambone shook things up with the horsey set because he could jump like a jackrabbit. His buddies at Fort Carson entered him in some competitions and he left his opponents in the dirt. Hambone flew like an Olympic high jumper. But the upper crust turned up their tails at him, and stripped him of his ribbons, a fiasco that the press picked up—love 'um—resulting in the story in "Life" and further notoriety for the Ham.

If you're out west, you can visit Hambone's grave at Fort Carson. The old stick's buried there. After retirement they knew it would be the only proper resting place for him. Hambone kicked off in 1971 at the whopping old age of 39. Wonder what that is in dog years?

Better quit hoofing it up. There's a final chapter yet. We'll put the wrap on mules by visiting with folks who are eager to share their experiences with long ears in current times.

Just a little mule humor!

Mule Links to More Learnin'

- 1 Pack Mules Rule—Reign in Difficult Terrain, <http://www.carolinacountry.com/index.php/carolina-stories/item/agility-stability-stamina>
- 2 To read more about Hambone, go to Google Books and enter "hambone the mule" in the search box. The first entry will be the "Life" magazine article from 1949 about Hambone.
- 3 Mules Trump Horses as Army Mascots, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AGYWMohP7xg>

Common Core Standards:
R.CCR.1, R.CCR.2, R.CCR.3, R.CCR.4, R.CCR.5, R.CCR.7,
W.CCR.4, SL.CCR.3, L.CCR.4