AN ODD TRIO: THE MISSOURI MULE, THE MALTESE FALCON & THE 101st CAVALRY
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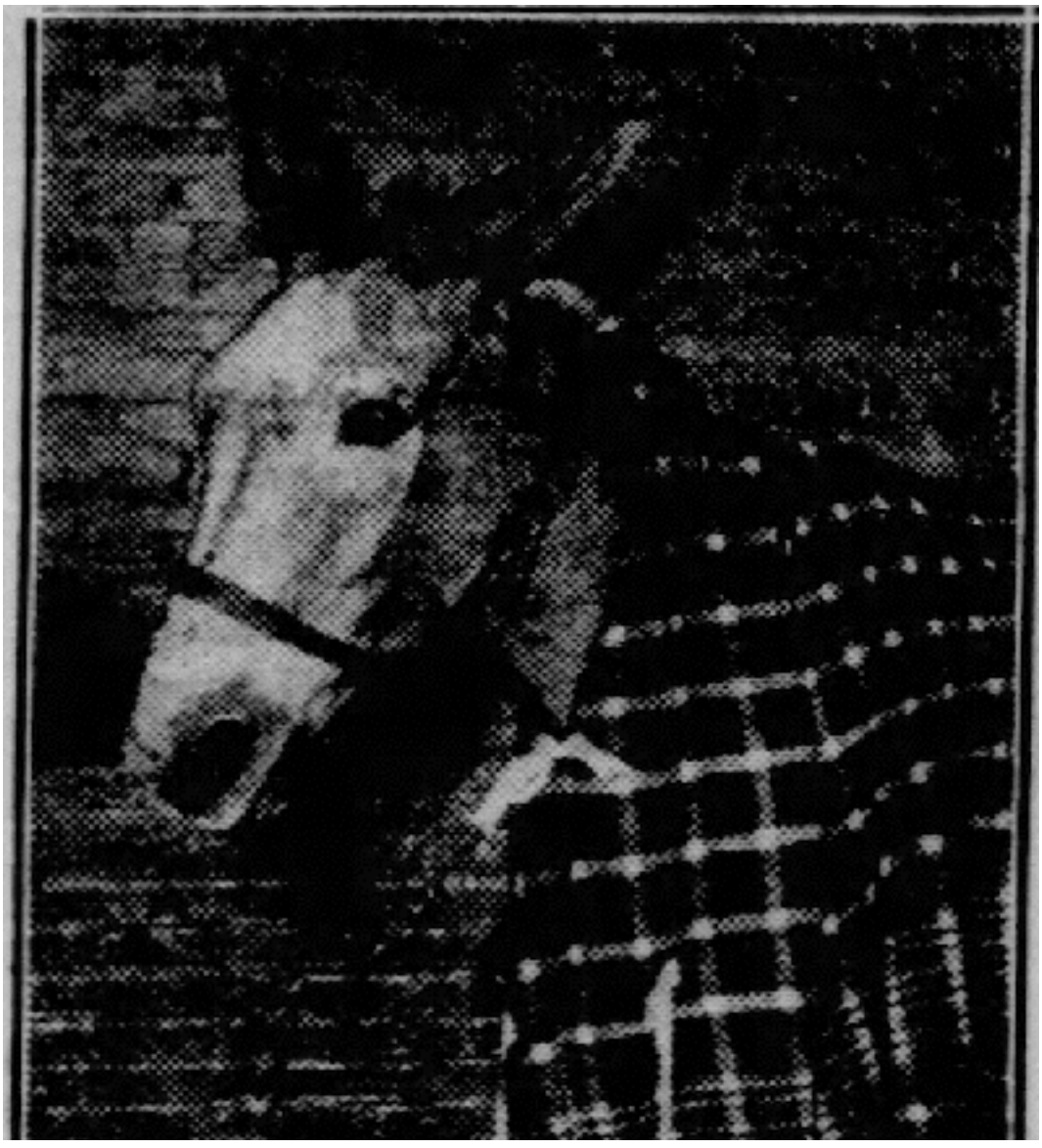
In Europe, war had been raging since 1939 and although the United States was officially neutral, by 1941 its military had begun preparing for entry into it, however unlikely it was deemed to be. On January 21, 1941, the 101st Cavalry New York National Guard was federalized and it wasn't long before the New Yorkers were ordered to Fort Devens, Massachusetts.

At Fort Devens, in February 1941, the Regiment was partially mechanized, retaining horses, necessary for scouting in hostile terrain, and mules to pull vital equipment such as ambulances. One of these mules was Gene a 35-year old Missouri mule and veteran of service along the Mexican border in 1916. He'd been "found" by the men serving at Fort McAllen, Texas.



Daily News, New York NY, September 25, 1941 Queens Section Q5

For 25 years Gene had been the mascot in Brooklyn and despite his advanced age, brought along with his stablemates to Fort Devens. His specialty was soothing horses while they were being shoed and calming them at loading points. The toothless, sorrel-colored, white-maned and tailed mule, did his best to keep up with his duties but age had taken its toll.

Unfortunately for Gene, orders came for the 101st Cavalry to travel to the Carolinas for 1st Army maneuvers, its advanced detachments leaving in mid-September. A journey of over 800 miles, taking four days would be too grueling for the mule, who had not adjusted well to living at Fort Devens. Colonel Gilbert E. Ackerman, commander of the 101st Cavalry, who had plenty on his mind preparing for the maneuvers, ordered Gene shot—considered humane, and not an unusual end for a horse or mule in that era. This did not sit well with some of the soldiers under his command and word of the pending order reached Brooklyn.

Colonel Walter E. Young knew Gene well and had served with him as a stable sergeant in the 1st NY Cavalry along the Mexican border. Presently commanding units of the 51st Regiment New York Guard, he interceded on Gene's behalf, arguing that fellow veterans would be shocked if the mule was executed. His intervention worked—the order was rescinded and Gene was spared. Taken by horse ambulance back to Brooklyn, the old four-footed soldier was "seasick" on the ride and, once home and tottering in his stall, was warmly greeted by dozens of fellow veterans. He would live out his retirement in Brooklyn and summering on Long Island.

Ironically, it was Colonel Ackerman, in the aftermath of the mule affair, who decided that the 101st Cavalry needed a proper mascot. As it so happens that the insignia of the 101st Cavalry has included a falcon since 1928, orders were issued to find one. Apparently, the army had several falcons in use at the time, training at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, to intercept enemy carrier pigeons and attack enemy parachutes. First Sergeant Thomas P. Neary and Captain Hugh Leonard were assigned the task, and the search through army channels came up empty except for a stuffed bird that was offered from friends in Washington. The 125th Observation Squadron at Fort Sill, Oklahoma had a female, named Lady Macbeth, but the Squadron would not surrender her Ladyship!

Two civilians answered the call. Jacques Susanne of Lake Placid, New York, an arctic explorer and artist, offered up his pet falcon. But it was Humphrey Bogart, whose movie *The Maltese Falcon* was about to premier on October 3, 1941 in New York City, who came through for the regiment. He wired that he was shipping a live bird from Hollywood to Fort Devens. Three thousand miles later, the bird arrived at Boston and Fort Devens received the following wire, "Bird here. Do something. Bird might starve."

Unfortunately for the bird, the 101st Cavalry had already left for maneuvers in North Carolina. Fort Devens officials scrambled to find someone to look after it. Eventually the bird reached the 101st Cavalry. In February 1942, Humphrey Bogart was thanked for the falcon by some soldiers he met at a train station. He initially thought they were referring to *The Maltese Falcon*, saying he enjoyed the role. They told him it was for the live bird: "That bird, they exclaimed, 'has bitten just about everyone in the

troop. When he took a hunk out of the mess sergeant he became everyone else's favorite. We've had better meals since.'"

What happened to the bird afterwards, I have been unable to discover.

FALCON MASCOT FOR CAVALRY: Humphrey Bogart delivers a pet falcon to Air Stewardess Henrietta Wischemeers just before the bird started a 3,000-mile aerial trip from Los Angeles to Ft. Devens, Massachusetts, where it became the mascot of the 101st Cavalry.

The Southwest Wave, Los Angeles CA, October 10, 1941 p. 2 c.3-5

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