

The USS Boxer & Maggie the Mule

The bulk of the division moved by MSTS Troop Ships. The first ship, with the 2nd Brigade headquarters, two infantry battalions, and one artillery battalion, left Charleston, South Carolina, on August 15. The ship was combat-loaded, as opposed to being administratively loaded, the premise being that the division might have to land fighting and wouldn't have the luxury of time on the beach to sort itself out.

A total of six troop carriers, four aircraft carriers, and seven cargo vessels were employed in the over-water movement. The 1st Brigade loaded out on the USNS Geiger, the 2nd Brigade on the Buckner, the 3rd Brigade on the Rose. The remainder of the division loaded on the Darby, the Patch, and the Upshur.

The division's aircraft were crowded on to the carries USNS Kula Gulf, Croaton, and Card and the USS Boxer.

General cargo and aircraft were to depart from the eastern seaboard and Gulf Coast ports. In fact, many of the aircraft had already been ferried to the ports of embarkation. Most of the ships to be used for the movement were U.S. Naval Ships, operated with civilian crews by the Military Sea Transport Service (MSTS). But one vessel, the aircraft carrier USS Boxer, was still a ship of the line of the U.S. Navy and had a military crew.

The Boxer, loading out of Jacksonville, carried more than 200 aircraft, mostly CH-47 Chinooks and the four CH-54 Flying Cranes from the attached 478th Aviation Company. It also carried one mule.

The saga of Maggie the Mule was but one chapter in the turbulent life of Lieutenant Colonel John Stockton, the 9th Cavalry's colorful commander. When the air assault division was in the Carolinas on maneuvers the previous October some of the officers in Stockton's squadron talked a farmer out of his old gray mule and gave it to Stockton as a gag birthday gift. Stockton didn't look on it as a gag, however, and ordered his staff to make sure that the mule got back to Fort Benning. No one is quite sure how the squadron acquired permanent title to the mule, named Maggie by Stockton in honor of his wife, but somehow it did end up at Benning.

After the division got its Vietnam marching orders, General Harry Kinnard put out an order that there would be no pets taken to Vietnam. And to make sure that the word reached the guy Kinnard intended to get the message, he called Colonel Richard Knowles in and told him, "Dick, it's your responsibility to see that mule and that little dog John runs with do not get to Vietnam." It was a case of too little, too late.

In front of witnesses, Knowles passed on the order to Stockton: "Did you get the order on pets?" "Yes Sir," said Stockton. But as with all orders given to Stockton, it had to be made explicit. Knowles had not asked Stockton whether he had already made arrangements to ship Maggie.

A few days later, Stockton went to division headquarters to tell Knowles the sad story. It seems that one of his captains, who had been sent to supervise the loading of the 9th Cavalry's helicopters, had been to dinner with the skipper of the Boxer and, in the course of the evening, the Navy captain had apparently had more than his share of cocktails. According to the captain, when the party got back to the ship that night, some reporters were hanging around and asked the skipper what his mission was. He replied, "I can't tell you what my real mission is, but I can tell you I'm taking the 1st Cav's Mule to Vietnam." Stockton had, of course, waited until the Boxer had set sail before relaying the story to Knowles.

Knowles rushed over to Kinnard's office to give him the bad news and was told to have the mule taken off at the first port of call. Knowles suggested to Kinnard that, since the eyes of the world seemed to be focused on the 1st Cavalry, a better course of action might be to declare the mule an exception to policy, make it the division's mascot, and forget about the whole thing. But the saga of Maggie the Mule was far from over.



*Maggie the White Mule
Milo (Mike) Schlaudraff Photo
On deck of the USS Boxer. Maggie in her corral on the fan tail. Rumor has it that she was shot by friendly
fire shortly after arriving in country.*



The troops celebrated the divisions's forty-fourth anniversary, September 13th, on the high seas. But the following day, the Buckner, with the 2nd Brigade, dropped anchor in Qui Nhon Harbor. Two days earlier, the Boxer had arrived and the Cav's birds already flying to shore.

Kinnard and a small staff, in a launch, began visiting all of the troop ships as they arrived in the harbor. He also paid a visit to the Boxer, not only to talk with the commander of the troops, Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Silver, who also was the commander of the 228th Assault Support Helicopter Battalion (CH-47 Chinooks), but also to ask the skipper of the Boxer to spring a couple of his seaman from the brig.

They were incarcerated after having sneaked onto the fantail of the ship, where a stall had been set up for Maggie the Mule. Armed with a hot iron, they seared the initials USN on the haunch of the unfortunate beast. Knowles had learned of the incident while visiting the ship the previous day, and had suggested to Kinnard that he make a personal appeal to the skipper of the Boxer for clemency for the two sailors.

When the unloading started, it suddenly occurred to Knowles that Stockton was going to have to transport the mule somehow to An Khe. So he summoned Stockton and asked him what his plan was to get Maggie to An Khe. Stockton started to say, "I talked to Ben Silver..." Knowles stopped him in mid-sentence. "John, I am going to give you an order. I do not want that mule to go up in a Chinook." Knowles said he could just visualize the mule getting excited and kicking a hole in the side of a Chinook, costing an aircraft and a crew because of a dumb mascot. "Do you understand?" he emphasized to Stockton. "Yes Sir," was Stockton's reply.

"It wasn't but thirty minutes later when I looked up and saw the mule slung under Stockton's command chopper," Knowles said. "It was typically Stockton; he would obey the letter of the order, but make his own decisions about the spirit."

Combat elements of the division closed on the An Khe base on September 14, and the Vietcong wasted little time in probing the base defenses.

The green troops expended a lot of ammunition early on, firing mostly at shadows. During the early days at An Khe, the saga of Maggie the Mule ended tragically. She wandered to far outside the perimeter one cloudy night and was shot by a spooked picket guard.

Note: According to the book and the poem both state that she was branded, but it appears that USN was spray painted on her in both pictures. ;-)

WHO BRANDED THE 1ST AIR CALVARY'S MASCOT "MAGGIE" THE MULE?

The mystery has been solved. During the 2002 reunion, Shipmate William Sneath provided the following play-by-play.

Twas a night in Qui Nhon
When all through the bay
Not a sound could be heard
But the munching of hay.

The sailors all snuggled
But awake in their sacks
Awaiting the signal
For the Fantail attack.

The iron was fashioned
With dear loving care
For this was to be

No "Affaire Ordinaire".

The sailors assembled
The charge "En Masse"
And Maggie became
A branded Jackass.

Then up on the fantail
There arose such a clatter
I sprang from my sack
To see "What's the matter?"

Up Remsen! Up Weiser!
Awake Mr. Beck!
Dash away Wallace!
All hands out on deck!

Then over the bay's
Most fragrant air
There arose the aroma
Of burning mule hair.

Then I heard these words
As she pawed in her pen
"Your heart may be Army...
But your ass is USN!"

The poem may have been referring to:

LCDR HENRY NMN REMSEN 513207 TRF-N&MCRTC-WORCESTER 1/5/67
LT CONRAD W WEISER, JR 618441 TRF-NS-WASHINGTON 7/31/66
CDR FREDERICK E BECK, JR 532642 TRF-COMOPTEVFOR 4/20/67
CDR GERARD V WALLACE 314389 TRF-NRTC-PORTLAND, ME 11/8/65

Additional Photos of Maggie the Mule and Boxer
Contributed by Robert Canchola
Received from
Ed Soltis and Jim Hackett, First Cavalry Division, US Army









MAGGIE