

Army Mules Honored at Last

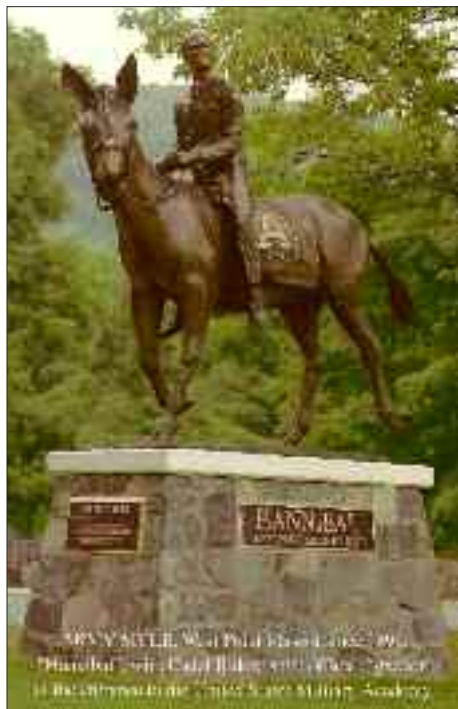
By Christina Lynch and Cary Peyton

A statue of a general on horseback rears up in every city in the world but when it comes time to acknowledge other equines that deserve military laurels, mules always seem to get short shrift. W.C. “Tiny” Tomsen discovered the anti-mule bias first-hand when he proposed making a mule statue the gift of West Point’s Company M-2, Class of 1954, to its alma mater on the occasion of its fiftieth class reunion.

“Mules have a long and wonderful history in the U.S. Army,” says Tomsen, so he was surprised when the U.S. Military Academy at West Point politely declined the gift. (The Army’s version of the story is that West Point is home to enough class monuments.)

Showing the true grit of Army perseverance, Tomsen had the statue cast anyway, and contacted local officials in Highland Falls, New York, the town where the Academy is located, who were delighted to welcome the monument. Today the 15-foot-tall trotting mule with a cadet astride stands at the main entrance to West Point, across the street from the West Point Visitors Center.

Back in 2002, soon after the Army looked the gift mule in the mouth, Tomsen, of Tulsa Oklahoma, led the charge to make the monument a reality. He established the “Army Mule Monument Fund” to raise the \$125,000 necessary for the statue, its transportation, and installation. All donations



were voluntary, and the statue was not considered the “official” gift of the class of 1954. Tomsen pledged to make up the difference himself between what was donated and what was needed to complete the project on time. Company M-2, along with many friends, rose to the challenge in true Army tradition.

Since 1899, the Army’s mascot has been a mule, and West Point has had a resident mule mascot since 1936. Several Cadets from each class are chosen to be the Mule Riders, and make appearances at Army athletic events, riding around the field and performing tricks. The statue, sculpted by J. David Nunneley of Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, is a likeness of Hannibal, the official Army mule from 1947-1964, a mule the members of the class of 1954 knew well.

Tomsen tells the story of Hannibal: “He was foaled in 1942, served as a pack mule in the Regular Army, and then became a West Point mascot. He was broke to ride by Walter Price of the class of 1950. Hannibal stood 14 hands and weighed 1000

pounds.” Tomsen says that his ’54 classmate Jan LeCroy (who rode mules before he was a cadet) reported that Hannibal had a very smooth and even gait, making it relatively easy to accomplish acrobatic maneuvers on board while at the trot.

“Hannibal was the longest tenured mule at West Point, and was reportedly perhaps the most intelligent as well,” says Tomsen. Intelligent or not, Hannibal was still a mule, and ran through the Presidential Box during the 1948 Army-Navy football game, giving a good scare to President Truman, his wife Bess, and rider Walter Price.

The bronze rider is not a likeness of any one Cadet, but rather a composite of Hannibal’s three riders from the Class of ’54: Jan Le Croy, George Perrin and the late Bobby Chapman. “The bridle, blanket, and rider’s clothing are all perfectly realistic and accurate,” points out Tomsen. “Hannibal was a handsome mule. This is as nearly a perfect clone of the Army Mule we knew as is humanly possible.”

The inscription on the statue reads: *Since 1899 the mule has been the West Point mascot promoting the spirit of the Corps of Cadets. Mules were very important to the Army in the late 1800s through World War I. While not regular cavalry mounts, mules were used extensively to pull supply wagons, caissons, and artillery pieces. Mules are stronger, more surefooted, more intelligent, and eat less than horses. Riding mules like ‘Hannibal’ were used by mounted guards and messengers.*

Hannibal (249-183 B.C.) was one of the greatest military leaders of all time. ‘Hannibal’ was an exceptional West Point mascot. He served the Corps of Cadets faithfully from 1947-1964. Donated to Highland Falls in recognition of their great support of West Point and the Corps of Cadets. This monument honors all of the intrepid mule riders since 1899 who have promoted the indomitable spirit of the Corps of Cadets.



Pictured are (left to right) Dick Weaver, Cary Peyton, Spooky Boyle.
Photo by Sheridan King.



Ranger II, the current mascot mule.

The monument was dedicated on May 22, 2004. Many members of the class of 1954 were on hand, including Hannibal's riders LeCroy and Perrin. At the dedication, Steve Townes, one of the Class of 1975's Mule Riders and now the CEO of Keystone Helicopter, said, "For over 100 years the Army mule has represented West Point as a living symbol of perseverance and strength." The current West Point mule, Ranger II, also took part in the ceremony.

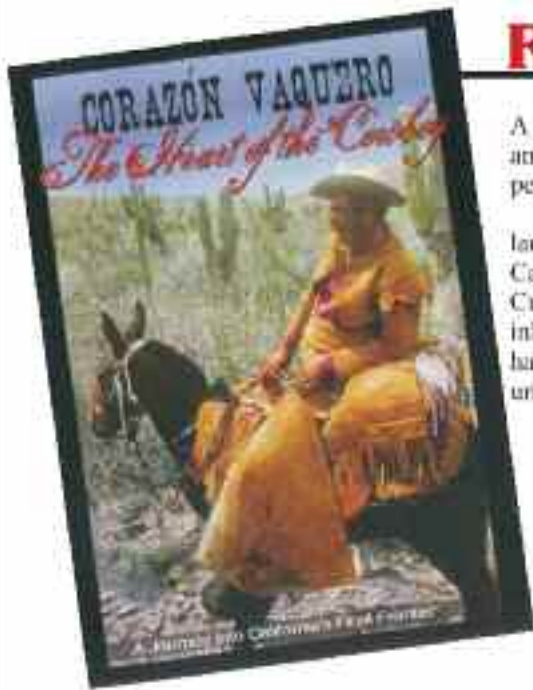
In April 2009, the class gathered again to celebrate its 55th anniversary and check in on Hannibal. Highland Falls now celebrates Hannibal Day on the third Saturday in May every year. It's estimated that three million visitors a year pass Hannibal on

their way into West Point. At last, mules' service to the Army and to the nation has been immortalized, thanks to some very dedicated fans of a little ol' longears who was drafted to be a pack mule and ended up a bronzed hero.

Note: Co-author Cary Peyton is a member of West Point's Class of 1954. His wife Sheridan King has been packing mules in Yosemite National Park for over 25 years.

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By Kulie



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