



## **THE GIRL IN THE GENERAL'S UNIFORM**

Scandal has rocked the Chinese army after it was discovered that one of its top male officers is actually a woman.

Hua Mulan, 32, decided to disguise herself as a man when she was drafted into the military 12 years ago.

Until a few weeks ago, none of her colleagues had a clue that she wasn't a man.

The Chinese government had introduced national service so it could fight a war against the Hun nomads living on China's northern border.

All families had to give up their men, and the Hua's were no exception.

"But when I saw my father's name on the draft posters, and imagined an old man having to fight, or being killed, it was just too much," Ms. Hua recalled yesterday in an interview at the family home.

Her only brother was too young to take their father's place, so Ms. Hua decided she would go instead. She bought a saddle and a horse, put on men's clothes and, disguised as her brother, joined the army.

"It was very sad leaving the family, but I had no choice," she said.

Ms. Hua was already an accomplished martial artist, because many military families at the time trained their daughters in the arts of war.

Once in the army, she rose through the ranks quickly, making a name for herself as a brilliant military strategist.

Twelve years later, the war ended, and all high-ranking officers were brought before the emperor to be honored and promoted.

The emperor asked Ms. Hua, who had risen to the rank of general, what reward "he" would like.

Court records have it that General Hua replied: "Mulan has no use for a minister's post. All I want is a swift horse to take me back to my home."

The emperor granted the request, and she returned to the family home.

Once there, she took off her battle clothes, put on some make-up and let her hair down.

When she emerged, her former comrades were stunned, and realized that their fearless military colleague had been a woman all along.

Word soon got back to the emperor, who has ordered a government inquiry into the matter.

Some legal experts say Ms. Hua may have broken some laws by misrepresenting herself and pretending to be a man.

Defense Ministry sources say the scandal may lead to some senior officers being sacked.

Ms. Hua, however, has already been approached by a movie studio, which wants to turn her amazing story into an animated feature.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Ballad of Mulan is a famous Chinese poem about a girl who disguises herself as a man to join the army, so her elderly father does not have to.

Some scholars believe it was composed during the 5th century by a woman named Tzu-Yeh, although it is not known whether the story was based on a real person.

Centuries later during the Ming Dynasty (1368 to 1644), the poem, which was originally written in the form of a song, was expanded and spun into a novel and a play.

Another few hundred years later, it became an animated Disney movie which, however, changed one detail: Mulan's secret is discovered while she is still in the army, and she is banished.

But one common thread binds all the adaptations of this popular tale: the idea of a woman beating the odds in a man's world.

## **FAB VOCAB**

SCANDAL

A disgraceful situation

DRAFTED INTO THE MILITARY

To be selected to serve despite not volunteering

SADDLE

A leather seat made to fit over the back of a horse

ACCOMPLISHED

Skilled

BRILLIANT

Gifted

MILITARY STRATEGIST

Someone who is able to plan how to win in battle

EMERGED

Appeared

STUNNED

Shocked

GOVERNMENT INQUIRY

An official investigation into matters of public interest

LEGAL EXPERTS

Those trained in the law

## **IF YOU ENJOYED THIS, READ**

*Fa Mulan*

By Robert D. San Souci

*The Outsiders*

By Susan Eloise Hinton

*The Adventures Of Huckleberry Finn*

By Mark Twain