

# Hamdan

(by Sara Loken)

"The animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours, they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth."

(*The Outermost House* by Henry Beston)

## HAMDAN

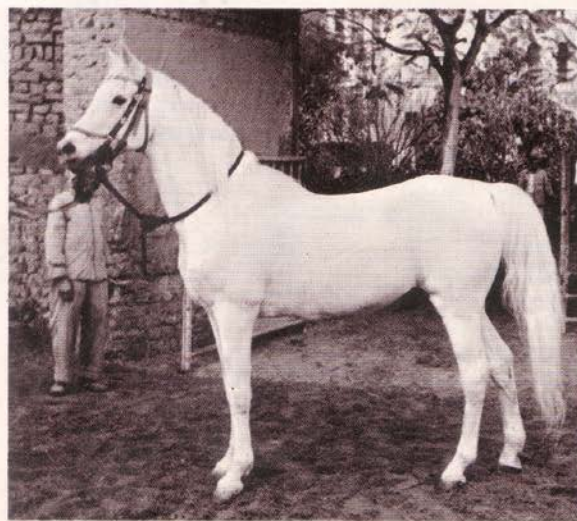
- Foaled: 13 September 1936, Kafr Farouk Stud  
Royal Agricultural Society, Cairo, Egypt
- 1939-1952: Herd sire at King Farouk's Inshass Stud
- 1952-1956: Under control of the revolutionary  
government
- 1956-1966: Herd sire at Hamdan Stables, Tahanoub,  
Egypt
- 1967: Returned to El Zahraa Arab Stud of the  
Egyptian Agricultural Organization (nee  
Royal Agricultural Society), Cairo, Egypt
- Died: July 1967

Hamdan became a part of Egyptian history on September 13, 1936. His sire, Ibn Rabdan, was 19 years old at the time of Hamdan's birth; his dam, Bint Radia, was 16. He was one of an illustrious family. His full sister, Samira, foaled in 1935, was judged the most beautiful mare in Egypt at one of the Royal Agricultural Society shows. His full brother, Shahloul, born in 1931, became a senior sire of great elegance at the Royal Agricultural Society's Kafr Farouk farm, while the other full brother, Radwan, born in 1934, stood at one of the Agricultural colleges. All four were foaled chestnuts with stars; all four became greys.

Hamdan's life was closely entwined with the political events of Egypt, even to the year of his birth. 1936 was the year of the death of King Fuad, and his 16-year-old son returned from schooling in England (where he was

known affectionately as Prince Freddy) to become the sovereign. Prince Farouk was welcomed with open arms by the Egyptians, for he was their first ruler to speak their own native Arabic, and he represented the new freedom of their country. In 1937 Egypt became a member of the League of Nations, a sovereign nation in her own right, and thus ended 2,000 years of vassalage.

Hamdan was born at the Kafr Farouk Stud Farm of the Royal Agricultural Society, near Ein Shams, east of Cairo. At that time, the intention of the Kafr Farouk Stud was the collection and preservation of the finest Arabian horses of the Middle East, and each acquisition—whether acquired as a gift or a product of stock already on the farm—was a triumphant step forward in the program. Arabian horse breeding in the Middle East had retrogressed alarmingly, the herds of the bedouins having been decimated by various conditions, and the Royal Agricultural Society, through the establishment of the Kafr Farouk Stud Farm, was determined to correct this distressing loss.



Hamdan at Ahmed Hamza Pasha's Stables.





**The young Hamdan at Kafr Farouk.**

It wasn't long before the fame of Egypt's Arabian horses was spreading around the globe once again. It is said that a group of South Africans visited Kafr Farouk in 1939 and offered a great price for Hamdan. King Farouk, even then an obsessive collector of rare and precious items, heard of the value placed on the stallion and claimed his monarchical right to have the precious animal in his own collection. The Royal Agricultural Society had no choice and in April 1939 gave Hamdan as a coronation gift to the King. Three mares accompanied Hamdan: Hagir, foaled 1936 by El Derre x Fayza (Ibn Rabdan x Samiha); Yasmeena, born 1937, by Awad x Bint Dalal (Hamran x Dalal), and Yaquota, foaled 1937, by Balance x Bint Rissala (Ibn Yashmak x Risala).

The King's Khassa (stable) was part of his huge country estate, called Inshass, some 50 kilometers east and north of Cairo. It is an area of agricultural land, reclaimed from the desert, thanks to the Suez Canal, and was ideal for the raising of crops, livestock, poultry and horses. It was run as a model estate with no expense spared to produce the best in everything, and photographs of the dog kennels indicate they were on a par with anything in Europe at the time. During my years in Egypt (1964-1967), Inshass was a military base and was closed to the public. It never regained its past glory as a splendid estate.

Despite the considerable distance from Ein Shams to Inshass, it is logical to assume Hamdan and the three mares were ridden, either under saddle or bareback, to their new home at Inshass. One can imagine the excited curiosity and the pleasure of the four young horses when they reached the outskirts of Cairo and entered the vast desert before them. It would have been their first experience of walking a long distance in the soft sand, and of breathing in the wonderful dry air of the desert, as well as sensing the freedom their ancestors

had enjoyed when ghazus and *razzias* were a way of life. I can imagine that this trip might have been one of the happiest episodes of Hamdan's long life, for indeed it was his first and last experience in freedom.

The King's Khassa contained about 160 horses of which the notable sires were: Hamdan, El Belbesi, Adham, Gamil, Nader, Zareef and Nasir. El Moez, an influential stallion and sire of the famous Sameh, was sold from Inshass in 1945 to the South Africans at a price listed as 10,000 pound Sterling. Nader (Mekdam x Mahasen) and Zaher (Ibn Fayda x Zahra) also accompanied him.

The veterinarian at Inshass was a young man named Dr. Mohammed Rasheed, who must have been a remarkable individual, as well as gentle, kind and brilliant in his field. He waited until Hamdan was fully mature before putting him to stud, and the first foal was not born until 1941. The list of Hamdan progeny, together with dam and foaling date, follows:

#### STALLIONS:

**Gandour** x Ghandoura, October 22, 1944; **Hadi** x Hagr, April 7, 1946; **Moharam** x Mahroussa, December 5, 1946; **Anter (Antar)** x Obeya, September 21, 1946; **Nadir** x Nafaa, April 5, 1952; **Hafez** x Mahfouza, August 30, 1950; **Wardani** x Ward, October 10, 1950; **Ameen** x Yaman, December 12, 1959.

#### MARES

**Ghorra** x Ghandoura, November 11, 1942; **Allia (Alleya)** x Abia, May 21, 1942; **Kawkab** x Bint Karima, February 2, 1943; **Mahfouza** x Mahroussa, March 30, 1943; **Abbassa** x Abia, May 10, 1943; **Ghareba** x Ghalia, April 27, 1946; **Rabha** x Ragaa, November 12, 1946; **Samiha** x Samira, March 29, 1947; **Rooda** x Ragaa, October 17, 1947; **Mahdia** x Mahroussa, November 6, 1947; **Karama** x Kawser, March 10, 1949; **Nafeya** x Nafaa, May 7, 1949; **Hafiza** x Mahfouza, September 6, 1949; **Shamaa** x Shams, July 17, 1949; **Yasmeena** x Yosreia I, September 17, 1950; **Gharbawia** x Ghorra, August 5, 1951; **Ameena** x Yaman, January 14, 1951; **Karama** x Bint Karima, February 11, 1951; **Bint Yosreia** x Yosreia I, August 11, 1951; **Shahbaa** x Shahd, October 10, 1951; **Ghamra** x Bint Horra, February 28, 1952; **Bint Mahfouza** September 23, 1952.

The years from 1939 to 1945, encompassing World War II, were a period in which heads of state, military and governmental officials of the Allied Powers were the constant guests at Inshass. Photographs show Hamdan, elegant and in repose, standing in his luxurious corral, while famous Western personages teeter in sand up to their ankles, looking in upon the royal stallion.

But troubles were boiling in Egypt; the King's automobile accident was said to be the cause of the changes in him, and he and his entourage were disappointing the country. The Egyptian people, expecting Farouk to bring them freedom and dignity, found themselves instead overwhelmed with British and troops of European nations of no interest to them.

From 1945 to 1952 Hamdan's visitors were primarily heads of the Arab states, as they met at Inshass to hammer out plans for their futures. They discussed independence, Palestine and the eternal problem of riding Egypt of the British. Wartime jobs dwindled, prices rose, food was scarce. The Nile flooded severely in 1947; the Arab humiliation in the confrontation with







the Israelis occurred in 1948, and was accompanied by a cholera plague that took 80,000 people; by 1949, the average wage of the peasant was 15 cents a day. But the rich had become richer during the war days, and a new group of millionaires "formed a conspicuous and vulgar clientele for a flourishing cabaret and racing world alien to the customs of Moslem Egypt." The pure-bred Arabian horse, traditionally a figure of religious faith and integrity, was becoming a symbol of a corrupt, sacrilegious, self-serving, wealthy group. It did not help that most of this exploitative group were of non-Egyptian citizenship.



By 1950, massive unemployment, bankruptcies, despair had affected the entire country. Much of the blame was placed at the feet of King Farouk and his "Palace Clique" and the discontent was openly expressed. Egypt was virtually under police rule.

On July 23, 1952, while the King and his courtiers slept in the cool summer palace of Montazah in Alex-

**Photos of Hamdan at  
the Inshass Stud  
of King Farouk.**





andria on the Mediterranean, the revolutionary government took control of Cairo. There was no bloodshed and no resistance.

One is grateful that the Egyptians are essentially gentle even during a revolution. In contrast, the Bolsheviks destroyed every pure-blooded creature—horse, livestock, poultry, dogs, etc.—during their revolution. The Egyptian soldiers simply ordered the King's employees to immediately evacuate their offices. One can imagine the army moving, by truck and tank, into Inshass and the soldiers appearing noisily and efficiently in the kennels, the barns, the administrative buildings, and the stable. One can also imagine that the Arabian horses in their stalls must have recognized the sounds of the tanks and trucks and of the groups of men, and must also have felt an inherent sense of alarm—for the Arabians of the desert were bred to be alert to the approach of hostile parties. Undoubtedly Hamdan and his stablemates were fretful and upset, and paced in their stalls.

For a time, things may have remained somewhat the same for Hamdan and his stablemates. Farouk abdicated and left the country and General Neguib became the head of the revolutionary government. He was a horseman to the extent that in the Citadel there supposedly is an unfinished equestrian statue of him mounted on a stallion modelled after Shahloul. The revolutionary government had urgent matters to attend to and so, perhaps, the 60 grooms at Inshass stayed on to care for the horses.

But the expense of maintaining luxury animals, as they were in that time of critical priorities, was too great for the new government, and it ordered the auction of the King's horses. The first auction was held in 1953 but not all the horses were sold. The prices were too high, it was said. Another auction was held, and still another, and many of the priceless horses (although records were kept of the purchasers) have, to all intents and purposes, disappeared.

By 1954, Colonel Gamal Abel Nasser had taken charge of the revolutionary government. My own personal assessment is that President Nasser, a sensitive and proud man, resented the Arabian horses for the luxurious care which had been lavished on many of them while his people had suffered. It was therefore difficult for him to concede their value—although concede this he did, somewhat later.

"The King's horses were kept by the army," I was told. Whether the army took over Inshass and the horses remained there, or whether the horses were shipped to army stables was difficult to learn. More likely the former. Either way, it was a difficult time for

the highly-bred animals. The army men were peasants, fellaheen, men of the land who are familiar with the burro, the mule, the water-buffalo and the camel—but who had no acquaintance with the purebred Arabian. Surely there was no intentional cruelty, but their lack of knowledge certainly resulted in hardships.

The auctions of the King's horses continued, and the prices dropped lower and lower. Dr. Rasheed's stud book, so carefully and finely maintained, has every record of purchaser and price paid, written in red ink at the bottom of each page. The only exception is Hamdan—nothing is noted.

The story is that he was ill, desperately ill and dying. He was sent to the SPCA for care, where he was kept for several months. Then he went on the auction block in 1956. His price was 50 pounds, or about \$125. The great stallion, then 20 years old, his marvelous strong almost 16-hands frame, was down, dying.

Ahmed Pasha Hamza, once a Minister of Agriculture under Farouk and a superb horse-breeder, bought him. "I bought him to bury him," he explains. Hamza Pasha left a man with Hamdan to tend him to his last breath. He must have been a very special man, for Hamdan took food and drank, and finally struggled to his feet, giving hope for his recovery. He was taken to Hamza Pasha's country estate at Tahanoub, where he indeed did recover and, during the next decade, sired most of the top racing horses of the country.

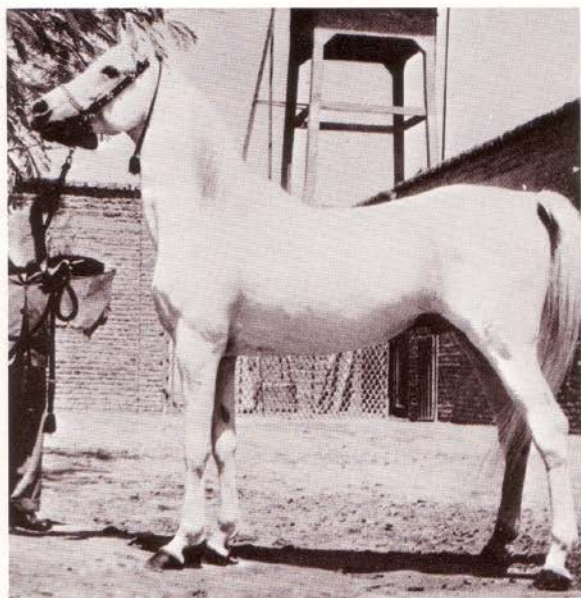
The balance of the King's horses, such as they were, were saved through the efforts of the then then Minister of Land Reform, Dr. Sayed Marei, and transferred in 1958 to the old Royal Agricultural Society, now called the El Zahraa Arab Stud of the Egyptian Agricultural Organization. The Hamdan progeny who survived the ordeal and went to the E.A.O. were: Rooda, Ghorra, Gharbawia, Hafiza, Ameena, Shahbaa, Yasmeena and Antar (Antar).

Hamdan lived quietly at Tahanoub, much loved by Hamza Pasha and well treated and cared for (witness his great age). He was apparently forgotten—an aging but contented exile in his own country, while his sons (their breeding apparently not noticed by the new racing attendees) excelled on the track.

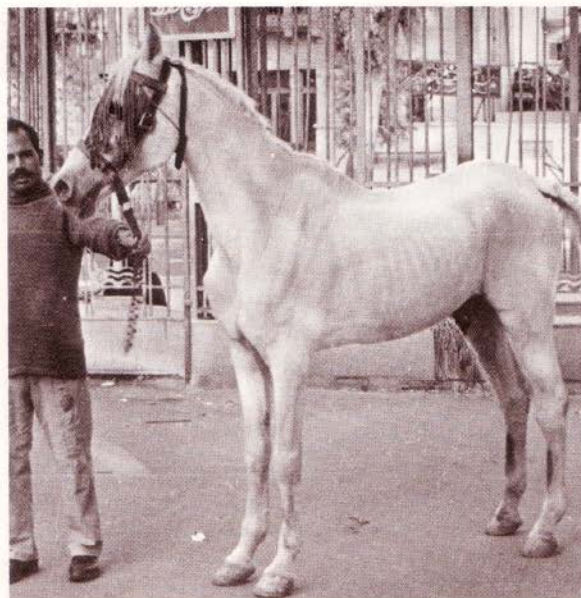
Times became harsher in Egypt as the revolutionary government coped with severe economic problems and outside political pressures. Foreign currency was scarce and imports (food, machinery, automobiles) could not be financed. The government made massive expenditures in non-profitable but necessary programs, such as schools, hospitals, drugs, social services, housing and so forth—long overdue for a long-suffering population, but expensive for a government to provide. The King's



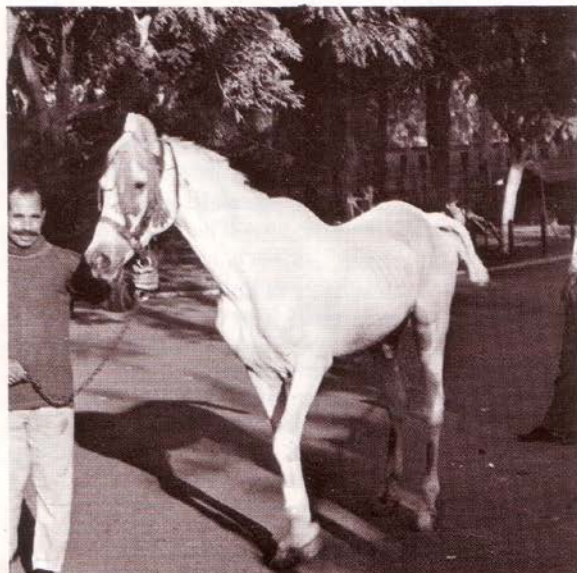




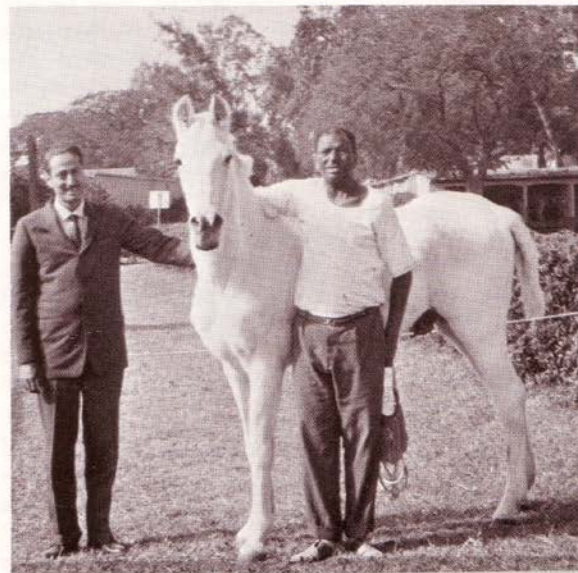
**Hamdan as an aged stallion  
at Ahmed Hamza Pasha's Tahanoub farm.**



**Hamdan at the zoo.**



**Hamdan leaves the zoo.**



**Hamdan with Ahmed, a friend, and Hamido, his  
groom, at Gezira Island.**



properties all over the country had been confiscated. In 1961 the government "sequestered" (took into receivership) many profitable ventures which were privately owned (often by non-nationals), such as factories, hotels, racing stables, and so forth. The individuals so deprived fled Egypt for their home countries. The trend against visible wealth increased. Ahmed Hamza was sequestered and it was a struggle for him to continue his horse-breeding and racing operation. But his horses were excellent and did well on the track and he did continue, as few were able to.

It was during this period of time that my husband and I arrived in Egypt. My first six months in the country were traumatic and very difficult. I spent most of my time trying to get back to America. Finally, my husband ordered me to "get a horse—and get happy." Although I had always ridden, my knowledge of and love for Arabians had been limited, but the next three years in Egypt was to change all that. I responded with blackmail: only if I could take the horse back to America. The bargain was struck!

\*Tala<sup>1</sup> was our first acquisition, purchased in February 1965 after many months of searching for "the right horse."

Within a week I recognized the qualities which made me an eternal Arabian devotee. \*Fakher el Din<sup>2</sup> was my next effort, though it was more than a year before he finally came to us. And, finally, Hamdan fell into desperate circumstances and I was able to help, and I came to know him well. These three stallions, each so different, but each a kind of crystallization of the genetic evolution of the qualities necessary for survival, share a full spirit of wisdom, self-sufficiency, courage, love and a universal pulse of life. The Arabian horse, in his own country, accepting the hardships, doing his job until the day his body absolutely cannot meet the demands of his spirit, retaining his sweetness of disposition and his willingness to try—this to me is an almost mystic thing, like the creation of young stars, or the flowing of the Nile, or the flight of migrating birds across the desert. It is creation, existence, livingness, continuity.

In May 1966 a new disaster struck. A new and surprisingly severe wave of sequestrations was imposed. The newspapers termed them "security sequestrations" and their application was widespread. Ahmed Hamza was confined to his Cairo home and the usual strict measures were applied to his properties. I visited Tahanoub in September 1966, having prepared myself for days for the sight. Hamdan had eaten halfway through his door. \*Fakher el Din, who is with me now in America, was a frail and exquisite wisp. The mares were aborting from malnutrition, and the foals were a shocking sight. There was nothing anyone could do about it; the Sequestration Office allotted \$12 per month per horse for care and that amount could not pay for grain, clover, bedding or grooms.



Hamdan at Gezira.

\*Fakher El Din, although stabled at Tahanoub, was not owned directly by Ahmed Hamza and therefore had not been sequestered. Knowing how much I wanted him, friends were negotiating for me to take him before he starved to death. In the midst of all this, in October 1966, my telephone rang late one night and an anguished voice shouted: "Now is not the time! Now is not the time!" It was a devoted friend of Ahmed Hamza, calling to say that the Sequestration Inspector had ordered four horses sent to the zoo to be shot and disposed of (as lion meat) and one of these was Hamdan. In his excitement, his English was fragile, and I suspect he meant "Now is the time! Now is the time!" (to take action, to do something). But I never really will know what he meant.

The Sequestration Inspector had noted, quite rightly, that Hamdan and several other horses were near death. And since the zoo is the only institution in Cairo that will destroy (and dispose of) a horse, he had made the correct decision. Also, the zoo is government property, and the lions are government property.

The van had already left Tahanoub that night: one horse died enroute, one died during the night at the zoo, one was shot at 8 a.m., and Hamdan certainly was facing the gun when we arrived at 8:30, because his mane and tail were already shorn to make the useful fly-whisks tourists love to buy. The zoo had paid 50 piastres for the "meat" of each horse and the complicated government documents had been transacted. The saga of the 10-day effort to save him is lengthy and complex, involving many people who worked in his behalf, and it was a successful effort. It was so complicated that the entanglements could not be cleared, and so our request finally was forwarded directly to the Prime Minister who himself authorized the sale of the

<sup>1</sup> \*Tala's maternal granddam, Samira, was Hamdan's full sister.

<sup>2</sup> \*Fakher el Din's dam, Moniet el Nefous, was sired by Shahloul, Hamdan's full brother.



great stallion to me. Consider for a moment if the American Secretary of State would do as much for a 30-year-old, albeit historic, animal.

During the long 10 days that we worked for favorable word from the government, the zoo officials and attendants tended to Hamdan, each in his own way. We ourselves brought food three times a day—and later learned that the zoo attendants had contributed their own sparse piastres to purchase feed also. The long-starved Hamdan could easily have foundered from over-feeding, but he appeared to us to be taking careful advantage of every opportunity for more time in life. As he concentrated upon the effort for recovery, he was quiet, methodical, and—poignantly realized by us—experienced in the technique. He chewed his feed slowly and rhythmically. When released from his miniscule Shetland Pony stall, where he was literally pinioned in one position, he trotted perfect circles in a pen around an amazed camel, and turned to change leads. He exercised himself as though he knew exactly what was required.

The elephant attendant rode Hamdan all though the zoo grounds daily, and they were a magnificent sight—the long, slim, dark Nubian, riding bareback so easily with an improvised hackamore, on the tall, emaciated but handsome grey stallion. They saluted the lions each time they passed on the path—and the visiting public, so tolerant generally of strange sights, gaped after them and wondered.

On October 22, Hamdan was officially released from the meat department. He was walked by two devoted zoo attendants through the exit gate of the zoo, through the streets of Cairo, to our stabling at Gezira Club (where the emaciated \*Fakher el Din had also just arrived). Our status-conscious grooms were distressed that the stallion's appearance did not meet their elegant requirements, but Hamdan quickly settled their doubts about him by breaking through a stall door and bending an iron bar in his effort to get out to a mare in season. His virility at his age, and in his condition, won their hearts completely.

His first day out on a shank, we had to sit down in the grass next to him to persuade him to stop trotting and cantering or changing leads, despite his weakness. Then, after grazing for a bit, he faced the length of the park, raised his head high and put his poor shorn tail straight up—and neighed and neighed and neighed. Our groom spoke in Arabic to a Jordanian friend with me, who translated: "He is calling his thanks to God—because before now he was a prisoner, and now he is free."



**Hamdan enjoys being pampered by a friend at Gezira.**

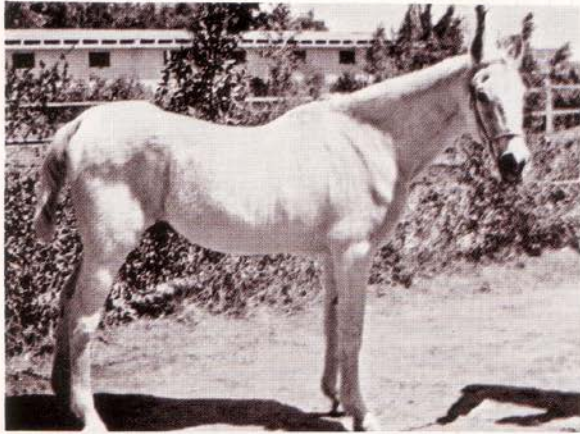
We hired a Nubian horseman, a strong and energetic and kind man, who massaged the weak flanks and walked him gently every few hours. Hamdan gained in strength, in weight, and responded to every effort in his behalf. A famous German veterinarian, visiting the University, examined him—and came up smiling from ear to ear, shouting: "He has the heart of a three-year-old!"

One day Hamdan disappeared from his small pasture in the park. When we finally located him, he was in the center of an active third chukka of a polo game, covering a German polo mare in season (who had an Army officer on her back), despite the protests of the mare and the grooms and attendants chasing and beating him. We could not catch him as he raced home along the racetrack. With effort I might have been able to translate the Arabic of my companions, but thought it better not to try. But Hamdan was given especial courtesies henceforth. An excellent American veterinarian examined him and urged us to use him for stud immediately, while he was in such fettle.

Then came a diagnosis we had not expected: metastasized cancer, starting with a ruptured tumor under his tail and spreading through his entire system. His hip was already weak and each day we felt a new tumor—on his neck, on his chest, along his crest. The great stallion's time was limited—not by age, not by hardship, but by cancer.

I had transferred ownership of Hamdan to Douglas B. Marshall, whom I had met through correspondence with Carl Raswan. Mr. Raswan had told me originally about Hamdan, and it was through Mr. Marshall that I first saw the stallion. In fact, it was my plan—assuming we could save the life of Hamdan and have him released to our care—to entrust his ownership to Carl Raswan. But on the very day of October 12, 1966, as the zoo officials were giving their permission for Hamdan to





**Shown at age 31 in 1966, Hamdan finds lasting peace at the E.A.O., his first and final home.**

live, Mr. Raswan gave up his life and died at home in California. Mr. Marshall accepted Hamdan in his stead and provided unceasing moral, financial and medical help for the stallion.

Since my husband and I were moving into the desert in March and planning to leave Egypt in July, it became necessary to settle Hamdan somewhere for his last days. Ahmed Hamza was still confined to his apartment by orders of the sequestrators. Douglas Marshall, who had been helpful throughout, urged Hamdan's return home to the E.A.O. as appropriate—and, in view of the possibility of his siring just one more foal, desirable.

I hesitated as long as possible, but finally, in February, accompanied by a flood of tears from me, Hamdan confidently entered a van and was driven back to his first home of 28 years ago where Dr. Marsafi and his colleagues most graciously stabled him in the "big stallion" barn, next to his sons and grandsons. I knew the brief few months with us probably had been Hamdan's first experience with people who fussed with him, brought him shredded carrots, indulged him in sugar, and loved him for his marvelous spirit and not only for his value as a precious herd sire. I knew he would miss the warm affection we had all lavished upon him—but I knew, too, that his return to the E.A.O. was the proper recognition for him. I hoped, too, that it would provide the status which he and his progeny deserved for entry into and registration in America.

A few months later the Six-Day War broke out and Egypt entered a new period of hardship. It was during that hot and distressing summer that Hamdan passed on.

Hamdan's brief stay with us in the Gezira Park had served an unexpected and peripheral purpose, for the word went around that the ancient horse was Hamdan. Often, as he grazed and I stood alone with him in the

far end of the park, someone would stroll by casually and surreptitiously say thank you "for the old horse." Some of these people were on the highest official levels, and I would never have thought they had the time or concern to care about an old stallion. Their names I have kept my own secret for fear of causing them difficulty in those tense times. But it was clear that Hamdan and his circumstances had deep significance to Egyptians at every level, and that the Arabian horses of Egypt are loved profoundly by their people. I hoped that, someday, the Arabian horse would be cleansed of the taint it had borne since the monarchy and could be freely recognized as a natural resource of the country and conserved accordingly. That wish is being fulfilled now.

The Emir Abd-el-Kader observed: "There are three conditions of horses: Some are burdened with crimes and belong to Satan; Others, save from eternal fire and belong to man; Yet others attract rewards and belong to God."

Hamdan was to me magnificent and awesome, a creature of a moment in time in a land where time is measured in thousands of years. He was like the breath-taking Karnak Temple of Luxor, in that they were both created in the form and proportion, the ability and function, the dignity and integrity—and hence the beauty—to have survived time and the misuses of man. Whether in their prime or in ruins, each of us is an undeniable creation. Such is Karnak; such was Hamdan.

Ahmed Hamza says in his Hamdan Stables Stud-book:

"We dedicate this volume to Hamdan 'The Thankful'

"Thankful that he graced our stables,

"Thankful that through his sons and daughters, his spirit lives on, and

"Thankful to God, the most Merciful and most Compassionate, for His many blessings and creations such as Hamdan."

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