

## ANIMALS WHO WON MEDALS in WW1

**A 16 million-strong army of animals including mules, donkeys, cats and even camels were part of WW1.**

Dr Matthew Shaw of the British Library, which dedicated an exhibition to WW1 animals, said: “They were central to the war effort. “Without them it’s likely victory would not have been secured. It would have been impossible to keep the front line supplied.”

The casualties were heavy. Of a million horses and mules recruited by the British Army, nearly half died as a result of injury or enemy fire. In one day alone 7,000 horses died during the battle of Verdun in 1916.

### **Cher Ami**

Trapped behind enemy lines during war, the few surviving soldiers of the 77th Infantry Division came under fire from both sides. As German bullets strafed through the Argonne Forest in north-east France and picked them off one by one, they came under heavy shellfire from their own lines too.



With less than 200 men from a 500-strong unit still alive, three messengers were sent on a perilous last-ditch mission to let HQ know their position. It was their only hope. Two were killed at once. The third was hit too. But blinded in one eye, with a chest wound and one leg damaged, the determined courier managed to struggle a further 25 miles and deliver the message before collapsing. The plan worked. Allied bombardment ceased at once and 194 men from what became known as the US Army’s Lost Battalion were rescued. The story is astonishing because the messenger was not a soldier, it was a female carrier pigeon called Cher Ami (“dear friend”). Cher Ami survived her battle wounds from October 1918 and even had a wooden leg carved for her. She was

awarded the French Croix de Guerre medal.

Cher Ami was one of 100,000 homing pigeons used to carry messages to and from the trenches between 1914 and 1918. Where other methods failed, pigeons had a success rate of 95%. She

saved 190 people's lives. There were no radios in the trenches and the land wires were broken once shelling started, so contact was lost. Pigeons were the best way of carrying messages from the front line and by 1918 the Royal Engineer's Signal Service alone had 25,000 birds in use with 380 men to look after them.

Archives at the RPRA offices near Cheltenham celebrate the achievements in page after page telling how pigeons saved many lives. RAF pilots would take them on missions then release them if they were downed with a message giving their position to rescuers.

## **Dogs**

Dogs were used to carry messages too. They also helped wounded soldiers and sniffed out the enemy. Around 20,000 served in the war, some pulling heavy armour, machine guns and other gear.

Among the most important were watchdogs trained not to bark but quietly growl on the approach of enemy troops. In some instances they would just silently prick up their ears. The training took place at the War Dog School of Instruction in Hampshire. Lt Col Richardson, who ran the school and went into battle with his dogs, said later: "Their skill, courage and tenacity has been amazing.

One of the most legendary was Rags, an abandoned French stray adopted by the US 1st Infantry Division. Though he was gassed, shelled and partially blinded, he survived the war. This was partly because he could hear shells coming before the soldiers – so he was an early-warning system too. Canaries were used to detect poisonous gases and both cats and dogs hunted rats in the trenches.

## **Horses**

Horses were recruited in hundreds of thousands for the cavalry and, with donkeys and mules, to haul equipment over terrain vehicles could not cross. In the Middle East and Asia camels did the same.

Some built high reputations, most notably Warrior, ridden by General Jack Seely. With exploits that inspired the fictional story of War Horse, Warrior survived the massive casualties at Ypres, the Somme and Passchendaele and lived on until 1941. The story of War Horse has delighted readers and audiences around the world after the heroics of the equine stars were recounted in a children's book, a successful stage play and Oscar-nominated Hollywood movie directed by Steven Spielberg.

Warrior's newspaper obituary said : "The horse served continuously on the Western Front till Christmas Day 1918. Twice he was buried by the bursting of big shells on soft ground, but he was never seriously wounded. Again and again he survived when death seemed certain and, indeed, befell all his neighbours. I have seen him, even when a shell has burst within a few feet, stand still without a tremor – just turn his head and, unconcerned, look at the smoke of the burst."

The Honorary PDSA Dickin Medal was being presented posthumously to famous war horse Warrior, dubbed "the horse the Germans could not kill" at a special ceremony". Warrior was



awarded the Animals Victoria Cross, the Honorary PDSA Dickin Medal, presented posthumously, called "the horse the Germans could not kill" at a special ceremony. The award, in the centenary year of the First World War (2014), is the first honorary PDSA Dickin Medal ever presented in the veterinary charity's 97-year history as recognition of the gallantry showed by all the animals that served on the Front Line during the war. After arriving on the Western Front on August 11 1914 with General Seely, Warrior stayed there throughout the war, surviving machine gun attacks and falling shells at the Battle of the Somme. He was dug out of the mud of Passchendaele and twice trapped under the burning beams of his stables, surviving many charges at the enemy and proving an

inspiration to the soldiers he was fighting alongside.

Despite suffering several injuries, Warrior survived and returned home to the Isle of Wight in 1918, where he lived with the Seely family until his death aged 33.

The PDSA Dickin Medal, instituted by the charity's founder Maria Dickin in 1943, is recognised as the highest award an animal can achieve while serving in military conflict.



Sir Alfred Munnings' painting of General Jack Seely and Warrior, in 1918

Since its introduction, 65 Dickin Medals have been awarded - to 29 dogs, 32 Second World War messenger pigeons, three horses (not including Warrior) and one cat.

## Stubby the Dog



The most famous animal to emerge from the war had a strong Connecticut (USA) connection: Sgt. Stubby, a bulldog terrier with a short, stubby tail. Stubby connected with the 102nd Regiment of the 26th Division while it was training for war on the Yale campus. Pvt. John Robert Conroy of New Britain stowed Stubby below deck on the *SS Minnesota* when his regiment shipped off to France. An intelligent dog, Stubby soon endeared himself to his regiment. He first entered the trenches in February of 1918 at the Battle of Chemin des Dames.

Wounded twice—once by shrapnel and once by gas—Stubby participated in 17 battles. His acute hearing allowed him to recognize incoming shells well before his human comrades could, and he would run through the trenches barking to alert his buddies. Some even maintained that he could distinguish between the sound of regular artillery and gas shells. Trained to recognize English, Stubby also was keen to locate American wounded in No Man's Land — the area between the trenches. He would dash out there when he heard soldiers

speaking English and stand near the wounded, barking until a medic arrived. One time he accosted a German soldier mapping out the American trenches. Stubby bit him and caused him to trip. American soldiers then took the German prisoner. For this heroic deed, Stubby was promoted to the rank of sergeant, the first animal ever to be given a rank in the U.S. military.

## **Jackie the Baboon**

Jackie the chacma baboon was taken to France by South African soldiers, intended to be the mascot of the 3rd South African Infantry in the First World War.

With excellent eyesight and hearing, the smartly dressed baboon was invaluable to the troops - able to warn his fellow soldiers of potential attacks and enemy movement by pulling on their clothes or making noise. Jackie marched and drilled alongside his infantry, smartly saluting passing officers, drawing rations, and eating politely using a knife and fork and drinking from a cup.

The dedicated animal saw action at the Battle of Delville Wood and the hell of Passchendaele, where he was injured trying to build a wall of stones around himself as protection from flying shrapnel. But he never finished the protective fortress - an exploding shell tore it down and took a good chunk of his right leg with it.

Private Jackie was rushed by ambulance to a British casualty clearing station where the baboon's leg was amputated by a Dr RN Woodsend who later wrote an account of the incident: 'We decided to give the patient chloroform and dress his wounds. If he died under the anesthetic perhaps that would be the best thing. 'As I had never given anaesthetic to such a patient before, I thought it would be the most likely result. However he lapped up the chloroform as if it had been whisky and was well under in remarkably short time. It was a simple matter to amputate the leg and dress the wounds as well as I could.'

## **Sgt Billy - the Canadian goat hero of WWI**

Originally bought as a mascot by Canadian soldiers passing through Broadview, Saskatchewan, Sgt Billy was smuggled into France by his good humoured comrades.



During his service, Sgt Billy was injured by shrapnel, suffered trench foot and shell shock and was even arrested for eating military equipment.

But his true defining moment of the conflict came as he fearlessly saved the lives of three of his comrades - headbutting the men into a trench to avoid an exploding shell.



