

FAITHFUL FRIENDS IN WAR



As Armistice day is upon us we remember all those who gave their lives so that we have our freedom. Many people have grown up not knowing their Grandfathers and Great Grandfathers because they died so that we may live.

Let us also remember the thousands of animals who suffered, were sacrificed or lost their lives on our behalf during both world wars.

Over the years, dogs have played an important part in British Military History. *The Times* describe how in 1918, an Airedale Terrier called Jack, delivered an urgent message asking for help which ultimately saved the lives of Sherwood Foresters who were surrounded by German troops. Sadly Jack died from bullet wounds shortly after reaching the receiver.

In 1943, the PDSA Dickin medal was introduced to honour the work of animals for helping to locate enemy troops. An Alsatian and Collie cross called Bing was awarded the Dickin Medal after his work when he was dropped into France as a 'paradog' during the D-Day Landings in 1944.

Last evening at the Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance at the Albert Hall, a tribute was paid to Sasha, a Labrador and her handler Lance Corporal Kenneth Rowe who were both killed in July 2008. Sasha is the most recent army dog to receive the Dickin. Prior to her sad and untimely death, she located 15 bombs and ammunition caches in Afghanistan which must have saved many lives.

Even today, animals work with the Military and are vital in helping soldiers. Featured in the *Times* on Thursday was a heart-warming story about a British Soldier who through the charity War Paws, has had his dog, Barrie brought back thousands of miles to the UK from Syria. The Soldier found the puppy in a bombed out building and started to care for it. Before he knew it, the puppy was following him everywhere and he said that in all the horror of war, the dog was the only thing that gave him comfort and kept him going.

During WW1, dogs played a vital part in the complexes of the trenches spread throughout the Western Front.



By 1918, Germany employed 30,000 dogs, Britain, France and Belgium 20,000, and Italy 3000.



Many different breeds were used depending on their role. For example, Doberman Pinschers and German Shepherds were used because of their intelligence and trainability. Their dark fur and excellent agility enabled them to slip through enemy lines undetected. Other smaller breeds such as terriers, (Our Welsh Terrier's ancestors!) were used as 'ratters' in the trenches as well of course, providing companionship and comfort to the soldiers.



Puppies in training on the German side.

Depending on their size, intelligence and training, dogs were given vital military roles and these consisted of the following:



Sentry dogs – these were trained to guard the Soldiers and equipment in the trenches and to alert them of anything suspicious with a low growl rather than barking which would draw attention of them to the enemy.





Scout dogs – these dogs were highly trained to go ahead of patrols and because of their keen sense of smell, could detect enemy 1000 yards away. If the dog sensed the enemy ahead instead of barking, the dog would stiffen, raise its hackles and point its tail. This would draw attention to the Patrol that the enemy was encroaching.



Casualty Dogs also called **Mercy Dogs**. - These dogs were trained to find the wounded and dying on battlefields. They were equipped with medical supplies to aid suffering. The Soldiers would tend their own wounds whilst gravely injured. Soldiers would be comforted by the company of a Mercy



Dog who would usually stay with them until help came or until they died?

I have to say, it was this role that moved me the most. To think that despite all the surrounding noise of gun shots and horror, the dog faithfully stayed with the injured Soldier without any fear of its own safety because that was what he was trained for and told to do!



THE AIREDALE AS A RED CROSS WORKER; A CANADIAN OF THE TORONTO SCOTTISH REGIMENT TIES ON THE RED CROSS COAT BEFORE SENDING THE DOG TO SEARCH FOR "WOUNDED MEN."

Messenger dogs – Communication in the field was crude and difficult. Dogs were faster and presented less of a target to a sniper than a human runner. Of course a lot of dogs got shot carrying out this role.



Mascot dogs – Probably one of the most important roles of a dog in the trenches was that of companion and comfort. For the men experiencing the terrors of warfare in the trenches, a dog was a psychological boost to morale and reminded them of home.





Of course all animals played a major role in helping the humans, particularly in WW1. Horses, mules, donkeys, oxen and even elephants were used to carry heavy loads in difficult terrain. Birds such as pigeons were used to send messages. Nothing illustrates this more than in Michael Morpurgo's wonderful book 'War Horse' of which many of us are familiar. The very sad and poignant story about how these beautiful, loyal creatures were in many ways cruelly treated and used for the benefit of humans. Just in one day at the Battle of Verdun in 1916, 7000 horses were killed by shelling. Britain alone lost 484,000 horses. But in total, over 8 million horses perished during WW1 trying to help man.



It is also estimated that one million dogs died during WW1.

In November 2004, the Animals in War Memorial was unveiled in London's Hyde Park to mark and honour all the animals that served and suffered and died in war.

This week, Jenny Seagrove, the actress and founder of the horse charity Mane Chance, paid tribute to the 16 million animals that served. Many people turned up to the Memorial with their animals wearing the Purple poppy.



I now come on to WW2. It was whilst researching the role and fate of animals during WW2 that I came across one of the most shocking statistics. On 20th August 1939, the Government sent out an official notice regarding pets. It suggested (more like demanded!) that unless you lived in the Countryside, all pets should be put down!

They stated that they were not allowed in Air raid shelters and that destroying pets was the humane alternative to having them terrified or having them wandering around the streets. Food rationing was another reason they gave for getting rid of pets.

My neighbour whose Mother lived in London at the time told me that she would join the queue for horse meat and was always frightened of doing so or of anyone finding out that the meat was not for herself but for her dogs!

In an article I found on Mail on Line, it stated that in one week, 750,000 pets were slaughtered!

The Government based it on the false assumption that it was the 'patriotic 'thing to do!

An example was given of a husband taking his wife's precious Wire haired terrier off on a walk as a pretext and returning without him. Even two lion cubs in London Zoo were put down. Because of the extermination of so many cats, rats became rife in London. As a result of this, the Government had to back down and allow the return of cats. However, people were told that they were not allowed to waste milk by giving it to cats. The milk given to them had to be watered down!

Although I hadn't been born, I remember the many stories my Grandparents told me about the war. Fortunately, Bert and Flora lived in the small country village of Halstead in Kent and so were able to keep their dogs. I remember vividly my Grandmother telling me that it was always the dogs that went down into the shelter first. They used to get an early warning from the soldiers manning the giant Balloon in the recreation ground when the enemy planes had reached Dover.



My Grandmother used to put a colander or saucepan on her head for her protection which my Grandfather used to joke to her about. She then immediately rounded up the dogs, her children (my Mother and Aunt) and a ready prepared Thermos of tea. They then all went into the garden and down into the shelter my Grandfather had built. Typically of Granddad, it was no ordinary basic Anderson shelter. He had built it with bunk beds and equipped it with paraffin heaters, lamps and every comfort and amenity that was possible at the time. Smudge their Wire haired terrier and Alf their Airedale were also provided with a bed in the shelter! My Mother and Aunt naively thought it was all very exciting until my Mother heard a random Doodle bug near to where she was cycling one day. It landed on a cottage not far from her, killing a family of four.

I also remember them telling me that their neighbour who had an Airedale (Alf's brother), had to be put down because the noise of the aeroplanes and sirens turned him into a nervous wreck. I have since wondered if actually, the poor dog was put down because of the horrific pressure made by the Government. It must have been so difficult for people in towns who owned dogs.

This was illustrated in the film/book Goodnight Mr Tom. The heart breaking moment he goes to London with his dog and is refused entry to the Air Raid Shelter. He has to leave him to his fate and tie him up to a lamp post with a piece of string. The relief for both him and the dog when the sirens signal the 'all clear' and they meet up again is so moving and yet must have been a common place situation at the time.

So, when you look at your Welsh terrier or the lovely Welsh Terriers wearing their red poppies on the blog. Think about their ancestors who did so much to help our Grandparents and Great Grandparents during both wars.

Dogs in the military saved many lives. They continue to do so today. Whether it be sniffing out explosives in Afghanistan or climbing over rubble searching and rescuing victims of an earthquake,

they loyally do as their handler instructs them. However, in saving the lives of humans, many thousands of innocent animals have lost or lose their lives.



I personally believe that an animal's life is as valuable and precious as a human life which is why I wear both the Red Poppy and the Purple Poppy to remember and honour both the humans and animals who made the ultimate sacrifice

LEST WE FORGET.....

