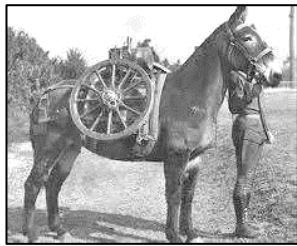


The Animal Soldiers of World War One

The First World War is remembered for the heroism of the many soldiers who fought in the trenches, but did you know that over 16 million animals also served in the Great War? They were very important to the day-to-day lives of soldiers, and played a crucial part in the war effort in a variety of roles.

Transport



Mule carrying heavy artillery

Prior to 1914, wars had mainly been fought by cavalries – soldiers who fought on horseback using swords and guns. However, both sides soon realised that men on horses could not win the war in the trenches. As a result, horses were used to transport many different things, such as guns, food, injured men and ammunitions. Mules (a cross between a donkey and a horse) were also used to pull heavy equipment including artillery.

Communication

As well as being beasts of burden, animals also played a vital role in communication. The most successful of these were carrier pigeons, which were used by both sides in the war to relay messages from the front lines to headquarters. This might sound strange, but the birds were actually more reliable than radio.

Mascots

Although animals were useful in practical duties, many were used to raise the moral of soldiers. Mascots provided comfort amidst the hardships of war, and were seen as part of the team. Records show that a wide range of animals were used for this purpose: dogs, cats, monkeys, pigeons and even a bear and a lion! One of the most famous mascots was a dog called Sergeant Stubby, who served with 102nd Infantry regiment of the US army; he was awarded many medals for his bravery.



Mascot Sergeant Stubby

It is important to remember how animals helped us during the Great War. Indeed, a bronze sculpture was recently unveiled at Ascot race course to remember the millions of horses that served during World War 1. Animals are still used today in military service and continue to play an essential role in our armed forces.