

Testimonies

Rifleman Alfred Read, 1/18th London Rgt. (Irish Rifles) 'We come across many wounded and dying horses. They are scattered all over in shell-holes, and at our approach attempt to get up and off, as if they mistrusted the presence of a human being. One poor beast with back broken tries to haul its useless hindquarters along, while others just lie where they have fallen, colouring the sodden earth with their lifeblood. A few are still galloping aimlessly about, foam-flecked and wild-eyed – victims of man's ruthlessness. . . . Dawn at last, and we plod wearily back for our spell of uncertain off-duty. Standing near the debris of guns and limbers is a solitary horse gently cropping leaves from a low-lying hedge. At our friendly words it trots towards us as if pleased to have our company, but not sure of its welcome – poor faithful beast, how ill you are repaid for your staunchness. I have long since become accustomed to wounded humanity. Their plight evokes pity and the desire to help, but a wounded animal leaves me with a feeling of loathing, loathing towards myself and the civilised humanity, which I represent. Too often have I seen reproach in the eyes of a dying horse, and outraged frailty in the flutterings of a wounded carrier pigeon. We may understand; they never can'. (Source: Tommy's Ark, Richard Van Emden)

Lt Melville Hastings, killed in action 3 October 1918 A week since I was lying out in no-man's land. A little German dog trotted up and licked my British face. I pulled his German ears and stroked his German back. He wagged his German tail. My little friend abolished no-man's-land, and so in time can we' (Source: Tommy's Ark, Richard Van Emden)

2/Lt Alan Goring 6th Yorkshire Rgt. 'We had two pigeons in a basket, but the trouble was that the wretched birds had got soaked ... We tried to dry one of them off as best we could and I wrote a message, attached to its leg and sent it off. To our absolute horror, the bird was so wet that it just flapped into the air and then came back down again, and started walking to the German line....

We had one man called Shuttleworth, a well meaning chap but very awkward.....anyway he was the one who suggested that if we had a cooker with us we could have toasted the bird over that a bit until he dried off. Eventually, we did we did something nearly as ridiculous. We huddled round this bird and blew on its feathers. As a matter of fact we did get it dried off, but we made jolly well sure it *was* dry before we sent it off with the message.' (Source: Tommy's Ark, Richard Van Emden)

2/Lt Alexander Gillespie 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders 'Writing is difficult, for Sonia the cat, is padding about on my knees, and making herself into a living sporran...She never leaves the company headquarters in this dugout, but is handed over to each relieving regiment along with other fixtures, appearing in the in the official indent after the ammunition, spades, fascines, RE material, etc as 'Cat and box 1'.

She has no real affections but prefers kilts, because they give more accommodation in the lap than breeches; on the other hand she has an unpleasant habit of using bare knees as a ladder to reach the desired spot'. (Source: Tommy's Ark, Richard Van Emden)

2/Lt Edmund Fisher, 36 Div., Ammunition Column. RFA I have just adopted an enormous French foxhound... He is without exception the most accomplished ratter I have ever met... Though he is a great lumbering fellow he is about 6 times quicker than any terrier I have met and quite often catches them in the air. He caught 27 yesterday, today about 15.

Today one {a rat} escaped and ran along under the duckboards.....We had no idea where it had gone to but the old boy wined it and trundled along about 50 yards of duckboards, and caught it as it bolted to get under a hut. He is red under the eye like a bloodhound and sleeps in my bed'. (Source: Tommy's Ark, Richard Van Emden)

Report from Cpt. A.C. Temperley 'On three occasions I had the opportunity of using the dog on outpost duties at night. Each time I found the presence of the dog to be of the greatest value. ..he can, and does detect the approach of human beings some considerable time before the eye or ear of the average man distinguish anything.....I should add, that his method of indicating the approach of anyone at night is nearly silent. It consists of a low growl, and a stiffening of his body, almost like a pointer'.

Signaller Bert Chaney, 1/7th London Regiment, 1918 'One by one our telephone lines were smashed. We endeavored a number of times to repair them, going out into the barrage, creeping down communication trenches trying to find the ends of the wires, but in that mist and in that barrage it was a hopeless task, and we had to get back to our dugout thankful to be in one piece. Looking across in the direction of our visual communication system on the mound, we saw that it was impossible to see anything.....So down into the dugout again and another message was written and put into the small pouch attached to the dog's collar. Leading it to the entrance, I gave it a parting slap on the rump, at the same time shouting firmly, 'Home, boy! Allez!' I watched it for a minute or two as it trotted off, then dropped the gas blanket back. Even while we were still sighing with relief, a wet nose pushed the blanket aside and in crawled the dog, scared out of its wits. All our efforts could not budge him, we pushed and shoved him, pulled him by the collar to get him moving, but he just lay down, clamped his body firmly to the ground and pretended to be asleep. He was a lot smarter than we were'. (Source: Tommy's Ark, Richard Van Emden)

Lt Reginald Dixon, 251st Siege Batt., RGA 'Soldiers love animals and will make pets of any strays they find. After the Vimy Ridge battle, the battery I was serving with at that time found in the battered village of Thélus a small mongrel dog that had had its front paw shot away by a shell splinter. The brigade MO had treated it, the wound had healed, and the MO had actually made and fitted a little artificial wooden leg for the little beast.

We named him Thélus because that was where he was found, and he became the battery pet, running around among the guns as if the business of war was his natural milieu'. (Source: Tommy's Ark, Richard Van Emden)

Private David Polley, 189th Machine Gun Coy, MGC, 1916 'To me, one of the beastliest things of the whole war was the way animals had to suffer. It matters not to them if the Kaiser ruled the whole world; and yet the poor beasts were dragged into hell to haul rations and gear over shell-swept roads and field paths full of holes to satisfy the needs of their lords and masters. Bah! Many a gallant horse or mule who had his entrails torn out by a lump of shell was finer in every way than some of the human creatures he was serving. I believe I might normally be described as a peaceful, easy-going sort of chap, but the sight of a team of horses, hitched to a limber, on a road in the forward areas, screaming with fright at a shell burst in the ditch beside them, turned my mind in such a direction, and instilled a desire to wipe out those responsible for the poor brutes' presence'. (Source: Tommy's Ark, Richard Van Emden)

Private Sidney Smith, the Somme 1916 'There was nothing the eye could see except waves rippling the mud as the wind blew, I had the terrible experience to witness three horses and six men disappear completely under the mud. It was a sight that will live forever in my memory. The last horse went to a muddy grave, keeping his nostrils above the slush until the last second. A spurt of mud told me it was all over'. (Source: The Animals' War, Juliet Gardiner)

Lt Col Richardson, in charge of running the War Dog School of Instruction 1918 The skill, courage and tenacity of these dogs has been amazing. During heavy barrages, when all other communications have been cut, the messenger dogs have made their way, and in many cases have brought messages of vital importance'. (Source: The War Dog: Their Training and Psychology, Lt Col Richardson)