

WAR PIGEONS



The first historical mention of the pigeon being used to carry messages in wartime was in the city of Sumer in southern Mesopotamia in 2500 BC. Many pigeons in both Great Wars were awarded for their bravery and their heroism. Not many people would be aware of how many soldiers owe their lives to Australia's feathered heroes. Patrols surrounded by the enemy, crews in sinking ships, engineers stranded by mud-slides, medical units desperately short of blood all have reason to thank the men and the birds of the Australian Corps of Signals Pigeon Service who, in 1942 arrived in Port Moresby as the Japanese beat a bloody retreat along the Kokoda Track.



VET CORPS



Up until the end of the Second World War, horses and other animals were a common sight on the battlefield, either as chariots of war, or as the backbone of the supply train. By 1909 Australia had added veterinary services to their order of battle in order to ensure these vital animals were protected from disease and treated for injury. But with the advent of mechanised warfare, the majority of service animals were retired and the supporting veterinary corps was disbanded in 1949. The notion that the military veterinarian became obsolete is erroneous. Militaries around the globe have retained their military veterinary units, which are currently providing valuable service. The Australian Defence Force would benefit greatly from a renewed AVC both at home and abroad, supporting combat, disaster relief and other operations.



MULES



No one can argue that the Mules are perhaps the most under rated and appreciated animal that has served the colours. Simple put without the mule no army in the world would have been able to launch any campaign. Perhaps more mules have given the ultimate sacrifice to man than any other animal; a sad testimony is very few memorials honour them. Today special force ADF soldiers use Mules in Kandahar to transport equipment to base camps in the mountains.



WAR DOGS



The use of War dogs is not a new concept, well before the Romans, the Egyptians, Greeks, and Babylonians all employed fierce fighting dogs in battle. From these beginnings, dog training and employment has been continuously refined to produce a highly sophisticated and versatile extension of the soldier's own senses. It might be imagined that with the increase complexity of military operations the value of war dogs have declined. In fact the reverse is true. Today's MWD team is a highly deployable being modular and mobile makes these teams very adaptable to many situations on a battlefield. Dogs are ideal for tasks such as tracking, detection of explosives or narcotics, casualty location and guarding.



WAR HORSE



Starting with the Boer War 16,314 horses were dispatched overseas approximately 160,000 Australian horses served in World War I, then during World War II 360 Australian Walers were assigned to the Texas National Guards 112th Cavalry in New Caledonia. While in Darwin which was under the threat of invasion from the Japanese the 2/1 North Australia Observer Unit used over 1,000 Waler horses to patrol remote areas. The ADF have used horses to transport soldiers called Light Horsemen, carry wounded and tow wagons or field artillery. The horse is still being used today by Special Forces troops as the most suitable form of transport in some terrain. There are no full time mounted units in the ADF instead the spirit and traditions of the Australian horseman are kept alive by re-enactors such as the Australian Army Veterinary Light Horse Troop.



DONKEY



The Donkey along with its offspring the Mule has been much maligned and underappreciated in military history. Even right up into the 20th Century no war could have logistically been fought without it. One of the most famous Military Donkeys is Simpsons Donkey used at Gallipoli to fetch wounded ANZAC troops down from the front lines to a medical station on the beach.



In recent deployments to Afghanistan ADF Special Forces used donkeys for the carriage of equipment over difficult mountainous terrain. They carried laptops and communications gear into remote mountain areas on donkeys to call in coordinated precision air strikes on enemy targets whilst riding locally purchased mounts.

CAMEL



The Camel Corps was founded in January, 1916. It attained its full strength in December that year. Four battalions were eventually formed. The 1st and 3rd were entirely Australian, the 2nd was British, and the 4th was a mix of Australians and New Zealanders. In May, 1918 it was reduced in strength to a single battalion. The Corps was formally disbanded in May, 1919. A total of 346 of its personnel were killed in action. In late 1917 Desert Mounted Corps had numbers totalling 6,000 camels. Today several countries still use camels to patrol desert terrain. The ADF still have two Camels as Mascots.



MASCOT



Military Mascots have been of great moral value to soldiers from the trenches of World War 1 to dogs adopted by Coalition Forces in Afghanistan today. There are two types of Military Mascots those which appear particularly in Commonwealth Forces that have a significant meaning or tradition to the official history of the Regiment. These official mascots are entitled to all the services of the army, including quartering and food at public expense. The other type of mascot and more usually a dog is the unofficial mutt which many a soldier have adopted In-situ as a companion.

