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 were disbanded in 1949.

The notion that the military veterinarian became obsolete is erroneous.

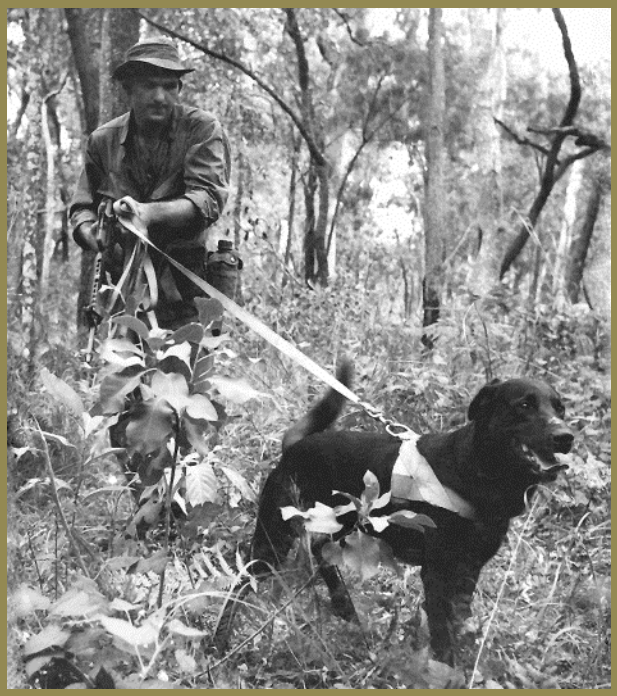
Militaries around the globe have retained their military veterinary units, which are currently providing valuable service. The Australian Defence Force would benefit greatly from a renewed AVC both at home and abroad, supporting combat, disaster relief and other operations.

MULES

No one can argue that the Mules is 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 HORSES

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 to 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 is kept alive by Troops such as the 14th Mudgeeraba Light Horse.

DONKEYS

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.

CAMELS

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.

MASCOTS

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.

POEM

From the protection of God's hands the war animals wait at heaven's gate for the return of their brothers in arms. Each has their own story and bond with the soldier whose life they shared.

The war horse laments how the years have gone by since the sound of trumpets had made us both tremble and our hearts beat as one as we galloped to the sound of gunfire. How I miss our mateship.

My back is bent with age reflects the donkey, but I remember the days as if yesterday when I would haul the injured you cared for in the mud and rain in no man's land. With your gentle voice encouraging me with every step, how I miss your compassion.

As canine warriors side by side ahead of the rest we would detect and protect the patrol from harm. When the sound of battle made me shake, your embrace around me made everything alright, how I miss your touch.

Often misunderstood and maligned, maybe because of my looks or stubbornness you saw through that during the long desert campaigns. Through sand and sun we patrolled many a mile, how I miss your respect.

Upon borrowed angels wings I fly, high above the battlefield, I return to earth to your embrace, the smallest of all war animals, I see respect in your eyes. How I miss your kindness.

The time grows near when we will be reunited once more, though the passage of time has grayed our hair it has not faded our memories of one another.

With all the compassion needed to work alongside God's creatures you are assured to have a place here in heaven and as we are united I shall miss you no more.

Nigel Allsopp

THE FUTURE MILITARY K9

Throughout the course of the long war in Afghanistan, Coalition troops have relied on thousands of military working dogs to help keep them safe and make their jobs easier.
Not only are they active on the front lines, but behind the lines they serve as therapy dogs, service dogs, and loyal companions. They also share the same risks as the ground troops, suffering injuries and sometimes death on the battlefields.

The future of military working dogs is certain until technological advances can match their detection capabilities and be of a portable and deployable size. In the modern world of terrorism multipurpose canines are used to support joint activities during military operations.
These canines are military working dogs that are capable of locating explosives or humans to provide early warning of potential hazards; facilitate capture of armed enemies and saves lives. Multipurpose canines can detect a wide range of munitions and homemade explosives. These canines can reduce casualties, increase freedom of movement, and inspire unit confidence to counter IED threats.

Could the dog get replaced by technology? In 2020 the USAF325th Security Forces Squadron at Tyndall Air Force Base (AFB) have been working with Ghost Robotics to develop a system to enhance security and safety for the base. This technology has the potential to replace and exceed the capabilities of certain static defence equipment especially in a contingency, disaster, or deployed environment. But is along way off replacing the military working dog that operates independently and cost in comparison little money. Each robotic canine so far has cost over 4 million dollars each and still cannot function or traverse as efficiently as a dog.

WAR ELEPHANTS

War elephants were important, although not widespread, weapons in ancient military history. Their main use was in charges, to trample the enemy and/or break their ranks. From the sixteenth century, the use of gun powder in battle made it considerably easier to bring down the animals, diminishing their effectiveness and bringing an end to their use on the battlefield. However, they continued to be used for transportation and logistics in warfare right up to the Second World War, where they were used by Indian and Burma forces to transport guns and supplies, and to assist in engineering projects such as road and bridge building in remote areas where vehicles could not be used.

During WWI German and British Elephants were taken out of Zoos and used in heavy haulage work. ▸

◂ Both North and South Vietnamese soldiers' rode elephants or used them to carry supply's.

During WWII elephants were used by the Chindits to load aircraft or used like bulldozers clearing jungle. ▸

◂ Kachin Independence Army rebels ride elephants toward the front line in Myanmar even today elephants are used in the engineer and transport roles in remote places or dep jungle

IS THERE A FUTURE FOR WAR ANIMALS

Far from declining animals are being used in greater numbers since the end of the Vietnam war. Military dogs are on the increase due to there detection capabilities, however equines – namely horses and mules are being used in remote mountainous terrain to aid logistics. With an increasing interest in Arctic mineral rescources countries such as Russia and the United States are re-looking at suitable modes of animal transport in these regions. With drones becoming a concern as both a terrorist weapon or spying device some countries are investigating the use of large birds of prey to take out these devices.

WAR CHICKENS

A century and a half ago, it was common to use birds as detectors of poison and poison gases. Because of their delicate lungs and how their lungs are arranged, birds will show signs of respiratory distress or even death before a human will know that anything is amiss. So it was that canaries came to be used as alarm systems for mine workers so that if they were exposed trapped gas or other life-threatening pollutants, the canaries would let them know that death was knocking.

Using the same logic, the US military decided to enlist chickens for the first Gulf War. In the half decade leading up to that war, the DOD had convinced itself that biological warfare wasn't a threat. Perhaps that's why only 7% of the biological and chemical warfare R&D funds were used to find ways to detect biological agents. This left them with virtually no way to detect biological weapons when Operation Desert Storm went into effect. All they had was the old canary theory, so in marched the chickens. Their official designation in the Marine Corps was “Poultry Chemical Confirmation Devices.” The focused use of poultry pawns in both Gulf Wars was referred to as Operation Kuwaiti Field Chicken. Yes, that's “KFC”.

Once enlisted, the chickens of the first Gulf War stood sentinel outside camps.

Unlike technology-based gas detectors, the organic nature of the chickens held a caveat: one morning, when some soldiers woke up and emerged from their tents, they saw all of the chickens lying dead on the ground. The soldiers were naturally terrified that they had been gassed, but it turned out the chickens had frozen overnight in the cold.

This shows that the plan had validity, though. Had the chickens actually died of the poison, the soldiers may have had time to get away and to seek medical help. The chickens proved a welcome addition to that evening's dinner.

Because PCCD were living and therefore not easily manageable as military equipment and gear, the DOD finally invested in defence contractor help in 1990. At that time, they began using Individual Chemical Agent Detectors – of the manmade variety. Who knows what happened between then and 2003, but when the second Gulf War hit – it was back to the chickens?

In the first year of Operation Iraqi Freedom, 43 chickens were purchased to be used as KFC PCCD. The idea was that the chickens would ride atop military vehicles in lookout cages. If the chickens dropped dead, it was time to turn about and retreat. The problem was, they died before the operation even got off the ground. In an interview by The Saint Louis Dispatch, Sgt. Ken Griffin said, “Nobody knows why they died. I just heard that they were boxed up really tight when they arrived, and they started dying from the moment they got here. And it didn't help that nobody here really knows anything about chickens.”

Another officer, Chief Warrant Officer Ken King was responsible for saving the two that didn't die. It was his theory that chickens are used to pecking at dirt and “. . . we've only got sand. So they were pecking the sand and getting it all clogged up in the giblets or nostrils or whatever.” Out of the 43 chickens brought to Kuwait, 41 died. These brave little soldiers were given a nice burial, complete with wooden tombstones bearing their names: Captain Popeye, PFC King, Lance Cpl. Pecker, and the grave of The Unknown Chicken.

While the chickens as gas detectors idea didn't exactly work out, chickens served successfully in another military function. They were used in the research of Gulf War Syndrome, its effects, and possible treatments.

DR DOLITTLE

Varges Ariel. British Officer of the Army Veterinary Corps in Salonika with his Pets, 1916.

Hugh Lofting, the man who created the children's book haracter Doctor Doolittle was inspired by this photograph of a British Veterinary Officers' mascots.

The British veterinary officer with his jackdaws, goose, dog, and wolf cub seems a veritable Dr. Dolittle, friend to and communicant with all creatures great and small.

Hugh Lofting

Lofting served with the Irish Guards in the First World War. When writing home to his children from the trenches during the 1914–1918 War, Lofting chose to protect them from the gruesome details of trench warfare. Instead, his letters featured the beginnings of the Dr. Dolittle stories.

It is amazing to think of the way this fictional character allowed Lofting to create a bit of innocence amid the strife of the battlefield.

Lofting was wounded in the war and USA.

Dr. Dolittle enjoyed several incarnations on the stage and screen and continues to be a beloved hero of fiction.

SIRIUS PATROL

In a region where snowmobiles malfunction from the cold, twelve men rely on Kalaallit Qimmiat, or Greenland Dog, to carry them across the 8,700-mile coastline of northeast Greenland.

Together with their dogs, these men make-up an elite special unit's force known as Sirius–the world's only military dogsled team.

The men of the Sirius Patrol serve as the only rangers for the Northeast Greenland National Park and have been using sled dogs to patrol it for over 60 years. Even with today's modern technology there is no better way to travel across the rough arctic terrain than by dog sled. Dog sledding is both skilful and chaotic. The men must continually interact with their dogs by whistling, scolding, encouraging, and praising.

Although untamed by man and far from civilization, the sled teams are not alone during their travels across the arctic. The park is home to a variety of wildlife, including musk ox and polar bears. Having a dozen wolf-like dogs with you can be helpful when you're sharing the land with polar bears – the dogs make a hissing/growl sound as a warning to the patrollers if a polar bear is nearby.

The dog's keen eyes and amazing sense of smell is especially useful during the winter months when Greenland is in total darkness. Sledding in the dark, especially in foggy conditions, can render the driver blind. The dogs, however, have been known to stop short of a cliff edge (invisible to the driver) and refuse to move forward, even when commanded to continue.

From June to November each team patrols 40 miles a day. The team covers around 5,000 miles during their 26-month charge. Most Sirius dogs will serve for 5 years, but one dog in particular and a legend among the patrol, Armstrong, has served for 10 winters. With all of Armstrong's time combined, it's estimated he's hauled a sled about 25,000 miles.

To the Sirius Patrol, the dogs are more than teammates. Returning home during the 26-month operation is not an option for a Sirius patroller, so for the men, the dogs become their family.

US SPACE FORCE

USAF Airman First Class Thomas White enforces hunting and fishing laws at Vandenberg Air Force Base 2021.

The U.S. Space Force, America's newest military branch entrusted with the absolute latest in military technology, also relies on horses. American Quarter Horses acquired from the Bureau of Land Management trained for Vandenberg Air Force Base's Conservation Working Horse Program. Military Working Horses (MWH) patrol the sprawling Vandenberg Air Force Base, the fifth largest air force base in America. Located in southern California, the 99,600-acre base incorporates such varied terrain as coastal hill country and beaches, and it is the only air force base in the country with such a program. The horses of the military working horse program do everything from enforcing fish and game laws to managing endangered species.

THE OLDEST VETERAN MASCOTS IN THE WORLD


Torty

Over 100 years ago the Allies launched an attack on the sun baked peninsula of Gallipoli in Turkey. The campaign lasted between April 1915 and January 1916 when finally the allies withdrew costing almost 400,000 causalities on both sides.
Added to this number many more soldiers became sick and incapacitated due to the unsanitary conditions especially from enteric fever, dysentery and diarrhoea.

There may be no old soldiers left alive from that campaign in New Zealand now, but one of their mascot's lives on.
The last “naturalised” Kiwi survivor from Gallipoli arrived in New Zealand in 1916 with wounded soldiers on the Hospital ship SS Marama. Torty as she is called is a tortoise is still alive today.
During the Gallipoli campaign Private Stuart Little from Dunedin was employed as a stretcher bearer taking the wounded to rear area hospitals. Private Little observed a small tortoise being run over by a French artillery carriage which caused sirver damage namely an open wound where a piece of her shell broke off plus a large dent to the rear her shell. This dent is still visible today. She also lost several toes in the incident.
At the time Little asked some locals in Salonica how old they thought the tortoise was, their estimate was 100 years old then, remarkably that would make Torty around 200 years old today.
Whilst under extreme fire from artillery and snipers one soldier whom we only know as Marris frantically looked for his companion that had gave him much comfort over the months. His mate called Blake was a local a native of the area, a Greek (spur thighed) tortoise.
Torty was not the only Kiwi tortoise mascot however, a NZ Nurse Nora Hughes working at the Aotea Convalescent Home in Cairo between 1915-1919 was given a tortoise by a wounded soldier who had found it in a trench in Gallipoli in 1915. When Hughes returned to New Zealand in 1920 she brought the tortoise back home. Peter as she had named him lived with the family as a pet until it died in 1994. The tale of Peter was written in a book by Shona Riddell-Hughes, Riddells great great-aunt.
Kiwi soldiers are quoted in several sources befriending these Greek tortoises at Gallipoli some were not as lucky as Peter and Torty, some being made into soup by the Indian troops nearby whilst their eggs were sometimes used to make omelettes.
In one such case Thomas O'Connor yet another Kiwi stretcher bearer took shelter in a trench at Gallipoli one night when a turtle dropped in. O'Conner made a small ramp for this animal to enable it to get out and return to the sea. To O'Conners surprise the turtle returned on a regular basis, however one night the relationship came to a tragic end when O'Conner left histrench as part of his stretcher duties only to find upon his return that Indian troops had made his mate into soup.
O'Conner was so upset he carried his mates shell around until repatriation where it found itself on display on the lounge wall to remind O'Conner of something that had made him happy during a terrible time.
It has not always been that lucky to be a tortoise mascot. One known as Snuffy, thought to have been a pet of Lieutenant Joseph Pilkington of the 94th Regiment, also features at the British museum. It's possible that Pilkington found the tortoise while serving in India between 1859 and 1866. After its death, the animal was later presented to his regiment on his retirement from the army in 1869 in the form of a decorative snuff box.

THE WAR FALCON

The Peregrine Falcon is renowned for its speed, reaching over 200 mph during its characteristic high speed dive, making it the fastest member of the animal kingdom. The Peregrine Falcon has been used in falconry for more than 3,000 years, beginning with nomads in central Asia.
The Military have occasionally used them to scare away birds at airports to reduce the risk of bird-plane strikes used to intercept homing pigeons during World War II.
Nazi-trained homing pigeons were the target of British covert operations during WWII, scores of lofts of the message-carrying birds were pinpointed by MI5 agents in 1940 across Belgium, West Holland and the Balkans. The airborne threat was believed to be the pet project of SS chief Heinrich Himmler - who was known by British intelligence as an avowed pigeon fancier.

Under interrogation, captured German pigeon personnel said that it was anticipated that the birds would be used to convey information obtained by German agents. To counter the menace, MI5 tamed and trained its own crack force of peregrine falcons with the aim of felling incoming pigeons.

According to documents now held at the Public Record Office in Kew, London, at least two of the captured pigeons became "prisoners of war". Displaying humour in the midst of adversity, an intelligence officer marked in his report: "Both birds are now prisoners of war working hard at breeding English pigeons."

The new Army Birds of Prey Special Section were used to set up an airborne net over the Scilly Isles early in 1942 following sightings of pigeons disappearing towards France.
The new anti-pigeon force would patrol for two hours at a time over the islands off the Cornish coast. The falcon flying high above the Scillies could watch not only a part of one island, but the whole group, and any pigeon flying over them would be attacked.

A BEAR STORY

Harry Colebourn and Winnie at Salisbury Plain in 1914. Source: Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Colebourn, D. Harry Collection, No. N10467

Story Several Allied armies in WWI and WWII took to using bears as mascots an unlikely companion in the trenches for several reasons apart from their vulnerability and roaming nature, they soon grow to a size that become quite unmanageable. As such they were all eventually handed over to local zoos for the duration. If one mascot story has a happy ending it is surely that of a Canadian bear.

In 1914 as the war began an officer Captain Harry Colebourn of the Canadian Veterinary Corps caught a train from his home in Winnipeg to the Canadian training base at Valcartier about 25 km from Quebec. Due to this bases locality by the port of Quebec it soon became the largest military base on Canadian soil, it had 32,000 men and 8,000 horses on establishment plus one bear.

On the way to Camp Valcartier the train stopped at White River, Ontario where he witnessed a fur trapper trying to sell a black bear cub after he had no doubt killed its mother. Captain Colebourn brought her off the trapper for $20 and named her Winnie after his home town of Winnipeg Manitoba.

Winnie and Coleborn became inseparable and when Coleborns infantry brigade whom he was attached to as a veterinary Officer sailed for England, Winnie naturally went with him. When Captain Coleborn got the call to go to the Western Front, he decided to donate Winnie to the London Zoo. He would miss her but knew she would be well cared for and have lots of visitors enjoying her play at the zoo.

As a veterinary Officer on the Western Front Captain Coleborn was immersed in the treatment of wounded animals but never forgot Winnie, he had every intention at the end of the war to take her back to Canada. In the interim at least lots of children would visit the London Zoo and see Winnie.

One of those children was Christopher Robin Milne, whose father was a writer. After their visit, Christopher Robin named his toy teddy bear "Winnie the Pooh." His father wrote a book about his son and his bear.

Winnie the girl-bear became Winnie the boy-bear in the story.

Now, millions of children around the world know the name Winnie.

In Winnipeg where the story began, you can see an almost-life-size statue of Harry Colebourn and Winnie in Assiniboine Park Zoo.

Winnie featured in her own signed publicity shot, dated February 16, 1916. Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Colebourn D. Harry 15 Collection, No. N10473

HOMING PIGEONS

A brief overview of the service that Homing Pigeons provided to both the armed forces and to civilian personnel during the Second World War in both the military campaigns in Europe and in the Pacific region.

Before I give an account of the pigeon service during times of conflict I think it would be important to give a description and brief history of the bird itself. The story of this bird has been obscured by the age-long confusion between the names pigeon and dove both names can refer to the same bird with the name used depending on the "users" reason for doing so, and are still used interchangeably today. For example, in general the term dove is used by advertising companies, contexts of religion i.e. Noah and the Ark, symbols of peace, while "pigeon" applies generally to the sport of racing or showing.

Let me first say that of all the animals that contributed to the war effort during those times, pigeons were recognised more than any other with 32 Dickin Medals being awarded for their exceptional and brave service.

(The Dickin Medal for those not aware is often regarded as the Animal equivalent of the Victoria Cross).

The homing pigeon has been accredited for saving countless lives during the Second World War a fact that most people today would be unaware of, with pigeon fanciers from many of the allied countries donating many of their best pigeons. It has been documented that almost 250,000 pigeons were donated by British Pigeon Fanciers alone between the years 1939 -1945.

Apart from these birds being in the service of the various armed forces they were also in the service of Civil Defence Personnel, the Police, the Home Guard, War Correspondents and Photographers.

Unfortunately a great many of these birds did not survive.

Australian Pigeon Fanciers donated their birds mainly to the military responsible for set up communication posts along the east coast of Australia and to those military personnel serving in New Guinea. In total around 13,500 pigeon were donated by Australian Fanciers which is a large number when you consider that the population of Australia during this time was around 7 million.

Rarely mentioned is the fact that nearly all Air Force Bomber crews and recognisance crews carried with them two pigeons, with many crews not willing to take off without them. These pigeons would be released should they have to ditch their plane either through it being damaged by enemy fire or engine failure. These birds would be released giving details of their planes last known position. Two pigeons just in case one met with misadventure along the way, or was injured or killed while having to ditch their plane.

An interesting fact about these pigeons used by Bomber Crews is that they could travel in planes at altitudes of 35,000 feet (10,600 m) above sea level without any form of oxygen assistance needed by the air crews themselves and even though the temperature was typically 45F degrees (7 degrees C) below zero with air crews having to wear heated/well insulted suits while the pigeon just relied on "puffing up" its plumage.

Many of these pigeons that were on reconisent missions, along with their messages would be placed headfirst into a paper bag with a slit cut in it and dropped into the planes slipstream while flying at 375 mph or 600 km per hr. When the bag tore open freeing the pigeon it would then fly the rest of the way to its home loft.

During the D-day allied landings on the Normandy coast of France, pigeons were used exclusively as the only means of communications between the landing forces and the operations units back in England as for security reasons radio communications were blackout.

Again, another very important role undertaken by homing pigeons that has never really been told. In some of the most dramatic movies that depicted the landings on the Normandy beaches, The Longest Day and Saving Private Ryan that starred Tom Hanks the humble pigeon never received a mention.

Most of these pigeons that were awarded the Dickin Medal were given names, much the same as horses and dogs are given, but I am only going to tell you about one that I believe is very much worth mentioning. This pigeons' name was "Mary of Exeter". She was awarded the Dickin Medal "For outstanding endurance while on war service in spite of the many wounds she encountered".

The first occasion that she was injured was while returning from a mission she was attacked by a peregrine falcon and needed 22 stiches in her wound. After being nursed back to health she was sent on a second mission, not returning to her loft for three weeks. When she appeared her wing had been severely damaged and there were several shotgun pellets in her body believed to have been caused by a German sharp shooter.

On her third mission from France she returned home exhausted and thin and was found in a field just outside Exeter's city walls with a cut from the top of her head to the base of her neck along with several other small cuts. Mary was returned to the fancier that bred her and was found to be barely able to lift her head. This fancier designed and made Mary a leather collar and fed each day by hand until she was well again and able to feed herself.

Mary was retired from active service and passed away in 1950 and was subsequently buried in an animal cemetery. Since then Mary has been honoured by the Exeter Council with a plaque being unveiled near the War Memorial in the UK city of Ilford.

Closer to home, two Australian pigeons serving with the Australian Army Signal Corps were also honoured and awarded Dickin medals for their service provided in Papua New Guinea in 1945. Unfortunately, neither pigeon were given names and are only known as pigeons DD-43T-139 and pigeon DD-43Q-878. (Their identification ring numbers). Pigeon number 139 was awarded the Dickin Medal for delivering an urgent message during a tropical storm which helped save a boat's crew along with its valuable cargo of supplies and ammunition. As the boat's radio was not working due to the vessel taking in water the prospect of losing their valuable cargo and even their lives if captured by the enemy was very real. Flying 40mls (64km) in 50 minutes threw heavy rain and strong wind, pigeon 139 made it home to its loft in time for a rescue mission reach the stranded boat saving it along with the crew and its valuable cargo. In all pigeon 139 flew 21 missions in total covering a distance of over 1000mls or 1610km.

The second pigeon, 879 was awarded the Dickin Medal for delivering an urgent message from a US Marine patrol that became pinned down by a superior enemy force that were planning a large counter attack on allied forces. The enemy desperately wanted to keep the counter attack a secret and were determined to destroy the US patrol. Being pinned down by heavy enemy fire and no radio communication available, the patrol turned to the 2 pigeons that they were carrying with them. With the same message requesting urgent assistance attached to both pigeons they were released, unfortunately one of the pigeons was immediately shot down but under heavy enemy fire the second bird 879 managed to escape without incidence and travelled the distance of 40ml (64km) back to the base camp in just 30 min.

The allied forces wasted no time and began heavy bombardment of the surrounding area were the enemy were camped allowing the US Marine patrol to escape from the perilous position under the cover of the ensuing bombardment.

Today the persevered remains of these two pigeons, along with their Dickin medals can be viewed at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra.

In closing I would like to quote the war time British Prime Minister, Sir Winston Churchill, who once said

– *"A nation that forgets to honour its heroes, will soon have no heroes to honour".*

SEA HORSES

Two mounted officers of the Australian Naval Brigade in China.
The Naval contingent obtained horses locally whereas the Army took Walers from Australia.
AWM P00417.003

The Navy have always been in the forefront of war including using animals.
The first soldier in Australian uniform to be killed in action in the First World War happened not in Europe but the German colony of New Guinea. Twenty-year-old Able Seaman John Courtney died instantly during Australia's first military operation as a nation, during the Battle of Bita Paka on September 11 1914. Well before this War Australian Navy personnel were used as soldiers and used animals to support its land-based operations such as towing artillery or packing supplies. We are all aware of the dashing Light Horseman – but wearing a sailor's uniform?

By the end of the nineteenth century the balance of the lucrative trade between China and merchants from America and Europe, particularly Britain, lay almost entirely in the West's favour. As Western influence increased anti-European secret societies began to form. Among the most violent and popular was the I-ho-ch'uan dubbed the "Boxers" the society gave the Boxer Rebellion its name.

By March 1900 the uprising spread beyond the secret societies and western powers decided to intervene, Australian colonies were keen to offer material support to Britain. With the bulk of forces engaged in South Africa, they looked to their naval contingents to provide a pool of professional, full-time crews and fighting as soldiers.

Some mounted volunteer Light Horsemen from NSW and Victoria went to China. They arrived after the famous 55 Day siege at Peking and found themselves assigned to guarding duties. The Victorians rode to Pao-ting Fu and back, while the NSW contingent was undertook garrison duties in Peking. They remained in Tientsin and Peking over winter, performing police and guard duties and sometimes working as railway men and firefighters. Although they saw little combat, the Australian forces helped to restore civil order, which involved shooting (by firing squad) Chinese caught setting fire to buildings or committing other offences against European property or persons. Our Sailors on the other hand managed to acquire local ponies to ride as cavalry and tow naval guns and saw some action.

The use of the horse did not end way back then. The Naval Dockyard Police can lay claim to having been the last, if not the only, branch of the RAN to have been horse-borne. Patrols of establishments on horseback commenced during WW II at depots such as Byford, in WA, and Newington in NSW. They continued right through until 1952 when the last fiery steed was withdrawn from service at Byford and transferred to the less illustrious role of towing a roller around the sports ground of HMAS LEEUWIN. Notwithstanding this, Riding Breeches appeared on the official kit list of the Naval Dockyard Police sometime after the disappearance of our last horse.

The artillery of the NSW contingent of the NSW Naval Brigade which went to Tientsin in China in July 1900 to help the British suppress the Boxer rebellion. It may have been getting ready for the International Competition held in Peking in early 1901. Note the comparatively small size of the ponies and the odd mule.

LEADING SEAMAN HANK

PHOTO: Royal Australian Navy mascot, British Bulldog Leading Seaman Hank, awaits the docking of Guided Missile Destroyer HMAS Brisbane (III) at Hamilton wharf on its first visit to Brisbane.

A little-known piece of Navy history dating back to the First World War, is being kept alive with a British Bulldog by the name of Hank, becoming the first mascot for 'the Steel Cat', HMAS Brisbane (III).

HMAS Brisbane is the second of three Hobart Class Air Warfare Destroyers built for the Royal Australian Navy and is based in Sydney.

Hank — who carries the honourary rank of Leading Seaman — took pride of place when Brisbane's 200 officers and sailors exercised their Freedom of Entry with a march through the streets of Brisbane.

The Freedom of Entry march was one of many activities the Air Warfare Destroyer fit into the maiden port visit to her namesake city.

Hank's owner, Jason Jenness, who previously served in the Royal Australian Navy, said he was thrilled that Hank could represent Australia's newest warship as her official mascot. Auditions for the ship's mascot were arranged and held by the Queensland Maritime Museum prior to HMAS Brisbane's visit.

Hank stood between the second and third platoons during the Freedom of Entry march, as soon as the band started playing he stood straight up and was ready to march.

The tradition of a British Bulldog representing warships goes back over a century to the First World War. In 1941 an advertisement was placed in the Courier Mail newspaper calling for a “Brisbane British Bulldog to give to the men of HMAS Brisbane”, a naval base in Bulimba.

Churchill the Bulldog auditioned and won the title of ship's mascot, marching in naval parades and providing an effective morale boost during the Second World War.

Historically animals on ships would not only be a source of morale amongst the crew, but also contributed to pest control, however today the main duties of a ship's mascot are purely ceremonial.

NAVY GOATS

11695—The Mascots of the Battleship Wisconsin.

Like a Naval ships cat, sailing goats also served a practical role on the waves. Since ships spent months at sea, the crews needed a source for fresh dairy products, meat, leather and fibre.

Goats offered advantages over cows. They required less space and the goats sure-footedness was better suited for rough seas.

A half-ton cow being tossed in a storm could be as dangerous as a loose cannon.

Goats also spared ships from having to store the enormous amount of special feed that would have been needed for cows because goats would at least try to eat anything placed in front of them.

Crews would feed goats scraps of whatever was available, giving goats another purpose by turning them into the ship's garbage disposal.

For centuries, fresh goat meat was prized by ship crews not only as a tasty alternative to their regular diet of salted pork, they also believed it could cure disease and heal wounds. It was fairly common practice for sailors to release goats on islands and remote shores where the animals would quickly proliferate and become a food reserve (and an environmental disaster in the decades to follow).

Photo # NH 101549 Bathing a battleship's goat, circa 1907-1908