

Box 9: The Silence of Animals



List of contents:

1. Wrapped horseshoe
2. Photographs of:
 - A pigeon – with small camera. Shutter can be adjusted to record during the flight at predetermined times. Credit: Bundesarchiv/ Commons
 - Captured war pigeons
 - Dog delivering first aid – A WW1 soldier bandages the paw of the Red Cross working dog in Flanders, Belgium, May 1917. Credit: Harriet Chalmers Adams, National Geographic/ Commons
 - Dog wearing medals – Sergeant Stubby, the most decorated dog of WW1. He wore a military uniform and was decorated. Credit: Commons.
 - Dog in the trenches: From BBC News Round page:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/28604874>
 - Elephant – A military elephant in WW1 pulls a machine in Sheffield. Credit: Illustrated War News/ Commons.
 - Camels - Ottoman camel corps at Beersheba during the First Suez Offensive of WW1, 1915. Credit: Library of Congress/ Commons.
 - Cat – ‘Pincher’, the mascot of HMS Vindex, on propeller of the sea planes, carried by the ship. Credit: Imperial War Museums/ Commons.
 - Horse being lifted onto the ship – From BBC News Round page:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/28604874>
 - Donkey with a gas mask -Two German soldiers with a mule wearing a gas mask:
<https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/two-german-soldiers-mule-wearing-gas-masks-wwi-1916/>
3. Scroll of a pigeon message from famous Pigeon Cher Ami’s message from Captain Whittlesey to the commanding officer of the 308th Infantry, 10/4/1918. (National Archives Identifier 595541)

Key information:

- In excess of 16 million animals were used in WW1. They were used for transport, communication – taking messages - and companionship.
- Both Britain and Germany had cavalry forces that fought on horseback. As the weapons became more sophisticated, cavalry forces were more vulnerable. In the desert, along with horses there were camel mounted troops.
- The front line was dependent on horses, donkeys, mules and camels to carry supplies of food and water, ammunition and medical supplies.
- Dogs and pigeons were used to carry messages – some were captured as shown in the photograph: ‘captured war pigeons’.
- There are documented cases of animals considered spies and tried for treason.
- WW1 was the first war to use gas. Canaries were already used to detect poisonous gas in mines as miners would note if the canary became distressed. They were used in WW1 in the same way to detect invisible gas attacks.
- Cats and dogs were used to keep down the population of rats in the trenches.
- Animals were used for companionship and lucky mascots to keep up morale – like the cat in the photograph. In addition to and dogs there were more exotic animals such as lions, bears and monkeys.

Box 9. Silence of Animals: questions



1. What do you think is in this box?
Can you guess from the outside of the box?

2. Carefully take the parcel out of the box and open it.
3. Who do you think wore this?
4. Can you imagine how the horse felt?
5. Open the scroll. How important is the information in this message?
6. How would you feel writing this message?
How would you feel receiving this message? What would you do?



7. Photographs of animals:

- List all the different animals you can see.
- Against each animal write what you think the animal had to do in WW1.
- Give each animal a name.
- How do you think the animal felt in each of these photos?
- How would you feel if you were the animal?

Suggested box combinations

- **Box 6 – Silence of the Aftermath of War**, looking at how the end of the war affected these animal heroes
- **Box 10 Silence of Gas**, exploring the use of canaries to detect gas attacks
- **Box 11 Silence of Surveillance**, where animals such as pigeons could be used to send messages

Suggested activities

- Using one or more photographs, create a story considering what was happening in the moments before the photo was taken and what happened after the photo was taken. Give your chosen animal a name and decide whether or not they survived the war.
- Write a poem or story or story board, explaining how you think the horse lost the horseshoe.
- Write a poem or story or story board, from the perspective of your chosen animal at war.

Caring for the box after use

- Please re wrap the horseshoe
- Carefully place everything back in the box