



# Animals during World War I



**A**nimals were protectors, comforters, entertainers, ambulances, messengers and transporters during World War I – and they didn't have a choice.

In short, animals made life easier for humans on the front – but life was worse for the animals there.

## Horses

Around 10,000 horses were sent from New Zealand overseas. Of these 10,000 around 1,500 were gifted for the war effort by generous New Zealanders.

Horses carried troops in the cavalry and mounted rifles, heavy and light artillery and other supplies.

The sight of a horse ridden by an armed soldier charging towards them would have been frightening for the enemy. Equally, the deafening sound of guns and bombs would have been extremely frightening for our horses.

Quite a small number of horses were lost on the epic journey overseas to the Middle East and the Western Front, but injury and disease meant many horses died at the front – just like soldiers. A New Zealand Veterinary Corps was created to look after the horses, but sometimes even the vets couldn't save the horses.

More than half the horses were ridden by mounted troops and officers, while 4,000 were used for transport, and pulling heavy loads.

Just four horses returned to New Zealand after the war. There was barely enough transport to get troops home let alone animals. There were also quarantine restrictions because of animal diseases. Horses were killed, sold or kept for use by the British army. In the Middle East, many men refused to leave their horses to the local people who had a reputation for treating them poorly. Their only alternative was to shoot them.

There's a memorial to Bess, one of the four horses that made it home to New Zealand, near Bulls.

## Other animals

There were many cases of soldiers adopting an animal mascot. The School Journal says: "A mascot was a symbol for the regiment. It was also a friend and companion, like a pet. It added humour and fun to everyday life. A mascot was good for morale because it cheered up the soldiers... Some people even think that mascots bring good luck and help to achieve success."

Nan the goat (pictured below) was the mascot of the New Zealand Engineers; Paddy the dog belonged to the Wellington Regiment; while the Auckland Mounted Rifles adopted a desert fox.

Dogs were trained to look for wounded soldiers in "no-man's land". Cats caught rats in the trenches, homing pigeons delivered messages, and donkeys carried water, supplies and the wounded.

Torty the Tortoise, a survivor from Gallipoli brought home by a New Zealand soldier, was still alive in Dunedin in 2014!



## Pictured:

Top: Moses, an Egyptian donkey, was the mascot of the New Zealand Army Service Company in France. These images were taken at Louvencourt on 20 April 1918.

Inset (top): Mounted New Zealand World War 1 troops in Palestine, moving towards the Jordan River.

Inset (bottom): Nan, an Egyptian goat, a mascot of the New Zealand Engineers, pictured standing on a hay bale with a soldier standing behind her.

## Sources:

Photo credit (top): Moses, the donkey mascot of the New Zealand Army Service Company. Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association: New Zealand official negatives, World War 1914-1918. Ref: 1/2-013143-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. [natlib.govt.nz/records/22770890](http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22770890)

Photo credit (inset top): Wilson, L F (Mrs): Photographs taken during World War I of the New Zealand Expeditionary Forces in Jerusalem, and the Auckland Mounted Rifles in Egypt, Sinai and Palestine. Ref: 1/2-066833-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. [natlib.govt.nz/records/22298410](http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22298410)

Photo credit (inset bottom): The goat mascot of the New Zealand Engineers, France. Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association: New Zealand official negatives, World War 1914-1918. Ref: 1/2-013133-G. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. [natlib.govt.nz/records/22712390](http://natlib.govt.nz/records/22712390)

Te Ara, the New Zealand Encyclopedia  
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New Zealand School Journal June 2014