

Animals in the First World War

During the First World War, more than 16 million people lost their lives, but humans were not the only ones involved. Over 16 million animals served in the First World War. Their work was extremely important, and they were also companions for soldiers during the hardship of war.



Sit down with the children and show them the series of pictures overleaf.

Discuss with the children how they feel about using animals to fight in human wars.

Additional supporting activities about the war can be found in the Remembrance Day section on iChild.

Horses, mules and donkeys



Horses, mules and donkeys were vital during the First World War. They moved ammunition and general supplies. They served as ambulances. Teams of gun horses pulled artillery, and cavalry horses were ridden in battle. Over eight million horses, mules and donkeys died during the First World War.

Dogs



Dogs carried aid to the wounded. They took messages between the lines. They sniffed out enemy soldiers, and pulled machine guns and equipment. They acted as “sentinel dogs” at the trenches, letting the soldiers know if anyone approached the barbed wire. Up to 20,000 dogs were trained for front line duties during the First World War.

Pigeons



Homing pigeons were used to carry messages. They were so important that a law was passed to make killing or harming homing pigeons punishable under the Defence of the Realm Regulations by six months' imprisonment or £100 fine. Over 100,000 homing pigeons were used in the First World War.

Cats



Cats were used to hunt rats and mice at sea and in the trenches. They kept soldiers company and were also used as gas detectors. Approximately 500,000 cats were sent to the trenches during the First World War.

Camels



Camels were used in the desert. They carried food, water, ammunition and medical supplies to men at the front. They served as ambulances to transport the injured to safety. They were also, apparently, much less prone to panicking under enemy fire.

Canaries



Canaries were used to detect the presence of poisonous gas in the trenches and in tunnels beneath.