This year is the 100th anniversary of the commencement of the 1914–18 war. There are commemorative events, stamp issues, new books, website information and newspaper articles on events and soldiers, marking the ‘Great War’. Animals – horses and dogs – played a significant role in that conflict. Horses were used as cavalry and for transport but the part dogs played is often forgotten. I prepared a lecture on the history of working dogs for the World Small Animal Veterinary Association Congress in Jeju, Korea a few years ago and recently read the article ‘Dogs of War’ in the BSAVA Companion (October 2014). I thought I would depart from the academic/medical theme for this issue and write something about Dogs in Warfare.

The use of ‘War dogs’ goes back to ancient times before Christ: the Greeks, Persians, Egyptians, Britons and Romans all used dogs (Figure 1), mostly in a sentry role but sometimes taken into battle. The earliest report involved the Alyattes of Lydia against the Cimmerians in 600 BC, when the Lydian dogs killed some invaders. In mid 7th century BC Magnesian horsemen, in a war against the Ephesians, were each accompanied by a war dog and a spear-wielding attendant. The dogs were released to breach the enemy ranks, followed by a spear assault and then a cavalry charge. War dogs were often sent into battle with spiked collars and coats of mail armour. Dogs were used by the Romans during invasions to hunt out local guerrillas who resisted the Roman invaders. Caesar’s invasion of Britain was opposed by Celtic warriors and their dogs in 55 BC, the English mastiff being one of the oldest recorded breeds. Attila the Hun used giant Molosser dogs (similar to the mastiff) in his military campaigns.

Other civilisations used armoured dogs to defend their position or attack enemies. Their key role was to distract soldiers and unseat horsemen. Mastiffs and other large breeds were used by the Spanish conquistadors against native Americans in the 1500s. Elizabeth I used dogs against the Irish in Ireland in 1580. Frederick the Great and Napoleon both used dogs as messengers and as guard dogs during their campaigns.

With the advent of ‘modern’ weapons and guns the role of dogs changed from attack to other less confrontational but essential aspects of warfare: for sentry and guard duties, logistics and communications, rescue and casualty, warning dogs, detection and tracking, medical research, scouting, drug and explosive detection, and as companions and mascots. The first use of dogs in the United States was in the Seminole wars and hounds were used in the American civil war as messengers and to guard prisoners. In the last stand of the British 66th Royal Berkshire Regiment in the second Afghan war in the 1880s, the mascot of the 2nd Battalion, ‘Bobbie’, was the only survivor of the battle of Maiwand. ‘Bobbie’ received the Afghan Medal from Queen Victoria in 1881; he died the year after, run down by a horse cab!

Roles and functions of dogs in World War I

Dogs were employed in many different roles and were of value in the trenches on the western front as sentry and guard dogs, pack animals (machine guns and stretcher bearers, Figure 2), warning dogs, messenger dogs and rescue dogs. Sentry or guard dogs on a short lead were trained to accompany a soldier and taught to growl, snarl or stiffen (hackles raised), to indicate when they detected someone advancing. Dobermann pinschers were favoured for this role. Scout dogs would go with soldiers on foot, patrolling the terrain ahead of them. They could scent the enemy up to 1000 yards away, sooner than a human. Silence was
important and raising of hackles and pointing of the tail indicated the enemy was encroaching.

Casualty/rescue dogs were trained to find the wounded and dying on the battle field and were equipped with medical supplies to assist the wounded. They were trained to remain with the wounded man, and many soldiers died while the dog waited beside them. To guide stretcher bearers, the casualty dogs wore Red Cross collars or coats. When the Germans introduced gas warfare, dogs were trained to detect gas and alert troops so that soldiers could don gas masks. Dogs were also issued with gas masks for protection (Figure 3). One famous dog, ‘Stubby’, fostered by American troops, detected incoming artillery shells before the soldiers could hear them. They watched Stubby who alerted them when to take cover. Stubby was promoted to Sergeant before his return to the United States as a hero, and he became mascot of the Washington Hogas football team.

Communications were often difficult and crude at best at the front line and dogs provided reliable and rapid communication between units. Dogs were less of a target to a sniper and could travel over the difficult terrain, pock marked with shell craters. Some dogs were trained to trail telephone wires between locations. One of the important roles dogs provided in the conflict was companionship. Units were encouraged to adopt dogs which acted as mascots, giving psychological comfort in the squalid and horrific conditions the soldiers lived through. Relationships were strong and there are stories of dogs that would sit beside their dead master or wait at their grave. Small terriers were sponsored by the British YMCA to deliver cigarettes to the troops in the trenches!

Despite the important role dogs played in the conflict there is little mention in the official record of veterinary service for dogs in the war. Furthermore, because rabies was present in continental Europe, disease control was a potential problem. It was decided that ‘a proportion of dogs could be brought to Britain subject to proper precautions’. Quarantine stations were established, with the RSPCA covering the cost for 500 dogs only. The commanding officer of each unit in all theatres of war decided which individual dogs would be allowed into Britain. The owners/handlers paid £2 and the RSPCA the rest. The first batch of dogs arrived in the UK from France in 1919. What happened to the hundreds and maybe thousands of dogs left behind after the armistice is not recorded.

**New Zealand dogs**
- ‘Caesar’, a bulldog, accompanied the NZ Rifle Brigade as a trained Red Cross dog and helped rescue wounded NZ troops in the battle of the Somme. He was killed in action.
- ‘Freda’, a harlequin great Dane, was adopted as the mascot for NZ 5 Battalion at Cannock Chase, England.
- ‘Pelorus Jack’ was the mascot for the battle cruiser HMS New Zealand. There were two ‘Pelorus Jacks’, both bulldogs: one was discharged dead in 1916; the other achieved the rank of Leading Sea Dog and fought at the battle of Jutland.
- ‘Floss’, a fox terrier, was the mascot of the NZ Army rugby team that toured England in 1917. Floss raised many pounds for rehabilitation of disabled servicemen and women.

Many other NZ army and navy units had canine mascots. The 1914 NZ war dog postcard emphasised the call to support “the cause”, the Empire (Figure 4).

**The Second World War**
Dogs returned to action in the Second World War (Figure 5). In the opening weeks of the German invasion of Russia, dogs were equipped with mines that would magnetically detonate when the dogs ducked under the German Panzer tanks. The dogs were trained with Soviet tanks but in many cases they
ran alongside the tanks or did not distinguish German from Russian tanks – not an effective strategy! The Soviet Army also used dogs to assist soldiers wounded in battle, dragging them on sleds in the snow. Dogs could travel in deep snow, improving a wounded soldier’s chance of survival when temperatures were extremely low. On one sector of the front a team of sled dogs carried 1239 wounded men from the battlefield and hauled 330 tons of ammunition. Samoyed dogs were useful in winter for sled transport and haulage. Dogs were used in a security role to detect booby traps, ambushes, weapon stores or enemy soldiers. Detection dogs were trained to detect mines but were not that effective under combat conditions. Throughout the war dogs were used by the Germans for guard duty in concentration camps and prisoner of war camps. Most armies had sentry or guard dogs for surveillance of camps or equipment. Dogs were also used to track escaped prisoners by the Germans and Japanese.

The United States Marine Corps used dogs, donated by their American owners, in the Pacific to help take islands back from the Japanese occupying forces (Figure 6). They were used for sentry duties and for tracking the enemy soldiers in the jungle. All breeds were eligible but Dobermanns and German shepherd dogs were generally selected. The Dobermann Pinscher became the ‘official’ dog of the USMC. Many dogs went home with their handlers and almost all returned to civilian life. ‘Chips’ was the most famous – a German shepherd/Siberian husky cross. He served in North Africa, Sicily, France and Germany. In Sicily ‘Chips’ broke away from his handler and entered an enemy pillbox, attacking the gunners inside, who surrendered as a result. Later he helped capture Italian soldiers. ‘Chips’ was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star and Purple Heart but these honours were later revoked because army policy prevented official commendation of animals! His unit unofficially awarded him suitable decorations in recognition of his actions. ‘Chips’ was returned to his family after the war. Major ‘Major’ was the mascot of the 2nd NZEF and of the 19th Battalion from 1939. Wounded at El Alamein he was promoted to Major in late 1942. He died of sickness in Italy in 1944 and was buried with full military honours.

During World War II in the United States, dogs were the primary animals used in medical research to test new drugs without risking human lives. The US government proclaimed these dogs as heroes and research dogs received medals ‘for outstanding service to humanity’. As expected, the ethics of using dogs for such experiments came under scrutiny and received significant criticism after the war (Figure 7). Political review led to the adoption in 1966 of the United States Laboratory Animal Welfare Act.
After World War II

Dogs have been used by most countries’ armies in different theatres of war. Approximately 5000 American war dogs served in the Vietnam War and about 10,000 personnel served as dog handlers (Figure 8). About 250 dogs and 300 handlers were killed in action. In Vietnam dogs were mostly used in a sentry role guarding the areas in front of gun towers or bunkers and the perimeter of airbases. Their detection of Viet Cong intruders resulted in rapid deployment of new reinforcements. The sentry dogs were highly successful and feared by the Viet Cong who even placed a bounty on the lives of handler and dog. Some dogs were trained to silently locate booby traps and mines. Despite the success of the dog teams in Vietnam, at the conclusion of this conflict the dogs were not returned to the United States. About 200 dogs were reassigned to US bases outside the USA. The remainder were euthanased or left behind. There was huge public outcry at that time about the decision not to repatriate the dogs that had saved many lives. Dogs were regarded as expendable equipment.

Dogs have participated in military roles in most modern conflicts. Their roles are often similar to those of the past but many new roles have been created. Dogs are equipped with tactical vests with microphones and cameras that can relay audio and video messages to the handler (Figure 9). The German shepherd is still the most popular breed but smaller dogs with a keener sense of smell for detection are also used. The dogs are trained with one handler and, in the US, new laws permit the return home and adoption of retired military dogs. The US Air Force trains dogs in different roles at the Lackland Airforce base in Texas.

Military dogs were deployed widely in Iraq (Figure 10) and Afghanistan for detection of drugs and explosives. They were also used for intimidation of the enemy. The use of dogs to intimidate prisoners in Iraq and Guantanamo Bay resulted in military court-martial and prohibition of dogs being used in this way.

A Belgian Malinois dog, ‘Cairo’, accompanied the SEAL team that stormed Osama bin Laden’s compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in 2011. The dog’s role was to detect bombs, concealed enemies and sealed doors or passageways in the Al Qaeda safe house. ‘Cairo’ was dropped into the compound from a helicopter along with the SEALs.

In 2014 a memorial to war dogs was unveiled at Camp Pendleton in California to pay tribute to canine military members of the US Army as far back as World War I.

The New Zealand Army until now has not had a dog unit but is in the process of developing a canine tactical unit. The NZ Airforce has dogs to guard the Whenuapai airbase.

Dogs used in warfare have made huge contributions to many conflicts and, in most countries, legislation now protects their welfare and defines their use. The relationship and bonding between a dog and its handler remains, as it always has, the key to a dog’s ability as a war dog.

References and reading

Jones BV, Dogs of War, BSAVA Companion, 4–6, October 2014

Dogs in World War One http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/dogs-in-world-war-one.htm
The dogs of war Photos of canines in combat – TIME http://combat.time.com/time/photogallery/0,29307,2070141,00.html
First World War mascots – animals at war by Philippa Werry http://literaryonline.tki.org.nz/content/download/28223/297054/file
Caesar, the ANZAC dog New Zealand history on line http://nzhistory.net.nz/media/photo/Caesar-the-anzac-dog (Ministry for Culture and Heritage) updated 31 July 2014
There are numerous other websites, books and monographs with pictures, stories and comment about World Wars I and II and other conflicts where dogs and other animals were used in a combat or support role.