

Animals in war (1)

Transport

- In both World Wars, all sides relied heavily on **horses**. They could move heavy equipment around on difficult terrain and they were more reliable than the motor vehicles of the time. The dangers were great and around eight million horses died in the First World War, and around 2.5 million were treated in veterinary hospitals.
- **Mules** were often used in Burma in the Second World War. This is because they have great stamina and can carry heavy loads through dense jungles, whereas horses would struggle to stay on their feet.
- Ask the students which other strong animals they think have been used for transport in difficult terrain. **Elephants** and **camels** have been used for this because they are adapted to cope and can keep going in extreme temperatures.
- During the First World War a British stretcher bearer, John Simpson Kirkpatrick, serving with the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, used a **donkey** named Duffy to rescue wounded soldiers, carrying them to safety in Gallipoli.

Communications

- In the Second World War, **pigeons** brought messages out from behind enemy lines. Around 200,000 pigeons were deployed during the Second World War. Of these, about 17,000 were sent into enemy territory in specially-designed pigeon parachutes. Very few of these pigeons returned safely but one, named Winkie, became famous. Some bomber planes carried a pigeon so that, in the event of a crash, the pigeon could fly home and alert the RAF about the stranded crew. The plane carrying Winkie crashed and her wings became clogged with engine oil, but she still managed to fly the 129 miles back to base.

Detection

- **Dogs** have often been used in detection work and are still used for this purpose today because of their amazing sense of smell.
- **Dolphins** have also been used in war. They were used by both sides in the so-called 'Cold War' (a 45-year-period in the middle of the 20th century when the East and the West were locked in mutual mistrust). The dolphins were used for spying and searching. Even today, dolphins and **sea lions** are used by the US Navy because of their ability to echo-locate. This means they can alert their handlers if they find underwater weapons, such as mines on the underside of ships.

Animals in war (2)

- There was a British plan to use **gulls** to find and indicate the location of German U-boats in the First World War, but this plan failed because gulls do not venture very far offshore.
- Explain that this was not the only failed plan to use animals in war. The Russians tried to train dogs to become suicide bombers. The idea was to send dogs under enemy tanks with explosives strapped to their bodies. Because the training involved Russian tanks, these were the ones that the dogs kept running underneath – so this cruel idea backfired on the Russian military.
- Animals have proved really helpful for vital military tasks because they can do some things more effectively than humans and machines. But animals have another quality that helps us in war: their willingness to trust us. The trust between a dog and a handler became huge news in 2011 after Lance Corporal Liam Tasker was shot dead in Helmand Province in Afghanistan. Liam's dog, Theo, died three hours later from a seizure. His death was mysterious, but the news stories surrounding it highlighted the working relationship, companionship and trust between the soldiers and their dogs. Theo had already detected 14 hidden bombs in five months on his first tour of duty – he and Liam saved countless lives because of their trust for each other.