



AN INCIDENT OF BATTLE—A FAITHFUL DOG WATCHING THE DEAD BODY OF HIS MASTER.

Man's Best Friend Goes to War

An examination of the dog's role in the Civil War gives a clearer understanding about how brutal the Civil War was and how important it was for soldiers to have a friend whose personality wasn't affected by being homesick, injured, near-death or other aspects of war. Dogs have always been known as man's best friend. During war time, that fact is emphasized. Dogs played their part in the Civil War just like the humans did. Dogs looked for food and water for soldiers, they crossed enemy lines to carry information, they worked as prison guards, they were companions and improved soldiers morale, they were even included on monuments, memorials and in pictures.

Dogs played a role in war long before the Civil War in America. Egyptian murals commemorate the loyalty and spirit of dogs who went to war with them. The murals show dogs behaving viciously toward their enemies (Allsopp 19). In the Middle Ages, while knights were getting ready for war, not only did they get dressed in their own armor, they put their dogs in armor as well and the dogs accompanied them into battle (20-21). The Greeks and Romans used dogs in battle and Frederick the Great used dogs as messengers during the Seven Years War in Russia (21).

For centuries it has been recognized that dogs can be of the utmost value for military purposes, and it is certain that no metaphor was intended by Shakespeare when he made Antony exclaim, 'Cry "Havoc" and let slip the dogs of war.'

(The New York Times, February 21, 1915)

We learned more about Napoleon, who is considered one of the world's greatest military leaders, when Napoleon said, "I walked over the battlefield and saw among the slain, a poodle killed bestowing a last lick upon his dead friend's face. Never had anything on any battlefield caused me a like emotion" (22). You would not guess that this is the same man who killed over 600,000 people.

During the Civil War, dogs were sometimes relied on for finding food. Some dogs would steal food from passing wagons or hunt to bring back food to their men to supplement the soldier's rations. An example of one of these dogs was Union Jack of the 102nd Pennsylvania Infantry. This brown-and-white terrier was known for catching chickens to bring to the soldiers. *Harper's Weekly* did a story about Jack's ability to find water. "On the road, when our parched

men were fainting from thirst, he would always run forward, and whenever he discovered a pool of water would rush back, barking loudly to tell them of it” (*Harper’s Weekly* 711). Jack’s behavior shows an understanding of what the soldiers needed and he tried his best to help. His behavior also shows how desperate the food situation could get during the Civil War.

There were spies during the Civil War. A woman named Emiline Pigott from North Carolina, together with her dog, was a spy. Many female spies would hide documents under their hoop skirts. One day, Emiline needed to report in with General Pierre Gustave T. Beauregard to give him information about Union troops. Emiline was searched thoroughly when she passed through Union lines but she was prepared (Palagruto 58).

... she asked the general to borrow his knife and Beauregard watched in shock as she bent over her little pet and plunged the knife into the dog’s side. The general was horrified, but then he noticed the dog was still wagging its tail. Emiline kept sawing, then removed the fake fur skin she had sewn around the dog’s middle and handed Gen. Beauregard the report ingeniously hidden underneath the dog’s second coat of fur (Palagruto 58).

In this instance, a spy used the fact that most people loved dogs and did not suspect a dog of participating in anything covert.

Dogs were trained to carry messages. Palagruto, in *Civil War Dogs*, talks about a dog who carried messages between Southern and Northern armies. This system worked by giving the dog a Southern newspaper and sending him to Union forces. After delivering the newspaper, he returned with a Northern newspaper. This went on until one day the dog was caught carrying

military information and had to be sent north for being disloyal (Palagruto 13). This shows that everyone pays the price for disloyalty, including a dog that didn't really understand he was being disloyal.

Dogs were also sent to prison camps. Jack, the terrier from the 102nd Pennsylvania Infantry, was captured by the Confederacy. In *A Civil War Scrapbook*, he was listed as eventually returning as part of a prisoner exchange. Frank was the mascot of the 2nd Kentucky Infantry. When his company was captured and sent to Ft. Donelson in Tennessee, Frank was captured too and spent six months in prison alongside his soldiers (Palagruto 12). Conditions in prisons were generally bad and there was little food or clothes and there were diseases such as pneumonia and smallpox. In a report examining the conditions at Camp Chase in Columbus, a prisoner recalls the time a stray dog got into the prison and how for a little while the dog nearly became a meal. Fortunately for the stray dog, he found a way out through a broken window (Ivy 73).

At Andersonville Prison in Georgia, big dogs were put to work as prison dogs. This prison was run by Captain Henry Wirz. In *A Civil War Scrapbook*, Wirz called his dogs the "Hounds of Hell." Their job was to kill or severely injure prisoners trying to escape. One of his dogs was known to weigh 198 lbs. It was 38 inches tall and seven feet long. Wirz was later hanged in 1865 for the bad treatment and murder of prisoners at Andersonville. In the transcript of the trial of Henry Wirz, we learn how Wirz used dogs to capture and maim escaped prisoners during the Civil War: "I remember a man making his escape from the hospital in July, and being overtaken by the hounds; a large portion of his ear was torn off, and his face mangled." Wirz

starved the prisoners and gave the dogs prisoner rations. “They used to draw rations for these hounds at the bakery. They drew the bread which I supposed was cooked for the men inside; they issued for these hounds there about twenty-five or thirty loaves (“Trial of Henry Wirz”).”

Not all dogs were given violent jobs. Most dogs were companions to soldiers who missed home. Palagruto writes, “The morale of the men was always higher in regiments which had pets. (10).” We learn about how important these dogs were to the soldiers in the letters they wrote. In *A Civil War Scrapbook*, it describes how the Union covered the cost of postage for their soldiers. These letters were marked “Soldier’s Letter” on the envelope (26). The only way families could communicate with the men at war was by writing. 90,000 letters passed through Washington D.C. each day (Ratliff 34). On Valentine’s Day, 1864, Captain William Jordan wrote a letter to his children that told of the pets of the regiment. He told his children that Harvey and Colonel were “veteran soldier dogs” who “go in any of the tents that they want and lay down at night or stand with the sentinels on guard (Palagruto 16).”

Robert E. Lee said, “I don’t believe we can have an army without music.” Music was very important in the Civil War. Today we recognize such Civil War songs as “When Johnny Comes Marching Home Again” and the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” (*A Civil War Scrapbook* 32-33). The dogs enjoyed the music and tried to sing too. In 1864, Private Adam Weaver wrote his brother in Ohio about the campfire sing-alongs and their mascot, a bull terrier named Harvey. Weaver said “My idea is that the noise hurts his ears as it does mine!” Harvey is described as swaying and singing along with the soldiers’ songs (Palagruto 16-17).

The Civil War was very bloody and there were many casualties. There are numerous stories of dogs being with their owners when they died. In *Civil War Curiosities*, Garrison describes how Captain Werner Van Bachel, who was a member of the Ohio brigade, had trained his dog to perform military salutes. The dog went everywhere the captain went and when a burial crew came upon the captain's body at Antietam, he was "abandoned by our line of men but faithfully guarded by his dog (Garrison 80)."

In 1862, Mrs. Louis Pfeiff wanted to bring her husband's body home. The widow traveled from Chicago to Tennessee to find her husband's remains. When she arrived at the battlefield, she spent hours looking at the thousands of markers marking soldier's graves. A dog ran up to her and she recognized her husband's dog. He led Mrs. Pfeiff to an unmarked grave. The dog had been by her husband's side when he died and for 12 days stayed at his burial site keeping watch (Palagruto 37).

Grace, the loyal mascot of the 1st Maryland Artillery, was killed at Culp's Hill. Union Brigadier General Thomas Kane found Grace's body. "She licked someone's hand after being perfectly riddled with bullets. Regarding her as the only Christian-minded being on either side, I ordered her to be honorably buried" (Palagruto 23). It was common for dogs to be recognized for their service by their regiments. The City of Alexandria, Virginia website describes Sallie, who was killed by a bullet to her head at the battle of Hatcher's Run in Virginia. Even though the men were under heavy fire, they wept and buried Sallie on the battlefield with military honors. Today, there's a monument at Gettysburg to the 11th Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry and at the base is a bronze statue of their dog, Sallie ("Animal Mascots").

The contribution that dogs made to families and soldiers in the Civil War cannot be measured, but it can be remembered. Through the eyes of a dog, we are able to experience life during the Civil War. Dogs received military honors and monuments to celebrate their life. Civil War dogs laid the groundwork for dogs in future wars and today dogs are intentionally trained to assist soldiers.

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