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VETERANS DAY

Sergeant Stubby: The Dog Who Became a Soldier

Monday, November 11, is Veterans Day, the day on which we honor all the men and women who have served in the U.S. military. Many of these are heroes who have risk their lives for our country during wartime.

But did you know that animals can be war heroes too?

One of the most famous of these animal heroes was a little pit bull terrier who served with American soldiers in the trenches of World War I.



In 1917, during the First World War, a stray puppy wandered onto a drill field in New Haven, Connecticut, where soldiers of 102nd Infantry Battalion were training for combat. The dog was taken back to camp by a soldier named John Robert Conroy, who named the pup "Stubby" on account of his cute little stub of a tail.

After a few weeks of hanging around and watching the soldiers train, Stubby had learned the military bugle calls and was drilling with the men. He could even give a doggy-style salute by raising his forepaw to his eyebrow.

When it came time for the troops to head over to France, Conroy just stuffed Stubby into his greatcoat and smuggled him onto the ship. Once on board, he hid Stubby in a coal-bin until the ship was far out to sea.

When Conroy's commanding officer discovered the dog, he was less than pleased. However, Stubby gave the officer a salute and won him over. In fact, the CO was so impressed by the dog's salute that he allowed Stubby to accompany the Division to the battlefield as their official mascot. Stubby was even given a set of dog tags to match the ones the soldiers wore.

The 102nd reached the front lines in France on February 5, 1918. Stubby was wounded in action later that month when the Germans launched a mustard- gas attack. The pup was poisoned so badly that he nearly died. He was taken to the army field hospital where he was treated alongside the wounded soldiers. He returned to the trenches with a specially designed gas mask to protect him from future chemical attacks.

Stubby's mustard-gas experience left him sensitive to the tiniest trace of the stuff. Thanks to his heightened sense of smell, the little dog could now sniff out the dangerous gas before it became deadly. From then on, any time a gas canister exploded nearby, he would run up and down the trenches barking and biting men until they'd gotten on their gas masks and put on his.

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Not only could Stubby sniff out mustard gas, his doggy-hearing allowed him to pick up the sound of artillery fire before the shells exploded. The little guy would howl when he heard the incoming shells, warning the men to take cover. He could even sense ground attacks – as soon as he heard and/or smelled the enemy coming, he'd run over and nip at the sentry until the fellow got up and sounded the alarm.

When he wasn't saving soldiers' lives by alerting them to danger, Stubby would spend his time searching for lost or wounded men to rescue. If he found a man who could walk, Stubby would lead him back to safety. If soldier was too badly injured to move, the little dog would stand by him and bark until a medic arrived.

But that's not all; Stubby even captured a German spy. The little dog was patrolling the Allied line, when he came across a man mapping out the layout of the Allied trenches. The man was wearing an American military uniform, but he made the mistake of talking to the dog in German.

Stubby recognized the language of the enemy and began to bark wildly. The spy turned and ran, but the brave little dog attacked him and kept at it until the soldiers showed up to arrest the man. For this courageous act, Stubby was given a battlefield promotion to the rank of Sergeant. This meant that the dog now outranked his owner, who was only a Corporal.

By the end of the war, Stubby had spent 18 months as a war dog and had taken part in 17 battles. Once, he was badly wounded when he was hit by a hand grenade while participating in the attack on the German town of Schieprey.

Stubby had to be smuggled back home after the war—dogs still weren't allowed on board the ship—but back in the U.S. he was an instant celebrity. He led military parades, visited the White House, and was awarded dozens of medals—including one that was pinned on his military jacket by General Pershing, the overall commander of American Forces in the war.

Sergeant Stubby, canine war hero, died in 1926, at the age of 10. His body was preserved and is on display—along with his medals—at the Smithsonian Museum in Washington D.C.