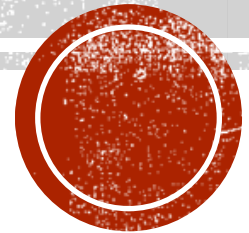


THE ROLE OF THE HORSE IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Free Spirit Memorial

www.freespiritmemorial.co.uk

twitter.com/spiritmemorial





BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

People's perception of horses often dictated by 'War Horse'

At the start of the Great War it was anticipated that cavalry would play a large part.

Requisitioning of horses organised at the very start of the war.

Although Britain was becoming mechanised horses were still hugely important to support the impact of that technology (e.g. City transport, mail delivery)

At Paddington Station the GWR built a 4 storey set of stables where 500 horses were housed.



HORSES AT WORK-EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY



REQUISITIONING OF HORSES AT THE START OF THE WAR

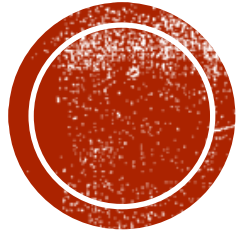
- War started on 4th August. Notices delivered almost immediately to farmers, carters etc. to produce their horses by 6th August at the latest.
- **Tough choice-present them for sale or have them compulsorily purchased anyway.**
- Ruthless process. Story of a trap being stopped in the road and the horse taken there and then.
- **Agents were given a black tin box with a government cheque book-authority to commandeer any horse they saw fit.**
- By the end of 5th August the Army had acquired 140,000 horses.
- **By December 1914 18,000 of them were already dead.**
- Began to look overseas to the USA, Canada-issues re transit, although very low casualties on board ship after a while.



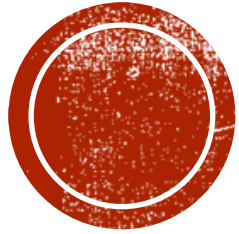
CAVALRY IN WORLD WAR ONE

- The role of the cavalry in the war has been affected by hindsight and misconception.
- **In fact the cavalry played key roles especially at the start and the end of the war.**
- Key moment during the Battle of the Marne-commander of the Royal Queen's lancers, Lieutenant David Campbell-heroic figure.
- **Haig genuinely believed that the only way to follow up any major breakthrough was with the cavalry.**
- Lack of cavalry prevented the Germans from following up on the initially successful Hindenburg offensive.
- **As war became entrenched the cavalry often ended up with less glamorous tasks, such as bringing out the dead after a battle, making roads and carrying ammunition and supplies.**
- Men, dismounted, also did their stint in the trenches.
- **There were still cavalry interventions –at The Somme at Longueval in 1916, and at Cambrai in 1917 in the aftermath of the first mass tank attack. In 1918 the cavalry played a key part in turning back the German March offensive in 1918 at Moreuil Ridge.**





The cavalry in World War One



Cavalry images

HORSES-ARTILLERY AND TRANSPORT

- Gun horses had the most difficult task-had to carry equipment and haul an artillery piece weighing a ton and a half.
- **Few records remain of their service but fortunately some wonderful paintings have survived which give testimony to their endeavours.**
- Almost none of the Officer cadets could ride-At St.John's Woods barracks in London they would practise jumps until they no longer fell off!
- During the retreat of March 1918 horses played a key part in recovering guns from almost under the noses of the Germans.
- **In the Ypres salient 700 horses were lost in two weeks from incessant German bombardment.**
- A lot of injuries to horses were avoidable-spikes and nails for example.





HORSES- TRANSPORT



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL bbc.co.uk. The BBC logo is in the top left, followed by a 'Sign In' button and navigation links for News, Sport, Weather, iPlayer, TV, Radio, and More. A search bar is on the right. The main content area features a large background image of horses pulling a carriage in a muddy field. Overlaid on this is a dark teal banner with the text 'iWonder' and 'Who were the real war horses of WW1?'. Below the banner is a horizontal menu with seven items: '1. The ultimate war machine', '2. The role of horses', '3. Horses in action', '4. The backbone of WW1', '5. What happened to the horses when war ended?', '6. What role do horses play in the army today?', and '7. Where next?'. Below the menu is a play button icon and a link to 'Transcript (PDF 293 Kb)'. At the bottom, a section titled '1' with a circular icon contains the text 'The ultimate war machine' and a small video player thumbnail.

bbc.co.uk

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iWonder

Who were the real war horses of WW1?

- 1. The ultimate war machine
- 2. The role of horses
- 3. Horses in action
- 4. The backbone of WW1
- 5. What happened to the horses when war ended?
- 6. What role do horses play in the army today?
- 7. Where next?

Transcript (PDF 293 Kb)

1

The ultimate war machine

BBC IWONDER

More information can be found in this fantastic article by the BBC.

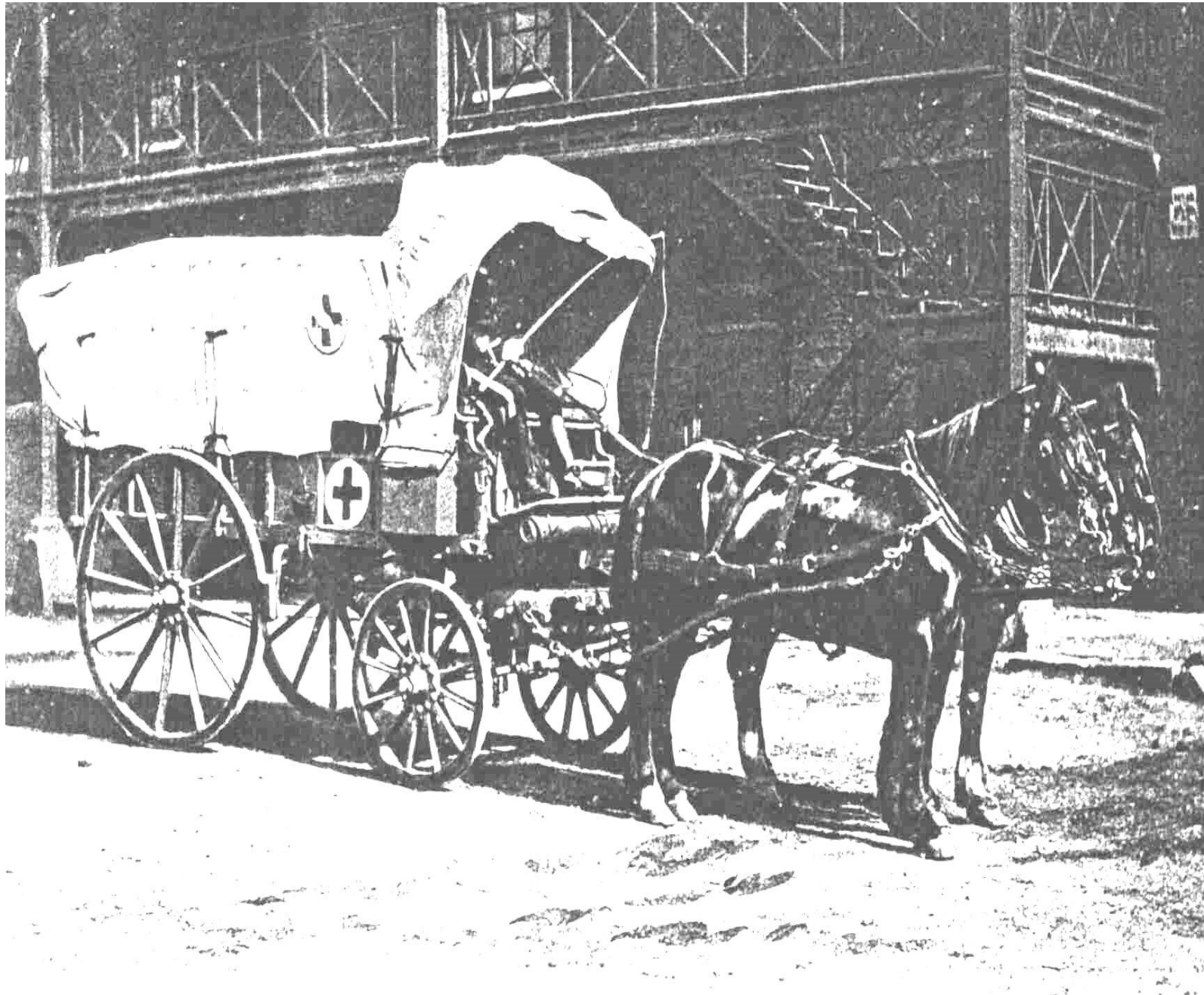
Who were the real war horses of WW1?
– BBC, iWonder





TRANSPORT





TRANSPORT



END OF THE WAR

- There was a concern about what to do at the end of the war with dead or “unservicable” horses.
- **Horseflesh found a ready market in Paris-some sent to Britain but it never really caught on!**
- By 1918 the Army had 800,000 animals on its books in all theatres of war. 200,000 were sold on the spot in Flanders and France.
- **500,000 horses and mules had died in the various theatres of war.**
- The war had accelerated the decline of horsepower in general and there was also a post war depression.
- **Shire stallions worth £1000 at the start of the war went for £200 by 1923.**



BROOKE HOSPITALS

- Dorothy Brooke was the wife of cavalry man General Geoffrey Brooke who served in Egypt in 1930.
- **They were both horse lovers and saw and heard of the lamentable condition of former British war horses in the Middle East.**
- Dorothy bought some of the frail horses and set up the Old War Horse memorial hospital in Cairo.
- **In four years she had gathered in 5000 veteran horses. She treated them and helped educate their owners.**
- The Brookes were then posted to India where more hospitals were created.
- **Today it is a huge horse charity with hospitals and programmes all round the world.**





BROOKE HOSPITALS



THE FREE SPIRIT PROJECT

- <http://www.freespiritmemorial.co.uk/>
- **Horse Memorial**
- “A site has been chosen at the UK’s year round centre for Remembrance; a spiritually uplifting place which honours the fallen, recognises service and sacrifice and fosters pride in our country.”
- This accolade to the horse is the only memorial the NMA granted to an animal in its own right.

