

Purple Poppy

Throughout the history of human conflicts, animals have been the hidden victims of war. They have been used as messengers, for detection, scouting and rescue, as beasts of burden and on the frontline. Meanwhile, in UK laboratories, thousands of animals suffer and die every year in invasive warfare experiments.

Messengers

Strong navigation instincts and incredible stamina have made dogs and pigeons popular as battlefield messengers. Despite being a small target, many thousands of messenger pigeons have been killed. For example, of nearly 17,000 pigeons used in World War I, fewer than one in eight returned. And little loyalty was shown to them – in 1914, the head of the Belgian Pigeon Service burnt 2,500 pigeons alive, rather than risk them being captured and used by the enemy. Dogs were not afforded much better treatment. Training was terrifying, and many who did not make the grade were euthanased or shot 'for being useless'. In Vietnam, 5,000 dogs served with the American troops but only 150 returned home. The rest were abandoned to fend for themselves when the troops moved on.



Detection

Dogs have also been used as scouts, and to detect mines and booby traps. More recently, sea lions have been trained by the United States Navy to detect underwater intruders and attach clamps to their legs, and dolphins have been trained to search for mines on the seabed. Aside from the dangers they are exposed to when deployed, the animals are kept in captivity, where they cannot swim, play or hunt naturally.

Collateral Damage

Animals suffer as a result of conflict even if they are not actively used in the war effort. Animals living in conflict zones often become displaced by warfare, abandoned by farmers or, in the case of pets, by their families, and left to fend for themselves. At

Baghdad Zoo, big cats were left to starve in their cages while other animals were 'looted'. Soldiers often pick up animals as 'mascots', and then dump them again when they move on.

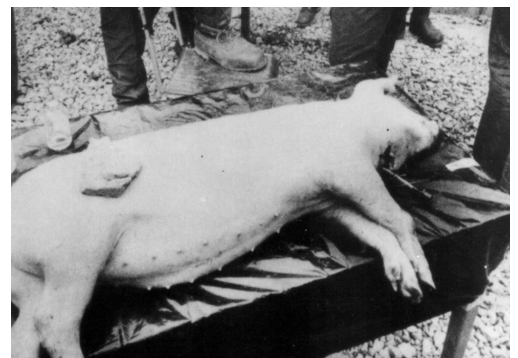


Research

The number of animals used in weapons research in British laboratories quadrupled between 1997 and 2007, from 4,500 to more than 18,000. Animals are poisoned by chemical warfare agents, subjected to blast injuries, dosed with sensory irritants, killed by bacterial toxins and deliberately wounded. Most of this research takes place at the Ministry of Defence (MoD) establishment at Porton Down in Wiltshire. Guinea pigs, rabbits, dogs, mice, rats, sheep, pigs, goats and monkeys are among the species used.

Pig Experiments

Pigs are a particularly popular choice for weapons research. In one experiment at Porton Down, ten female Large White pigs were used to test the effects of Phosgene, a highly toxic gas. The animals were anaesthetised and exposed to the gas for varying lengths of time. Most died from severe lung damage. Those who survived were euthanased at the end of the experiment.



Pigs continue to be used in explosives tests. For instance, in a recent experiment 18 live pigs were anaesthetised and placed a few feet away from explosives, which were then detonated. The pigs were left to bleed until almost a third of their blood



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had drained from their bodies, to see how long they could then be kept alive. Before the tests, scientists inserted tubes into the blood vessels and bladders of the pigs, and removed their spleens. A wire was placed in a major blood vessel to ensure it was lacerated during the explosion.

Alverstoke Goats

In addition to the laboratories at Porton Down, a facility at Alverstoke, Hampshire used goats to conduct research into decompression sickness, subjecting them to extreme pressures in sealed chambers. Between 2000 and 2007, 406 'procedures' were carried out. The tests were defended on the grounds that they provide advice for submariners on escape procedures from crippled underwater vessels. Yet the French Navy confirmed that they had stopped using animals in their hyperbaric experiments, instead relying on computer models and safe and painless human trials. A sustained campaign against the experiments put pressure on the MoD to hold an internal review, and the tests – which had gone on for 50 years – were at last halted in 2008.

Gulf War Syndrome

Many experiments at Porton Down took place following the two Gulf Wars when returning veterans reported a range of debilitating and life-threatening diseases. These included tumours, brain and respiratory disorders and birth defects in their children. Marmoset and rhesus macaque monkeys were among the species widely used in an attempt to test whether the combination of vaccine jabs and anti-nerve damage tablets given to troops resulted in Gulf War syndrome. A senior government scientist indicated that the monkey tests did not suggest any problem for the troops. In sharp contrast, US scientists found a clear link between exposure to toxic chemicals and Gulf War syndrome. This difference highlights the 'alibi' role of animal tests. They can prove or disprove virtually anything to suit the aim of the experimenters.



Ethics

Warfare experiments are undeniably cruel. For example, scientists at Porton Down described how monkeys dosed with the nerve agent soman became prostrate with violent convulsions and then lost consciousness. At higher doses, the animals made attempts to crawl about the cage, and died an hour later. When used on guinea pigs, the same substance made them salivate, urinate, defecate and have convulsions, before dying of respiratory failure.

Aside from the suffering, the many differences between humans and animals, and between different species of animals, mean that the results from animal experiments cannot be reliably extrapolated to humans. For example, in the hunt for an antidote to soman, substances that proved effective in rats and mice failed when tested on guinea pigs and monkeys. As well as being unethical, therefore, animal research is also unreliable.



Alternatives

There are plenty of alternatives to animal testing available, and much information has been gleaned from actual military conflicts, ranging from World War II to more recent conflicts such as the war in Afghanistan. Sadly, there are all too many human victims around the world who could be studied to give scientifically useful, species-specific information.

Conclusion

Animals do not start wars, and they do not create weaponry. And yet, because humans do, they are made to suffer in war zones and laboratories across the world. At the very least, these hidden victims of war deserve to be remembered and respected. Animal Aid continues to campaign against the use of animals in warfare experiments.

What you can do:

- Order a purple poppy to commemorate animal victims of war
- Order a purple poppy enamel badge
- Order a poppy sales pack
- Sign our petition urging the government to ban warfare experiments on animals
- Order copies of our purple poppy leaflet to distribute
- Request a free copy of our booklet 'Animals: the hidden victims of war'
- Write to your MP to protest the use of animals in warfare experiments
- Write to your local paper about the fate of animals caught up in human conflicts
- Send for Animal Aid's free poppy action pack

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