The Guardian of the Trenches

In 1916, the second year of the First World War, a tale of friendship and courage unfolded amidst the chaos and carnage. It was the story of two soldiers - a private named Stan and a dog named Beau, or Oscar, depending on who you asked. Oscar was a scruffy mutt, his coat a mix of browns and blacks, and his ears large, pointy, and fluffy. His cozy home had been destroyed, and his owners were now gone. One cold, rainy night, he wandered into a British trench, seeking friendship and shelter from the elements. Thankfully, the weary and homesick soldiers welcomed him with open arms. They named him Oscar, he became a beloved member of their unit. After some formal training, Oscar proved to be an excellent mercy dog. His warm fur, loyalty, keen sense of smell made him perfectly suited for a life on the battlefield.

Stan was a young private, just 19 years old, from the small English village of Tewksbury in Gloucestershire. He had heeded Kitchener's call and joined with four pals when the war began in August 1914. He and his pals had mistakenly believed they would be home by Christmas 1914. All his friends were gone, and Stan felt lucky to have survived this this long but believed his luck was about to run out. It was now October 1916, and Stan was about to be sent over the top as part of an ongoing assault on the German lines. He was filled with a mix of fear and determination. He was also driven by a sense of duty and a desire to protect his country and believed it was necessary to defeat the enemy and bring peace back to Europe.

As he charged towards the German lines, Stan could hear the deafening roar of gunfire and the screams of the wounded. Fellow soldiers and his friends were falling around him like cut grass. He surged forward in blind fear, acutely aware that his next breath could be his final one. Then it happened... a blast from a shell knocked him off his feet into a waterlogged shell hole. The explosion had been so close that he could taste the cordite in his mouth. A wooden beam had pinned him down, his leg badly injured. He lay there, unable to move, and listened as the enemy firing subsided as the assault was repelled. He soon became cold and could feel the life leaving his body—as darkness fell, hopeless, he let out a final, desperate yell for help.

Hours after the assault, under the cover of darkness, Oscar had been sent out into No Man's Land. He moved quickly and silently, ignoring the lifeless bodies of soldiers, nose to the ground and ears pricked high. Then he heard a cry for help up ahead. His nose, attuned to the smell of blood, guided him the rest of the way there. He discovered Stan and licked his hand, offering comfort and reassurance. Oscar carried water and morphine in his saddlebag, which gave Stan renewed hope and the comforting presence of the dog a reason to hold on. Then, Oscar carefully tore off a small piece of Stan's already tattered uniform, intending to take it back to the trench as a sign that he had found his friend. This was part of his training, a way to provide proof of his mission's success.

Oscar stayed a few minutes before leaving Stan and the relative protection of the shell hole. On the way back to the trench system, an enemy flare lit up the sky. Oscar did as he had been trained and lay on the ground, frozen until the light faded. Once again, in the darkness, he quickly sprang to his feet and returned to the trenches to alert medics before leading them back into No Man's Land to where Stan lay waiting.

Stan's injuries were severe, and after being rescued from No Man's Land, he spent several weeks in the hospital. It was obvious that he could no longer fight, and it was necessary to send him back to England to continue his recovery. His company commander, recognising the bond between Stan and Oscar, allowed the dog to leave with him. As they boarded the train, a wave of relief washed over Stan. He knew that he would be returning to his home and family, and the presence of his loyal companion made him feel whole again.

Stan was greeted by a hero's welcome on his return to England. His bravery and the story of his friendship with Oscar had spread throughout the village. The people of Tewksbury celebrated his homecoming, and Oscar became a local celebrity. They lived out their days together, their bond a testament to the enduring power of friendship and loyalty, even in the most challenging circumstances.

MERCY DOGS OF WORLD WAR 1

Mercy Dogs - A Snapshot

Mercy dogs, or casualty dogs, were specifically trained to aid the wounded and dying on the battlefield. Originating with the Germanic armies in the 19th century, these medical dogs, or *sanitätshunde*, became widespread during World War I.

Trained to locate and prioritise the wounded, mercy dogs were equipped with first aid supplies and rations. Instead of alerting the enemy, the dogs were trained to silently approach the wounded, allowing soldiers to access the medical supplies.

These dogs were also skilled in triage, able to identify those most in need of aid and those who were beyond help. In the latter case, the dog would often stay with the mortally wounded soldier, offering companionship in their final moments.

Rank - Most Important Roles of Mercy Dogs ?

Four Legged Medics

Mercy dogs could carry a variety of medical supplies, including bandages, gauze, splints, and painkillers such as morphine. These supplies could be essential in keeping solider alive long enough until human medics arrived.

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Food + Water

Dogs were also tasked with carrying food such as biscuits and water to soldiers who were unable to move due to injury or who were pinned down under enemy fire.

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Search + Rescue

Dogs were able to locate even hard to find soldiers and offer them aid + comfort - they were trained to take an item of uniform such as a cap back to the trenches and return with medics.

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Aid + Comfort

Mercy dogs often played a comforting role with dying soldiers. They could also serve as a reminder of life and hope, even in the face of death. Dogs were known to stay with dying soldiers until the end, providing a sense of peace and comfort in their final moments.

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More About The Roles of Dogs

Other Roles of Dogs During WW1			Vocabulary
Ratters		Rats were a significant problem in the trenches, spreading diseases and caused damage to food supplies. Dogs were used to hunt and kill rats.	**Match similar words.** Sentry Wounded Medic Doctor Guard Find Pals Injured Morphine Locate Painkiller Ration Friends
Sentry		Dogs were used to alert and guard against enemy patrols and snipers. Their keen senses and alertness made them ideal for this task.	
Mascots		Dogs often served as mascots for military units, providing morale and companionship to the soldiers.	
Messengers		Dogs were trained to carry messages across dangerous terrain, often under enemy fire. They were particularly valuable in trench warfare.	
Transport Equipment		Dogs were incredibly useful for pulling heavy equipment, such as artillery and supply wagons.	
Anti - Gas		Dogs were trained to detect the presence of poison gas, alerting soldiers to the danger and allowing them to put on their masks in good time.	

Comment on significance > using the significance chart to help develop explanation

The most significant role of mercy dogs?	Research - The role of one other animal used in WW1
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""They lead us to bodies we think have no life in them, but when we bring them back to the doctors…always find a spark. It is purely a matter of their instinct is far more effective than man's reasoning powers." **British Surgeon.**

T / F

"Shells were screaming overhead, and army motor lorries passed to and fro. The dogs are trained to the constant sound of the guns and very soon learn to take no heed of them." **Edwin Richardson.**

The British + Germans used mercy dogs **True - - False**	Dogs barked loudly when finding a soldier **True - - False**	Mercy dogs ignored dead soldiers **True - - False**	They were also called green cross dogs **True - - False**	Dogs were trained to inject morphine **True - - False**	Mercy dogs ignored enemy soldiers. **True - - False**	Mercy dogs ignored dying soldiers **True - - False**	They were also called ambulance dogs **True - - False**	Dogs described as 'messengers of hope' **True - - False**	Only 700 mercy dogs died in WW1 **True - - False**


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