

**NORTHERN TASMANIAN LIGHT HORSE TROOP
SERVICE TO COMMEMORATE
WAR ANIMAL REMEMBRANCE DAY 2023
ADDRESS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE BARBARA BAKER AC,
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
CAMPBELL TOWN WAR MEMORIAL PRECINCT,
SUNDAY 26 FEBRUARY 2023**

Good morning everyone. I welcome you all to this service to commemorate War Animal Remembrance Day 2023. May I thank the Northern Tasmanian Light Horse Troop for their kind invitation to attend and to deliver this address.

I begin by paying my respects to the traditional and original owners of this land: the palawa people. I acknowledge the contemporary Tasmanian Aboriginal community and recognise their enduring culture and continued connection to land, sea, and waters. I recognise a history of truth, which acknowledges the impacts of colonisation upon our First People. I commit to a future that listens to and respects Aboriginal stories, culture and history.

The Australian War Animal Memorial Organisation was set up to establish recognition for animals that died in conflicts. There were over 9 million losses alone in WWI. Each year, we commemorate National War Animal Remembrance Day on 24 February. We continue to make people aware of their deeds and sacrifices by placing memorials at important sites. Thus far, 40 Australian and International monuments have been established.

We are all aware of the origins of the red poppy worn on Anzac Day as our 'Emblem of Remembrance'. In soldiers' folklore, the red of the poppy represents the blood of comrades on the ground.¹ The purple poppy, that we see worn by so many here today, was chosen as a symbol of remembrance by the Australian War Animal Memorial Organisation. The purple poppy is a reminder that animals have served, and continue to serve, our Nation.

Historically, dogs have been deployed in warfare since at least 600 BC.

¹ <https://www.army.gov.au/our-heritage/traditions/red-poppy>

In earlier days, dogs were used to break up enemy formations, charging into the ranks and tearing down into enemy soldiers. Dogs still serve providing additional shock and fear in attacks.

In addition, modern dogs and their handlers protect airfields, detect explosives and serve as support animals for soldiers who have been traumatised by their experiences.

Importantly, our Australian history records that many animals have provided significant service. Horses were the significant labour force of armies. In the First World War, camels also provided this support to our troops, especially in the deserts of Egypt and beyond.

In the Second World War, while trucks and other vehicles were available, horses were still used to transport heavy supplies and equipment.

Our Animals in War Memorial in Canberra connects those animals that served alongside Australians in all conflicts. The Memorial incorporates as its centrepiece a large bronze horse head, a remnant of the original Desert Mounted Corps memorial in Egypt, which was destroyed by rioters during the Suez Crisis, but reworked and unveiled in 1968. The horse head provides a tangible link to all animals and is a sensitive and symbolic memorial for all animals that have served in war.²

Pigeons too were used in war for communications between groups of soldiers. Pigeons were able to move quickly and generally safely. That is not to say that there were not significant losses. In the Second World War, pigeons were used in many theatres of battle when communication lines were cut. Radios were not always reliable, especially in mountainous areas, where they were completely unusable.

Even cats have been used in the role of ratcatchers on board vessels and on land.

² <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/ART9329#> accessed 17 Feb 23.

In almost every case, there was a particularly significant difference between the animals and their human handlers. With the exception of the Vietnam War, the majority of Australians who have served overseas have been volunteers.

As Brendan Nelson observed in his speech at the opening of the War Animals Memorial at Pozieres:

“The Australians who fought, suffered and died here were volunteers. The animals that served and supported them were not. Men could speak of what they endured. Their animals could not. Nerve shattering, pounding artillery, relentless gunfire, snipers, disease, mud, water and brutal weather, both man and animal endured. In all this they were bound in trust and the comfort one gave to the other.”³

Sadly, often dogs trained to attack humans were euthanized at the end of their service. More recently, it has been recognised that these dogs can safely reintegrate and enjoy their twilight years in retirements.⁴

So, thank you all for attending this commemoration service for National War Animal Remembrance Day. As we reflect on the service and sacrifice of our soldiers, let us also remember their companions, who served alongside them and were subjected to the same experiences.

Lest we forget.

³ <https://www.awm.gov.au/commemoration/speeches/australian-animals-in-war-memorial> accessed 17 Feb 23

⁴ Goodavage, Maria, 2012. ‘Soldier Dogs’ Penguin pp 248-9