



## Hooves of Valor: The Equine Heroes Who Earned the Dickin Medal

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*“They served without question, carried supplies through fire, and brought wounded soldiers home. For their courage, they earned the animals’ Victoria Cross—the Dickin Medal.”*

The history of warfare is often told through generals and strategies, but in the mud, smoke, and chaos, four-legged allies played roles no less heroic. Among them, a select few horses and mules have been awarded the Dickin Medal, the highest honor for animal bravery in conflict. Established in 1943 by the People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA), the medal is often called the “animals’ Victoria Cross.” While dogs and pigeons dominate the roll of honorees, a handful of equine recipients stand as enduring symbols of loyalty, endurance, and courage.

### The Medal of Bravery

The Dickin Medal was created by Maria Dickin, founder of the PDSA, to recognize animals who displayed “conspicuous gallantry or devotion to duty while serving with the armed forces or civil defense.” The medal is bronze, inscribed with the words “For Gallantry” and “We Also Serve.”

Though awarded mostly during World War II, it remains active today, and the recipients’ stories are testaments to the extraordinary bond between animals and humans in times of peril.

### The Equine Roll of Honor

Only three equines—two horses and one mule—have received the Dickin Medal. Each represents a different theater of war, yet all share one thing: their bravery went far beyond instinct.

#### ***Olga: The Courageous Police Horse***

**Awarded: 1963**

In 1963, the streets of London erupted into chaos. During violent riots in Ladbroke Grove, mounted police officers faced a barrage of missiles, bricks, and even firebombs. In the midst of the turmoil, one horse stood out—Olga, a striking chestnut mare of the Metropolitan Police.

Olga carried her rider through the mobs without faltering, despite injuries and relentless assault. Eyewitnesses reported her steady composure as she helped clear paths for officers and civilians alike. Her actions were not just brave; they were instrumental in restoring order and preventing further harm.

When the PDSA presented her with the Dickin Medal, it was a rare recognition of a peacetime service animal. Olga became a symbol of the bravery and steadiness demanded of police horses, whose duties often resemble combat zones in miniature.

#### ***Regal: The Stalwart Military Mule***

**Awarded: 1946**

While horses are celebrated for speed and elegance, it was a humble mule named Regal who carried the weight of survival during World War II. Serving in Burma with the British Army, Regal hauled essential supplies—ammunition, food, and medical kits—across treacherous jungle terrain where vehicles could not pass.

One mission, in particular, etched his name into the record. Amid enemy fire and collapsing trails, Regal delivered his load to frontline troops, enabling them to hold their position. Mules, known for their resilience and sure-footedness, were often unsung heroes of the war, yet Regal’s determination under fire earned him the Dickin Medal in 1946.

His award acknowledged not only his individual efforts but also the thousands of equids whose labor sustained armies across inhospitable landscapes.

#### ***Warrior: “The Horse the Germans Could Not Kill”***

**Awarded: 2014 (posthumously)**

Perhaps the most famous equine Dickin Medal recipient is Warrior, the charger of General Jack Seely during World War I. Born in 1908 on the Isle of Wight, Warrior accompanied Seely to the Western Front in 1914. For four years, through some of the most brutal battles—Ypres, the Somme, Passchendaele, and Cambrai—he carried his rider, rallied troops, and survived near-misses that killed countless other horses.

Nicknamed “the horse the Germans could not kill,” Warrior became a legend among soldiers. His survival alone was remarkable, but his courage in charging into machine-gun fire and artillery bombardments made him iconic.

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Though Warrior died in 1941 at the age of 33, his story lived on through Seely’s memoir, *My Horse Warrior*. In 2014, during the centenary of World War I, the PDSA awarded Warrior the Dickin Medal posthumously, recognizing him as a symbol of the millions of horses who served. The presentation, attended by Seely’s descendants, was a poignant reminder that his valor transcended his own lifetime.

### Sidebar: The Dickin Medal by the Numbers

- **Total Medals Awarded:** Over 70
- **Species Recognized:** Dogs, pigeons, horses, and one cat
- **Equine Recipients:** 3 (Olga, Regal, Warrior)
- **Motto:** “We Also Serve”

### Why Equine Bravery Matters

Horses and mules have been at the heart of human conflict for centuries. They carried knights into medieval battles, hauled artillery in the Napoleonic wars, and transported supplies across the jungles of Asia and the deserts of North Africa. Yet by the 20th century, their role was both diminished and heightened—diminished by mechanization, but heightened in the ferocity of the situations where they were still deployed.

The Dickin Medal’s equine honorees illustrate three aspects of equine service:

- **The battlefield charger (Warrior)**
- **The tireless pack animal (Regal)**
- **The modern-day protector in civil duty (Olga)**

Together, they show how equids adapted from cavalry charges to riot control, carrying their courage across eras.

*“The Dickin Medal reminds us that animals were not just bystanders in war. They were comrades.”*

### The Silent Majority: Horses Without Medals

While Warrior, Regal, and Olga stand out, they represent only a fraction of equids who served. During World War I alone, over eight million horses and mules were deployed; millions perished in battle or from disease and exhaustion. Few were recognized individually, but their collective sacrifice shaped outcomes.

The Dickin Medal cannot possibly capture all their contributions, but in honoring a handful, it honors them all. Each medal tells a story that stretches across hoofbeats and history.

### Cultural Impact

Stories of equine medal winners continue to inspire literature, film, and commemoration ceremonies. Warrior’s posthumous medal in 2014 coincided with a surge in public remembrance of animals in war, including the Animals in War Memorial in London. Police horses like Olga remain central in discussions of urban policing and animal bravery, while mules like Regal remind us of the practical backbone of military campaigns.

Even in an age of drones and mechanized warfare, these stories endure because they touch on something universal: loyalty under fire, and courage that asks for no recognition.

Though the use of horses in combat is largely consigned to history, equids remain in service across the world: in ceremonial units, in policing, and in remote regions where vehicles cannot travel. Whether or not future Dickin Medals will be awarded to horses is uncertain, but the legacy of Olga, Regal, and Warrior ensures their place in the broader narrative of animal heroism.

As animal-welfare groups and historians continue to document their stories, the equine recipients of the Dickin Medal stand as ambassadors for all service animals, reminding us that heroism knows no species.

From the jungles of Burma to the fields of France to the streets of London, the hoofbeats of equine heroes echo through history. Olga, Regal, and Warrior may have been only three individuals among millions, but their courage shines brightly enough to honor them all.

The Dickin Medal, small and bronze, carries immense weight. Around the necks of horses and mules, it represents not only acts of bravery but also a timeless partnership between humans and equines. In their stories, we find a reminder that war is never fought by humans alone—and that sometimes the bravest hearts beat within animals who cannot speak, yet still serve.

