

Dogs for War Service

Ewelme News, Feb-Mar 2021

Ewelme could have provided a World War II war dog. A bundle of documents belonging to the late Fred Greenway, the popular village shopkeeper/postmaster sheds light on this. Amongst them was a tattered official form in faded type acknowledging his request to loan his pet dog for war purposes! Fred was extremely patriotic, so he was possibly volunteering his black Labrador 'Marco' for Army training. Incredibly, a nationwide plea issued by the War Office in May 1941, elicited 7,000 such applications in a fortnight! The form is headed -

INSTRUCTIONS AND CONDITIONS FOR LOANING DOGS FOR WAR PUPROSES

It is much appreciated that you are prepared to loan your dog to further the war effort, for the duration of the present emergency. The following conditions are forwarded for your information and instructions. The dog must be railed not less than 10 days after receipt of this letter. Please fill in entraining station on the warrant'.

The form goes on to state that a collar, lead, muzzle, and travel warrant were enclosed - the collar to be fitted tightly, and the dog's name written in block capitals on the attached labels. On arrival at the British Army training school the dog would be subjected to a veterinary and preliminary training test. Information on previous illness[es] or anything pertaining to veterinary attendance had to be reported by letter. Failure in either test would result in the return of the dog. However, if the dog fulfilled all the necessary requirements it would be enlisted for the duration, or as long as his services were needed. Although every care would be given, should he become a casualty, the owner would be informed, but no responsibility would be accepted for loss, or accident during the pursuance of his service.

The form was signed by Veterinary Officer Captain *Denys Danby*, i/c R.A.V.C.
for Major Commandant, War Dogs Training School, Northaw, Nr Potters Bar, Middlesex



The many village dog owners today will be horrified to imagine that 1941 scene; as in common with the confused and frightened child evacuees, loyal family pets would also be labelled and sent off from a train station! Whereas the owners may have been comforted by a sense of patriotic duty, the bewildered dogs would not have understood why they were being sent far away from their familiar surroundings! Cynthia Winfield thinks 'Marco' left the village for a short while, but not for long. Whether he went by train to Potters Bar and was returned as an Army reject is an ongoing mystery.

Clare Campbell, an authority on the subject, has written a book entitled - *'Dogs of Courage: When Britain's Pets Went to War'*. The dogs were trained to carry messages, to sniff out mines and casualties trapped in rubble, and Para dogs were trained to parachute with airborne regiments – as with the 13th Parachute Battalion on D Day. In a 1942 briefing, dog handlers were instructed *'Do not make friends or pet the dogs.'* An order surely impossible to obey!

Ewelme Village Archive