

Simon, of HMS Amethyst (2003+)

awarded the Dickin Medal for gallantry under enemy fire

(page checked February 2026)

At the end of this account is a note of other recipients of the Dickin Medal with links to more information; and also links to further articles.
The Quest for Simon, recounts my experiences while researching Simon's story, with more photos and *Amethyst*-related material;
and there is a further page containing a selection of tributes sent to Simon.

Cats on ships

For a long time it was thought that cats first started to become domesticated some 5,000 to 8,000 years ago, when the Egyptians began storing grain and the rats and mice moved in for a feast. However, in 2004 an archaeological dig at a Neolithic village in the south of the Mediterranean island of Cyprus unearthed the skeleton of a cat alongside that of a human who had been carefully interred. This makes it the earliest known domestic cat, dated to about 9,500 years ago.



Later the Egyptians took cats on Nile boats to catch birds in the thickets along the riverbanks — the first waterborne cats! (*right*) Before long, traders from other nations were taking felines on their ships to help control rodents, and that's how cats started to colonise the world.

As time went by they reached virtually all parts of the world by ship, and over the centuries their offspring developed into different breeds according to the climate in which they found themselves and the mates they took.

Thus the history of ships' cats goes back a very long time indeed. They've been valued not only for their pest-control attributes and for their remarkable ability to adapt to new surroundings, but for the companionship and sense of home and security they gave to sailors away from home for long periods, particularly in times of war. No doubt there are still plenty of ships' cats elsewhere: but, sadly, since 1975 they (and all other animals) have been banned from British Royal Navy vessels on hygiene grounds. I'd have thought having a cat on board was a great deal more hygienic than having rats, but it's been decreed otherwise.



Oscar's tale

All kinds of tales, superstitions and anecdotes exist about ships' cats and their exploits. Oscar, for example (*left*), is said to have been the ship's cat on the *Bismarck*. When the vessel was torpedoed and sunk, he was rescued from the sea, so the tale goes, by HMS *Cossack* and renamed Unsinkable Sam**. After some months, *Cossack* too was sunk. That time he was rescued by HMS *Ark Royal*, but soon afterwards she also was torpedoed. Sam was rescued a third time, but the destroyer HMS *Legion* was taking no chances, and Sam was retired to a home on dry land in England.

[** **Note:** There are a number of valid reasons to doubt the authenticity of the story of Oscar's adventures. For more details see the notes beneath our *Bismarck* entry at [this page](#) (Featuring / War / Sea) – where there is also information on many other other ships' cats.]

But there is no doubt that the most celebrated ship's cat of modern times was **Simon**, of HMS *Amethyst*.

Simon gets a job

Simon was born probably in the latter part of 1947, on Stonecutters Island, Hong Kong, a busy naval dockyard at the time. (A resident of Stonecutters Island later tried to research Simon's parentage, but without success.) A few months later, early in 1948, the Royal Navy's HMS *Amethyst* called there for supplies; she was based in Hong Kong, but had been on operations in Malaya. One day Simon, looking in need of a good meal, was found in the dockyard by Ordinary Seaman George Hickinbottom from the ship. George was a 17-year-old at the time and had joined the Navy in the previous November. The cats of Stonecutters Island were well-known for becoming ships' cats, and George decided to smuggle the waif aboard. To avoid the man on watch, he concealed the cat under his tunic and took him to his tiny space — hardly a cabin — which served as his accommodation. George had been appointed 'captain of the fo'c'sle', meaning that he had to ensure everything there was kept shipshape and in good order. As such, he was quartered close to the captain's cabin.

[Note: some accounts tell of Simon going aboard the ship on the captain's shoulder; however, the above is a first-hand telling by George Hickinbottom of what happened.]

Of course, it wasn't long before the captain and Simon met! It so happened that Lt Cdr [Ian Griffiths](#) liked cats; his family had them at home, and he had also had one during a previous command. And there was a job vacancy for a cat on *Amethyst*, where rats were always a threat to food supplies and also posed a health risk, especially in the hot and humid weather at the time. However (said George), 'He warned me that if he saw any muck on board, he'd have me up on a charge.' The crew made sure that didn't happen, and any 'muck' was hastily dispatched overboard.

Captain's mate

Simon wasted no time in taking up his duties and was soon investigating all the nooks and crannies from top to bottom of the ship. He frequently laid his dead trophies at the captain's feet; sometimes even on his bunk! The captain had only to whistle for Simon to appear from wherever he was, and he would accompany Griffiths on his evening rounds. When off duty, Simon — actually usually called 'Blackie' by the crew — shared his time between George's room and the captain's cabin, where he particularly liked to curl up in Griffiths' upturned gold-braided cap when it wasn't being worn.



As one would expect from his upbringing, he was an independent soul, and no one had particular responsibility for feeding him; but he soon made friends, gradually became part of the crew and didn't go short. One of his party tricks was fishing ice cubes out of a jug of water with his paw; he became very adept at this. He was shamelessly spoilt by the men, who adored him, and seemed all set for a very pleasant life on board. But in December Ian Griffiths was given a new command, and felt it wouldn't be right to take the cat, by then so much at home on *Amethyst*.

Captain Bernard Skinner took over and, as luck would have it, was a cat-lover too. Simon kept all his privileges and was

given time to get used to his new master; although he wouldn't follow Skinner around or come to his whistle, as he had for Griffiths. Then, in April 1949, *Amethyst* received orders to steam up the Yangtze river from Shanghai to Nanking to relieve HMS *Consort*, which was guarding the British Embassy in case the Communists captured the town and personnel had to be evacuated.

The attack

In the event, *Amethyst* didn't get much further than 100 miles or so upriver before being shelled by Communist shore batteries, even though Britain had not taken sides in their war with the Nationalists, and the ship was displaying huge Union Jacks and flying the White Ensign.

The first shots missed. But an hour later another battery opened up, hitting the wheelhouse and the bridge, and causing *Amethyst* to run aground on a mudbank. Further shots were fired and caused still more damage.

The situation was very serious. Twenty-five of the crew were dead or dying, including the captain and the MO, and many others were injured. Bernard Skinner died while being evacuated, and was later buried at sea by HMS *Consort*. Simon is thought to have been asleep in the captain's cabin when a shell landed very close by and blasted a fifteen-foot hole in the bulkhead. Although obviously he bolted, he can't have been fast enough, and pieces of shrapnel caught him in the leg and back; he would have been dazed and thrown to the deck. He must have crawled into a corner of a gangway, amongst the debris, and passed out.



Meanwhile *Consort* had attempted to come to assist, but had herself come under heavy fire, suffered casualties, and been obliged to retreat. Eventually First Lieutenant Weston, now in command of *Amethyst* in spite of a severe injury himself, managed to get the ship refloated and it was moved a couple of miles upriver, away from the main Communist guns. The next day other ships, *London* and *Black Swan*, came upriver to help, but were also forced to withdraw. Weston sought the friendly Nationalists' help with the wounded, and eventually all were evacuated or treated. A Sunderland flying boat had landed on the river and dropped off an RAF medical officer, before also coming under fire and having to take off in a hurry.

Simon's ordeal

Clearly the ship's cat was not a priority in these circumstances, and how long Simon remained stunned and wounded isn't clear. But eventually he appeared on deck, probably driven by hunger and thirst, and P/O George Griffiths found him there. His whiskers and eyebrows had been singed off and there was a lot of dried blood on his back and legs; he was very weak, frightened and badly dehydrated. George Griffiths carefully picked him up, gave him a little water and then took him to the surgery. As the wounded men had all been evacuated or treated, the medical officer was able to give his attention to Simon. He had bad facial burns, shrapnel wounds in four places, and his heart was weak; but at least no bones were broken. He was cleaned and stitched, but was not really expected to last the night. Simon, however, had other ideas!

Lieutenant Commander John Kerans, who had travelled overland from Nanking with medical supplies and charts, now had charge of *Amethyst*. He wasn't a cat fan and made it clear he wouldn't share his quarters with one. So when Simon was starting to take an interest in life again, P/O Griffiths made him a cosy bed in the corner of the petty officers' mess, and there he rested for some days. His wounds began to heal, and his hearing fortunately seemed to be unaffected by the shell blast. Then the cat's natural curiosity prevailed and he began, rather slowly and painfully, to get up and look for his master. His



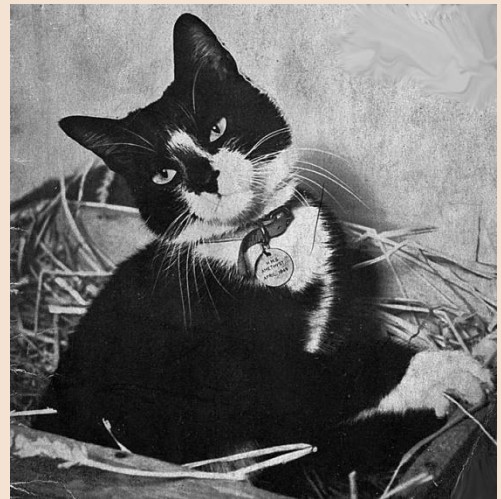
sortie coincided with the funeral service and commitment to the water of the bodies of those who had died. He sat quietly and watched: then went to the captain's cabin to curl up in his cap, as he had been used to doing. The captain evicted him unceremoniously.

Negotiations with the Communists for the ship's release dragged on unprofitably, because the Chinese wanted an admission that the *Amethyst* had fired first, which was continually refused as it was patently untrue. Life on board became hot, humid and boring. Simon was recovering, but was certainly not looking his best.

Return to duty

However, he was back on rat-catching duties, needed more than ever. In his absence rats had started to seriously affect the food supplies, and had even begun to invade the living quarters. The shelling and commotion had stirred them up and caused them to spread from their regular haunts. Not serious at first, the situation became more so as they multiplied. Stores were running low and needed to be protected.

Simon caught at least one rat a day, often more, which in itself was excellent for the crew's morale; but he found another role, too. Several of the younger seamen lay unwell in the sick bay, shocked and traumatised from their experiences under fire, and the medical officer thought Simon's presence might help them. He encouraged the cat to sit on their bunks, where he would contentedly knead his paws and purr. His injuries obviously helped the boys to relate to him and they started to welcome his visits, which helped them to get over their own traumas.



One day, Simon seems to have decided it was time to win over Lt Cdr Kerans. So, as is the way of cats, he presented him with a dead rat. Uncertain what to do, the captain stroked him — and threw the rat overboard when Simon wasn't looking. But it was a start. When Kerans came down with a virus and was confined to bed for a few days, Simon saw his chance and jumped up on the bunk. This time he was allowed to stay, and indeed to sleep where he wished from then on.

'Mao Tse Tung'

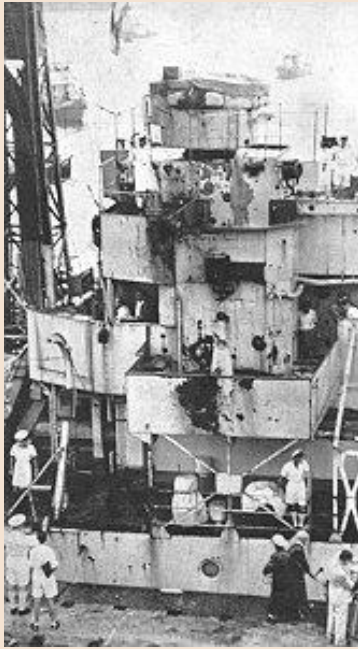


There was a particularly large, bold and vicious rat that, together with his band of followers, was causing havoc with the supplies; the crew had named him 'Mao Tse-tung'. Many attempts were made to trap him, as it was felt that Simon, in his weakened state, wouldn't be able to cope with him: but he had evaded the traps. However, one day the animals came face to face: Simon sprang first and killed the rat outright. The delighted crew hailed him as a hero, and he was promoted to Able Seacat Simon — the feline equivalent of Able Seaman.

The days dragged on, more than two months after the original incident, with fierce heat and humidity, no relief in sight, and dwindling supplies of everything, including fuel. At times the boilers had to be shut down to conserve fuel, so there was no ventilation and no refrigeration. Even Simon started to

wilt, although he continued with his duties and his rounds, helping, with the ship's terrier dog Peggy, to keep up the crew's flagging spirits. Then there was a typhoon; Simon was kept shut up to avoid possibly losing him, and slept through it all in the captain's cabin. *Amethyst* survived again — but rations and fuel were becoming desperately scarce. Kerans decided he had to make a dash for it while it was still possible.

Escape!



So, on the night of 30 July 1949, *Amethyst* left under cover of darkness and, after a further series of adventures and more damage from Communist guns on shore, made it to the open sea, to be met by HMS *Concord*. The ordeal was over, after 101 days. King George VI sent his congratulations and ordered that the mainbrace be spliced. On 1 August a special presentation was made on deck, representing what the whole crew had been through. While both officers and men stood at attention, Simon was held by a boy seaman while a citation was read out by P/O George Griffiths, and Able Seacat Simon was awarded the *Amethyst* campaign ribbon.



As the ship sailed on to Hong Kong, news of the Yangtze Incident was spread by radio and newspapers, and the crew were hailed as heroes — as was Simon. It was a story welcomed by a country still trying to recover from the horrors of WW2. While the ship was being repaired in dock in Hong Kong, a message was received from the Armed Forces Mascot Club (part of the [PDSA](#)) suggesting that, subject to the captain's recommendation, Simon should be awarded the Dickin Medal, the animal award for gallantry, often referred to as the 'Animals' VC'. Lt Cdr Kerans lost no time in writing a citation and the medal was awarded by unanimous agreement. It was confirmed on 10 August 1949 and was the 54th award of the medal. Not only was Simon the first — and so far the only — cat to gain the medal, but it was also the first time a Royal Navy animal had received it.

A special collar in the colours of the medal ribbon was sent for Simon to wear, and he was due to be presented with the actual medal upon his return to the UK. There were plans to present him with a temporary, home-made medal while in Hong Kong — but he didn't think much of that idea and bolted! But both Simon and ship's dog Peggy were awarded *Amethyst* campaign ribbons at a presentation held at Hong Kong's China Fleet Club. Their friend P/O Griffiths (who was actually Peggy's owner) read the citations while a guard of honour stood at attention. Simon's citation can be read [here](#) or later in this article. [For crew and many other photos, including Peggy the dog and Simon, see also the [Maritime Quest](#) site]



Two newsreel clips of *Amethyst*'s arrival and welcome in Hong Kong can be seen at YouTube [here](#) and [here](#). They share some of the same footage, but the commentaries are different. The second mentions the ship's cat, although he isn't shown.]



Simon's fame spreads

When news of the award reached the media, Simon became a celebrity, as well as a hero. There were photo-calls aboard, newsreel film of him (see [Footnote 1](#) for links to video clips), and his pictures went around the world. However, he didn't seem keen on photographers and frequently vanished when they were around, only to reappear when they had left! Letters, poems, gifts of food, cat toys arrived by every post; a special 'cat officer' had to be appointed for a while and dealt with nearly 200 items that arrived. One day, though, maybe tired of all the fuss, Simon walked down the gangplank and went ashore in Hong Kong, something he had never before done since joining the ship. The captain, who by then had become a firm fan, was alarmed and sent the crew to search for him. They

failed to find him, but three hours later the cat strolled nonchalantly back on board.

When *Amethyst* finally sailed for England, there was more publicity at every port of call: Singapore, Penang, Colombo, Aden, the Suez canal, Malta and Gibraltar. At one stage a live rabbit, called Hugo, was brought aboard, as it was known that Simon was rather partial to a choice piece of rabbit meat; however, the crew became too fond of it! It probably ended up in a pie anyway though, as UK quarantine fees would have been £30, which wasn't available.

Plymouth was finally reached at the beginning of November 1949. A huge welcome awaited *Amethyst*, as can be seen from a [fine collection of photos](#) of the occasion from the *Life* magazine archive available through Google (*just three small images there, November 2023*). Apparently all the noise and fuss unnerved Simon, who disappeared below decks, being found later in the galley! But even heroes are subject to quarantine regulations, and Simon had to be incarcerated for what was at the time the standard six-month period, for which he went to Surrey. He was given plenty of attention, with numerous visitors queuing up to see him, lots of messages and presents, and play every day with the member of staff responsible for him. In addition, and probably most importantly for Simon, he had regular visits from some of the *Amethyst* crew including Kerans, who planned to collect the cat when his quarantine period was over.



A sad ending

The medal presentation was set for 11 December, and the PDSA's founder and instigator of the medal, [Maria Dickin](#), then 79, was to be present, as indeed was the Lord Mayor of London. But it was not to be. Simon became listless, and when a vet was urgently sent for, the cat had a high temperature and acute enteritis. He was given an injection and tablets, and then seemed to sleep. His carer sat with him all night; but by the morning of 28 November he had died. He was still a youngster. The vet felt that he would have recovered from the virus had his heart not been weakened by his war wounds: but it just couldn't cope. Maybe the fact that he was in a strange place, rather than at sea on 'his' ship with his friends, didn't help.

I like what one of his biographers wrote:

. . . the spirit of Simon slipped quietly away to sea.

Lt Cdr Kerans and the crew were devastated; and when Simon's death was announced, cards, letters and flowers began to arrive at the quarantine shelter by the truckload. His photograph and [a tribute appeared](#) (*archived copy*) in the obituary columns of *Time* magazine. There was apparently a proposal that his body be stuffed and displayed to raise funds, but thankfully it was rejected by the Allied Forces Mascot Club. In

the event Simon was buried in the [PDSA's animal cemetery at Ilford](#), east of London; a specially made dark-wood casket was fashioned to hold the small body, wrapped in cotton wool, and it was draped with the Union flag. Father Henry Ross, rector of St Augustine's church, held a short ceremony, after which Simon was buried with naval honours in the presence of Kerans and a number of the ship's crew. Following the burial, a wooden marker was placed, with the legend:

*In honoured memory of Simon, DM
HMS Amethyst
Died November 28, 1949.*

Later on a specially designed stone monument was erected instead of the temporary marker, and it remains to this day.

IN
MEMORY OF
"SIMON"
SERVED IN
H.M.S. AMETHYST
MAY 1948 —
SEPTEMBER 1949
AWARDED DICKIN
MEDAL
AUGUST 1949
DIED 28TH
NOVEMBER 1949.
THROUGHOUT
THE YANGTZE
INCIDENT
HIS BEHAVIOUR
WAS OF THE
HIGHEST ORDER



Note: photos of a few other graves are included in our [Quest for Simon](#) article, and of other DM recipients at the page for the [PDSA cemetery](#) in our Cats in Wartime series.



Meanwhile, *Amethyst* carried out a search for a new ship's cat, and eventually another black-and-white tom, **Simon II (left)**, joined the crew. He hailed from the London district of Camden Town.

Simon's medal (*previous page and below*) was accepted posthumously on his behalf by Lt Cdr and Mrs Kerans. It was held on the *Amethyst* until the ship was scrapped in about 1957, when it was transferred to the Naval Trophy Store on HMS *Nelson* at Portsmouth.



Eventually it was auctioned off and bought by a private collector in Canada. In 1993 it came up for auction again and was expected to fetch somewhere in the region of £3,000 to £5,000. It was sold for £23,467, to the Eaton Film Company, who were planning a TV film called *Animal Heroes*, in which Simon's story was to be featured. The medal remains in the company's bank vaults to this day, except when loaned for exhibitions from time to time. A video film was made but was more in the nature of a cartoon and didn't show the medal.

It's less well-known that Simon was also awarded the Blue Cross Medal (*example left*), but that also had not actually been presented when he died. It was accepted on his behalf

by the 'Lord Commissioners of His Majesty's Admiralty', and it would be interesting to know what became of this medal. [The Blue Cross](#) (formerly Our Dumb Friends' League) is an old-established animal welfare society, founded in 1897; it's particularly noted for having done tremendous work in both world wars to relieve the suffering of horses, mules, dogs and all other animals involved in war. That included helping, often under extremely difficult and dangerous conditions, domestic pets injured or made homeless in bombed cities. Their medal for bravery was awarded to numerous animals during the war years and afterwards, but has now become defunct. I am very grateful to the Blue Cross for researching their archives and verifying the award of Simon's medal, although it hasn't been possible to find out what became of it.



In 1957 a [feature film](#) was made that re-enacted the *Amethyst's* story, based on a book by Lawrence Earl; the ship itself was still in reserve and was able to take part. No direct mention was made of Simon's exploits, but a black-and-white cat did feature in some scenes. The film had its premiere on 1 April 1957: Pathé News has a short [newsreel of the premiere](#) (*archived copy but video needed Flash player*), which was attended by Kerans and members of *Amethyst's* crew, as well as Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

The Dickin Medal

As mentioned earlier, Simon of the *Amethyst* remains the only cat to have received the Dickin Medal. Originally intended for award to animals in wartime, other recipients were 32 homing pigeons (see also [Footnote 4](#)), 18 dogs and 3 horses. In 2000 a further award was made posthumously to a wartime Canadian Newfoundland dog called Gander, making a total of 55 awards.

However, the medal has been reintroduced in recent years, and three were given to dogs Appollo, Sally and Rosie in connection with rescue efforts following the 11 September 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks in New York and Washington DC; while a further posthumous medal was awarded in January 2003 to dog Sam for gallantry in the Bosnian conflict. In December 2003 it was announced that Buster, an Army dog, had been awarded the Dickin Medal for his services in Iraq, in connection with tracking down a large cache of arms and explosives. It was fitting that this 60th medal coincided with the 60th anniversary of its introduction in 1943. Since then further DMs have been awarded to dogs Sadie, Treo, Theo and Sasha for service in Afghanistan; and a retrospective award has been made to Lucky, who was the only survivor of a team of four police and tracker dogs that gave outstanding service during the Malaya campaign of 1949–52. The total number of awards at mid-2014 thus stood at 65; however, by 2024 71 awards had been made, to the 32 pigeons, 34 dogs, 4 horses – and Simon.



In addition to these 'regular' medals, it was announced in August 2014 that an honorary Dickin Medal — the first of its kind — had been awarded posthumously to [Warrior](#), a famous horse from World War One who became known as '[the horse the Germans couldn't kill](#)'. He survived the war and lived to be 33 years old, despite all kinds of attacks, disasters, misfortunes and charges against the enemy, and was an inspiration to the soldiers who served alongside him. His award is intended partly also to recognise the gallantry of all the animals that served on the front line during the conflict. The medal was accepted on Warrior's behalf by Brough Scott, grandson of his original owner, General Jack Seely.

The rolls of honour for many of these recipients, including Simon, can be accessed from PDSA's page for [Animal Bravery Awards \(archived copy\)](#). Also there's an excellent series of images of many of the recipients at [The Telegraph \(archived- doesn't load fully, Oct. 2024\)](#).

In September 2009 Simon's medal was loaned to the Royal Navy's HMS *Collingwood*, a shore-based training establishment in the south of England, where it formed the centrepiece of an exhibition about HMS *Amethyst* marking the 60th anniversary of the 'Yangtze Incident'. The exhibition was planned to be permanent, but although the medal, released by Eaton Films, was loaned initially for a year, it was still there in early 2026!. It seemed a shame that the exhibition wasn't open to the general public, for security reasons related to its location, but an Open Day was held later in the year when it was possible for people to visit. I was fortunate in being able to obtain a preview, and took a photo of the famous medal (*above left*).

In closing, it's worth mentioning that the dedication of Paul Gallico's book [Jennie](#), published in 1950 and one of the definitive stories about cats, reads simply: 'To the late Simon of the *Amethyst*'.

If you have enjoyed Simon's tale, these further pages may also be of interest:

- [Tributes to Simon](#) contains a selection of his fan mail.
- [The Quest for Simon](#) is a fuller account of my experiences in researching his story, which led me in some interesting and unexpected directions, and includes a number of further photos and links related to Simon and the *Amethyst* incident.
- Within our Featuring Felines section are pages for cats in wartime ,which include an account of the reopening in December 2007 of the [PDSA Animal Cemetery](#) at Ilford, where Simon and eleven other Dickin Medal recipients are buried. I was delighted to be one of the invited guests, and took the opportunity to take more photos of the refurbished graves.
- [Lt Cdr Ian Griffiths](#) was the first captain Simon served under, and, with the kind permission of the Griffiths family, the page includes some previously unseen photos of Simon as a youngster on board the *Amethyst*.
- See also the footnotes below for more information and links related to the Dickin Medal

Citation

'Able Seaman Simon, for distinguished and meritorious service on HMS *Amethyst*, you are hereby awarded the Distinguished Amethyst Campaign Ribbon.

'Be it known that on April 26, 1949, though recovering from wounds, when HMS *Amethyst* was standing by off Rose Bay, you did single-handedly and unarmed stalk down and destroy "Mao Tse Tung", a rat guilty of raiding food supplies which were critically short.

'Be it further known that from April 22 to August 4 you did rid HMS *Amethyst* of pestilence and vermin, with unrelenting faithfulness.'

A different citation was read for Peggy the dog; then ribbons were placed around the animals' necks, Griffiths saluted and the crew members present joined in three cheers. 'Simon and Peggy made no comment,' reported the *China Mail* newspaper. Peggy didn't return to Britain, but was found a new home in Hong Kong.

Footnotes

- ❖ 1. With Pathé News available online, it's possible to see a short newsreel of *Amethyst's* homecoming to Plymouth, including a very brief shot of Simon 'looking after' the ship while his crewmates were being fêted ashore: he's shown at about 2m 14s, but for barely 4 seconds. See <https://www.britishpathe.com/asset/84277/> (*vopy to browser, otherwise doesn't work*)./ In 2012 we also came across a very short video clip of Simon being held by one of his shipmates, Sidney Horton: it's one of very few found in which we can see Simon alive: [see the clip](#). This is followed by a [further clip](#) briefly showing *Amethyst's* homecoming, another shot of Simon (lapping milk) and the later auction of his Dickin Medal.
- ❖ 2. There are many photos and a wealth of information about *Amethyst*, including Simon, at the [Maritime Quest](#) site. A couple of the crew photos also show Peggy, the ship's dog, about whom we don't usually hear much. (*Simon's page includes a personal tribute from Bob Green, who remembers seeing Simon when he, Bob, was eight years old.*)
- ❖ 3. Another feline recipient of a special medal from Mrs Dickin (although not the Dickin Medal itself) was Faith, a London church cat, for her bravery during the London Blitz, whose story you can [read here](#).
- ❖ 4. 2005 saw the release of the CGI animated film *Valiant*. While this light-hearted tale is fictional, it is based on the very valuable role that the Royal Homing Pigeon Service (RHPS) played in WWII — no fewer than 32 pigeons received the Dickin Medal. The animation's voice cast includes many well-known actors, with Ewan McGregor as the story's hero, 'Valiant'.

Resources and acknowledgements

Simon the Cat, Vera Cooper, c. 1950 (Hutchinson)

Escape of the Amethyst, C. E. Lucas Phillips, 1957 (Coward McCann Inc., New York)

Two Perfectly Marvellous Cats, Rosamond M. Young, 1993 (J N Townsend Publishing, Exeter, NH, USA)

Ships' Cats in War and Peace, Val Lewis, ISBN 0953045811, 2001 (Nauticalia Ltd)

I am especially indebted and grateful to the late Lt Cdr Stewart Hett, MBE, RN, who was on *Amethyst* in 1949 and who gave me invaluable and unstinting assistance; and to George Hickinbottom, who was responsible for taking Simon on board and provided me with some most interesting material and memories (although he had left the ship before it was involved in the Yangtze Incident). See our further article, [The Quest for Simon](#), for more details.

Warm thanks are also due to the [PDSA](#) HQ in Telford and to Isabel George in particular; to the PDSA Animal Hospitals in Ilford and in Plymouth, and to Mr R. Beck, Principal Surveyor of PDSA Property Services in Croydon; to [The Blue Cross](#), as mentioned in our text above; to the Eaton Film Company in London; to the [National Library of Scotland](#) in Edinburgh; and to Bill Bartholomew for permission to use the only existing photo of Oscar from the former HMS *Cossack* Association website (*no longer extant in 2026*).





In 2018 *Time* magazine ran an [article](#) about Simon and his medal, with some other well-known cats mentioned.

[BBC News](#) (Dec. 2023) | [Yahoo Life](#) (Feb. 2024) | [Green Howards Museum](#) (Feb. 2025)

There's a nice painting of Simon [here](#).



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