

Featured Felines: Cats in Wartime On Land and in the Air (2006+)

(page checked July 2026)

[For wartime cats at sea, see separate page.]

On this page, below:

[Wartime Cats on Land](#)
[Wartime Cats in the Air](#)



Cats don't have a natural or important place in humankind's wars in the same way as dogs, horses and some other animals do, since (as cat owners will know!) it can be very difficult to get a cat to do what you want it to. There were stories that the Americans tried to use cats during the Vietnam war, but they were too easily distracted and either started playing or disappeared into the jungle! However, these tales are apocryphal. During the nineteenth century it's said the Belgians tried using cats to deliver letters, but with a marked lack of success. (See the introduction to [Working / Postal Cats 1](#) for more about this curious scheme.)

There's one function that cats have fulfilled since time immemorial, though, and that's as ships' cats (see [Featuring / Cats in Wartime: Sea](#)), where they kept the vessels' stores free from rodents and also served as mascots and companions to the crews. They became especially important in wartime, when supplies could be short and men were far from home for long periods and welcomed feline companionship. Sadly, since 1975 the British Royal Navy has banned cats, and indeed all animals, from its ships, with the Merchant Navy following suit two years later .

Many of these wartime accounts are short and/or without photos, as they date from decades ago now; information is sparse and snippets have been gleaned from many sources.

A memorial to all the animals that have been caught up and have suffered in human wars is to be found in England, in London's Park Lane. There's an article about it, with some photos, [here](#).

War on Land



It's said that the ancient Persians took cats into battle against the Egyptians, because they knew it would give them an advantage. The Egyptians, with their reverence for cats, would do anything to avoid harming one, so would be reluctant to attack anyone with a cat.

In the sixteenth century German artillery officer Christopher of Hapsburg came up with a plan to use cats as gas bombs. The cats, he proposed, would have jars of poison gas attached to their backs (with the openings facing backwards) and be driven amongst enemy troops to spread alarm and poisonous fumes.



His plan was presented to the Council of One and Twenty in Strasbourg, but was never put into use. During the Crimean War (1854–55) it was reported that some captured Russian soldiers were found to be carrying kitten mascots beneath their coats. See also the story of [Sevastopol Tom](#) from the Crimean War.

In World War I, the British army employed some 500,000 cats as gas detectors and ratters in the trenches. During World War II, cats as guardians of food stores were so important to the war effort that thousands of them were donated by the British public and also by the US via a Cats For Europe scheme, with an official powdered milk ration for 'all cats engaged in work of national importance'. During that war, in Britain and many other countries, all pet animals, including cats, were hard hit by rationing — those that survived, that is: and many did not. In Britain it was actually illegal to give cats milk to drink and they were obliged to drink water (which we now know is better for them anyway). There was some heavy lobbying, though, on behalf of warehouse mousers that had a job to do, and sick cats, and for these the rule was relaxed so that they could have a dried-milk ration.

Soldiers have always felt better for adopting mascots, and many cat mascots have earned their keep as 'stress-busters' — such as the kitten '**Mustard**' here (*above right*), which was a US tank mascot in WW1 (with Sgt Paul Postal, Argonne, France, October 1918). See also **Pfc Hammer** under 'Iraq cats' at the end of the following Land section. Entries here are in alphabetical order of cats' names.



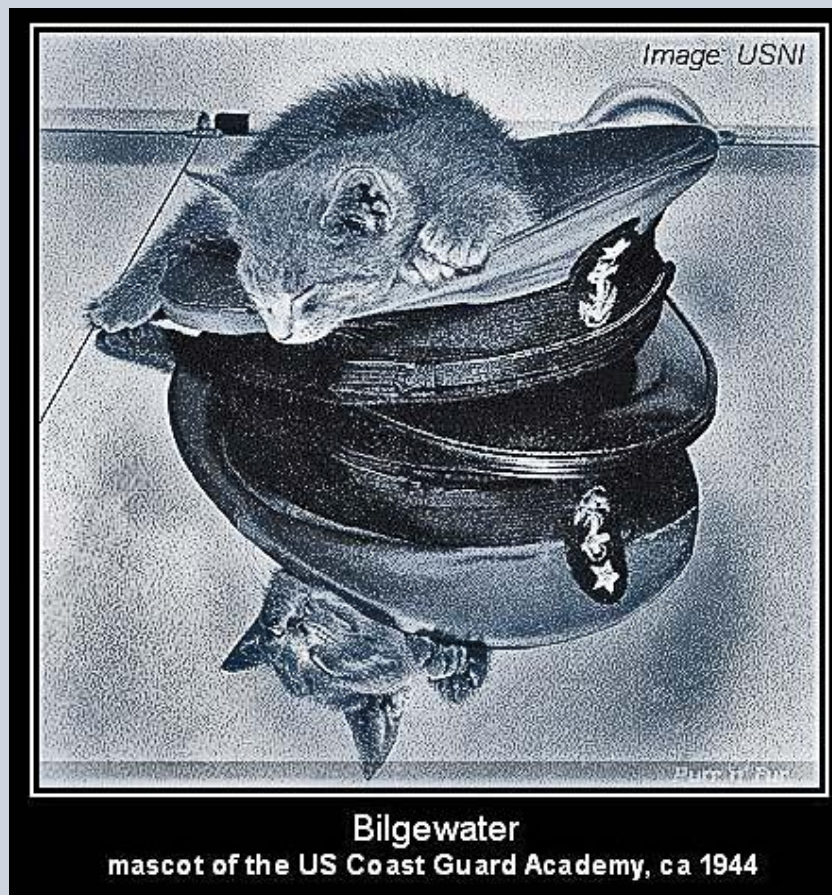
Andrew
Mascot-in-Chief of the
PDSA's Allied Forces Mascot Club
pictured in 1945



▣ **Andrew** became the mascot of the Allied Forces Mascot Club, an organisation formed by the [PDSA](#) in 1943 to obtain recognition for all the animals and birds that served their country during WW2. Membership was confined to creatures serving with the Allied Forces (not necessarily British) and the Civil Defence services. It met with great success and approval and there was a very large membership. Although Andrew didn't himself go to war, he was based in London and was in the front line for air attacks (he slept through most of them!); but he had a very useful attribute — he seemed to know when a flying bomb was going to fall near his home. When he took cover, everyone around knew they should do the same. Weighing in at nearly 14 pounds (over 6 kilos), he was a very large fawn-and-brown tabby with spotless white front, tummy and 'socks' and an inverted 'V for victory' on his nose.

▣ This charming picture, dating from 1944, shows **Bilgewater** of the US Coastguard Academy checking out part of the new, grey cadet uniform for comfort.

Image: [USNI Naval History Blog: Cats in the Sea Services](#). (2018 – archived copy: no images, sadly)

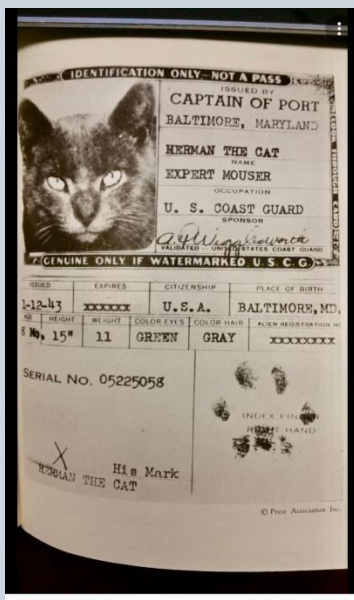


▣ While the 42nd Royal Highlanders, the renowned Scottish regiment known as the Black Watch, were encamped in 1854 near Varna, in Bulgaria, before embarking to do battle in the Crimea, a soldier felt a furry body rubbing against his legs and looked down to see a thin tabby cat. She was very friendly and clearly wanted food, but after being fed she didn't leave and seemed to want to stay. She became the regiment's unusual mascot and was named **Bulgarian Belle**. On arrival in the Crimea she was assigned a soldier's knapsack for transportation — a popular duty, as whoever carried her had no other fatigue duties that day! Safe in her knapsack, she advanced with the regiment when they routed the Russians at the battle of Alma; she must have heard all the cacophony of war, but couldn't see what was happening until the Russians had retreated and she was allowed out after the battle.

Belle then accompanied her regiment to Balaklava, where it was decided not to risk her life by taking her into action again and she was sent to the safety of the regimental hospital. But she sickened and died anyway, apparently missing active service and pining for the companionship of her soldier friends. Hers was a brief career, but she had become part of the proud tradition of one of the most gallant regiments.

▣ One World War II widow had a 10-year-old son to support and a feline companion known simply as **Cat**. The day came when she could no longer afford to feed Cat, who was told by her grieving mistress that she was going to have to be 'put to sleep' the following day. Cat seems to have taken in this information, for early next morning she went out and returned later with a dead wild rabbit for the pot. Thereafter, for the duration of the war, Cat's hunting skills earned her keep; three or more times a week she brought in rabbits that were often bigger than she was. She always waited patiently for her share.

▣ **Herman** was the Coast Guard cat on the waterfront in Baltimore, Maryland during WW2. He had his own ID card, with is serial number and his paw-print. A grey cat with green eyes, he was taken on officially as an 'expert mouser' when eight months old.



[Cinemaholic](#) (Aug. 2022) | [Getty Images](#) (short video of Herman being photographed for his pass)



Herman receiving his reward

▣ During 1942 in Malden, Essex, south-east England, an area subject to heavy bombing, a 19-year-old cat called **Jim** saved his owners when their house caught fire. He ran upstairs and woke them in time for them to be able to get up and get the fire under control. Jim was awarded the [Blue Cross](#) Medal (see picture under 'Pussy' below), which was instituted for animals that had helped to save human lives and was only sparingly given.

▣ **Little One** is seen (below) with his owner Mrs Olive Day, London, 1941. He's wearing a

NARPAC collar, standing for 'National Air Raid Protection for Animals Committee'. This was described by the Ministry of Information as an 'animal lovers' voluntary wartime organisation that ensures, should he stray in blitz or blackout, he will be returned safely to his owner'.

Image © [Imperial War Museum](#), London



▣ **Mike** was the studio cat and mascot of the wartime (WW2) Australian Army broadcasting station at Bosley Field, Bougainville in what was then the British colony of the Solomon Islands.

Image: [Australian War Memorial](#)

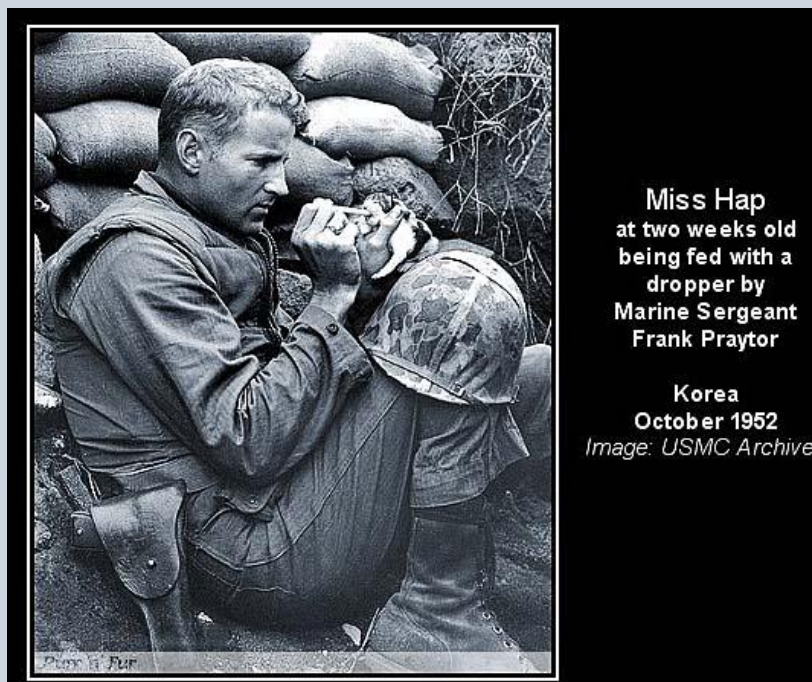


▣ An orphan of war, **Miss Hap**, a two-week old Korean kitten, is pictured (*below*) being fed watered-down canned milk with a medicine dropper by Marine Sergeant Frank Praytor in or about 1952. The name, Sergeant Praytor explained, was 'because she was born in the wrong place at the wrong time'. The Marine adopted the tiny kitten after her mother was killed by a mortar barrage near Bunker Hill — or that was the explanation given when the photograph was extensively circulated later in 1952/early 1953, and it persists widely today, but according to Praytor himself, writing in 2009 (*see below*), the reason for being orphaned was quite different.

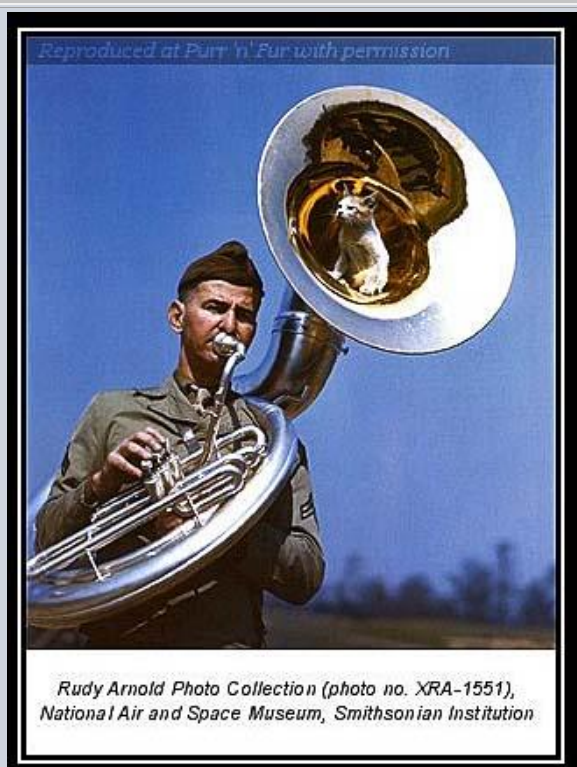
Miss Hap was later weaned onto meat from 'C' rations and remained with Sgt Praytor,

and when he left Korea she was placed in the care of a new guardian, Cpl Conrad Fisher from Illinois, becoming the mascot of the Press & Information Office, where Praytor did see her once more on a brief return to Korea. Cpl Fisher hoped to take the cat home when he left, but it's not known if this came about.

The full story is contained in an article written by Praytor himself in 2009 for *The Graybeards* magazine, published by the Korean War Veterans' Association ([KWVA](#)). Back issues are available as PDF documents at the KWVA site, but there's a good summary of the story at [History by Zim](#) (*archived copy*)



Update: Frank Praytor died in January 2018, aged 90 — see the [USNI's obituary](#), which also includes a little about the Miss Hap photo. A [Mail Online](#) piece (*archived copy*) is virtually the same but includes more photos of Praytor.



▣ The kitten sitting in the sousaphone (*left*), with Corporal Manuel Campos we hope only pretending to blow it, was called **Misfire**; it would be interesting to know why! She was a mascot in 1942 at Fort Totten, New York, a Civil War-era fort that formed part of America's coastal and aerial defences until 1967.
Image © National Air & Space Museum (Smithsonian Institution) and used with their kind permission.

▣ **Mourka** (*below*) was a cat during the terrible German siege of Stalingrad (now called

Volgograd) in 1942–43, who risked all his nine lives carrying messages about German positions from a group of Russian scouts back to their headquarters. He was probably well rewarded for his efforts and devotion to duty, as there was a kitchen in the HQ building. The image shown is said to be of Mourka, but that isn't confirmed : [WWII in Color](#).



Said to be Mourka - pictured carrying what appears to be a message
Stalingrad, ca 1942

▣ Two WW2 photos (*below*) show Estonian volunteers of the 20th Waffen Grenadier Division of the German SS. One identifies the little kitten as **Nina** the Bunker kitten. They probably date from about June 1944 and are thought to be on the Eastern Front at Narva, Estonia during the offensive against the Russians in what some call the Battle of the European SS, referring to the proportion of foreign nationals participating.



Nina the Bunker Kitten
with the 20th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS (1st Estonian),
probably at Narva, Estonia on the Eastern Front, ca June 1944

Nina
the Bunker Kitten
with the
20th Waffen Grenadier Division
of the SS (1st Estonian),
probably at Narva, Estonia
on the Eastern Front
ca June 1944



▣ **Percy** had what was surely an uncommon experience for a cat in World War 1: he saw action in a tank! The black cat was the mascot of the tank crew of D20 ('Daphne') and belonged to Lt Harry Drader, a Canadian who had been brought up in England from a young age. In August 1915, aged 18, he was commissioned into the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers and went on to command a Mk 1 Male tank. Percy accompanied him throughout, and both man and cat survived the war, Drader having been awarded the Military Cross for conspicuous gallantry in action.

Scenes of Harry, Percy and the crew of Daphne are included in *The Battle of the Ancre*, the official record of the British Army's winter campaign on the Somme in 1916. In 2010 the Imperial War Museum embarked on a project to completely restore the film, a process that took two years. An account of what was involved is given at their blog, and included is a short clip from the film — the sequence with Harry and Percy, with the cat shown being carried into the tank (*can't see any clip, Feb. 2025*). See [Restoring the First World War film *The Battle of the Ancre*](#) (Nov. 2012).

More information about Drader's service in WW1 is at [The First Tank Crews](#) (*undated – archived copy*). The portrait of Harry seated with Percy is from the same site.

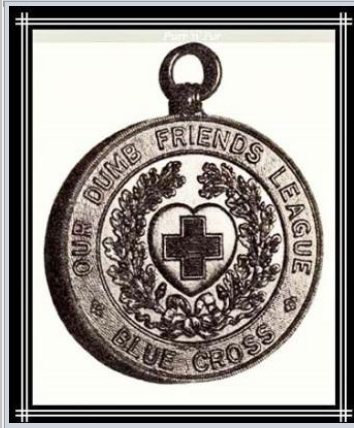


Lt Harry Drader with
Percy
courtesy of
The First Tank Crews

(Right)
Probably just
prior to
The Battle
of the Ancre,
Somme,
November
1916



▣ An unusual story involves a cat and a rabbit. Both were mascots of a Bofors gun team of the Royal Air Force Regiment; the rabbit was called Bofors and the cat, a female, was known as **Preedy**. She was described by one of the team as 'a beautiful pet who has made herself quite at home with us. She is always on duty with me during an alert; in fact she follows all of us as we go on duty, day or night.' Cat and rabbit were on 'quite good terms' and ate together; but Preedy couldn't understand why Bofors wasn't interested in mice! She would catch one, play with it for a while, then bring it to the rabbit — which would ignore it and let it escape! When the time came for the team to be moved to a different position, Preedy didn't wish to go; she was put in the luggage truck six times, escaping each time; finally she was put aboard it in a box. But when someone opened it to see how she was faring, she shot out like greased lightning and was never recovered.



▣ A cat called **Pussy** (names don't seem to have been as imaginative in those days as they are now!) did the same as Jim, mentioned above, when fire broke out downstairs where she lived, and she also gained the Blue Cross Medal (*left*). **Whiskey**, belonging to a Corporal Witcomb, saved his family in similar circumstances, although it isn't recorded whether he too received a medal.

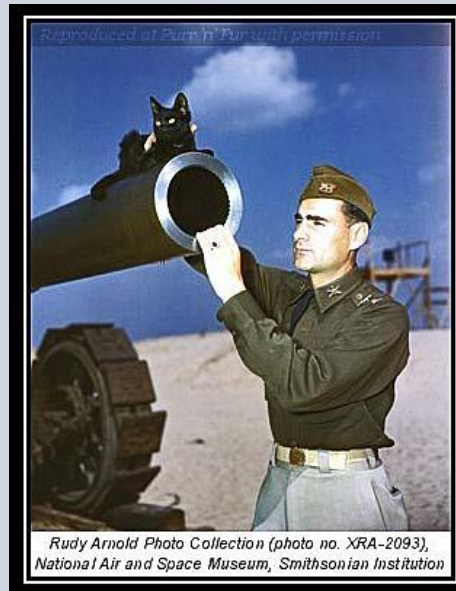
▣ **Queenie** was a tabby cat befriended by the famous 'Desert Rats' when they were battling for Tobruk in North Africa during WW2. She has an 'honourable mention' in a little book I have about WW2 animals.

▣ **Sevastopol Tom** (*aka Crimean Tom*) became something of a saviour for the British troops following the siege of Sevastopol during the Crimean campaign in the mid-1850s: he still 'lives' today and his story is [here](#).

▣ In 1940, **Smoky**, of Paddington in London, was rescued by Ann Twynam following an air raid during the Blitz. She took him home with her, nursed him back to full health – and taught him to salute! Whenever service friends visited, Smoky loved to salute them. The photo dates from February 1943.



▣ **Tillie**, pictured with her own 155mm. artillery piece and First Lt C.A. Gross, was the wartime mascot of an American Army Coast Artillery unit. The photo dates from 1941. Image © National Air & Space Museum (Smithsonian Institution) and used with kind permission.



▣ **Tom Cat** was a Confederate mascot at Fort McAllister, Georgia, in the American Civil War: his story has a slight twist and can be read [here](#).

▣ Many cats were adopted by shore-based establishments. One 'Wren' (Women's Royal Naval Service) depot had a cat that wore 'a black coat with a white shirt-front and knee stockings, not to mention whiskers'. She was named **Wren Figaro** and was affectionate, an excellent mouser, and 'a most convenient cat' because she preferred dried milk to the real thing. Morale at the depot increased when she was adopted, even when 'she devoured part of the Chief's lunch while he was out of his office'. Sadly, as happened to many cats, she disappeared one day, and was much mourned.

New Zealand Army cats

Several cats have been mentioned, as follows, that were with New Zealand troops during their North African and Italian campaigns during WW2, in 20 Battalion and Armoured Regiment; whereas Snowy the tunnellers' cat dates from WW1.

▣ **Mrs Rommel** was caught during the 1941 Libyan campaign and was cared for by C Company. After the battalion returned to Baggush she produced two kittens, selecting for their maternity couch the bed of Lieutenant Charlie Upham (later awarded a VC and Bar). When he came into his tent and saw what had taken place, Charlie, with true courtesy and consideration for a lady in distress, slept that night on the sand. The kittens were named **Tiger** and **Tankie** (see below). Upham described Mrs Rommel as 'a wild cat who didn't have a loving nature, and a great biter', who took some catching when the unit had to move camp. Upham believed that she was eventually killed by a bomb.

▣ **Tankie** was acquired by Tom O'Connor of the quartering staff. Most army cats are pretty hardy as regards diet, but a few meals of bully beef made Tankie very unwell! However, he lived to accompany the battalion to Syria. While riding in the cab of the Quartermaster's truck one day he made it plain that he thought it high time for a wayside stop. This was not possible while in convoy, and Tankie became desperate. Finally,

escaping from the cab, he scampered over the top of the engine (the bonnet covers being open) and, miraculously avoiding injury from the whirling fan blades, gained his urgently desired temporary freedom. Tankie was finally lost in June 1942 when the battalion came through the minefield after leaving Mersa Matruh.

▣ **Tiger** became cat mascot of the former transport platoon, and especially of truck driver Corporal 'Hammy' Hamilton. Hammy had been left behind in a base camp in North Africa and was fed up with the routine and the boring duties, so he managed to bluff his way to the action in Italy, taking Tiger with him. Tiger enjoyed a lordly life under the protection of the transport platoon; he had a special bed and a handsome collar bearing an Egyptian coin on which his name and unit were inscribed. After being smuggled across the Mediterranean, it was bad luck that he should become one of the first casualties in Italy when he was run over in the town of Atessa. After the death of his pet, Hammy lost interest in Italy and returned to Egypt, in much the same irregular manner as he had left.

▣ **Wallad**, originally a native of Syria, was a handsome cat with beautiful markings and belonged to New Zealander George McAllister. Wallad was a dandy and incurably lazy, disdaining to hunt. It is on record that on 12 October 1942, with the help and encouragement of a noisy mob of troopers, he caught his first mouse. At moments during the chase Wallad was markedly reluctant to come to grips with his prey, and as soon as the exhausted victim was within his paws he promptly went to sleep!

▣ Soldiers playing with **Snowy** the cat (*below*), the New Zealand Tunnelling Company mascot, in Dainville, near Arras, France. A row of huts can be seen in the background. Photograph taken by Henry Armytage Sanders on 16 July 1918 (*Royal New Zealand Returned and Services' Association Collection*, reference number: 1/2-013371-G). Permission of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, must be obtained before any re-use of this image.
Image by kind permission of the Alexander Turnbull Library.



Playing with 'Snowy', July 1918 near Arras, France

Unnamed cats

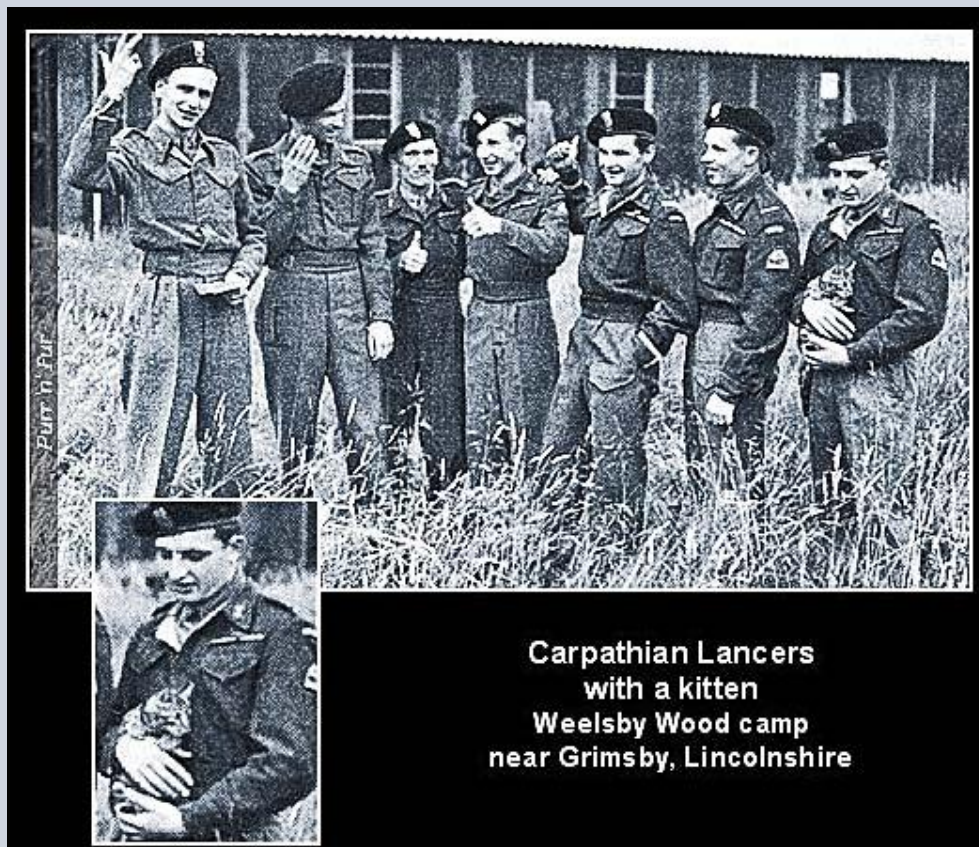


▣ A German Luftwaffe inmate of Murchison prisoner-of-war camp in Australia, photographed with his pet cat in December 1942.

Image: [Australian War Memorial](#)

▣ The photo below shows members of the Polish Carpathian Lancers Regiment with a tabby kitten. The Lancers were a group of 33 cavalry regiments who escaped via the Carpathian Mountains following the German occupation of Poland in 1939. With the horses soon replaced by armoured vehicles and then tanks, they served with great distinction in North Africa under Allied command, and then in the Italian campaign, after which they came to Britain. After the war they were unable to return home because of the communist takeover of their country, and for a time they camped at Weelsby Wood, near Grimsby, Lincolnshire in eastern England, where this photo with a kitten was taken. The camp was disbanded in 1947 and many of its inhabitants settled in the area. See [BBC News Humberside](#) (Oct. 2011) for a memorial to them.

Many thanks to Polish correspondent Bartlomiej for sending the photo.



**Carpathian Lancers
with a kitten
Weelsby Wood camp
near Grimsby, Lincolnshire**

▣ This delightful photo, was originally an Imperial War Museum image showing (according to the IWM description): 'An officer of 444 Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA), smoking a pipe as he supervises a kitten balancing on a 12-inch gun shell near Arras in France, 19 July 1918'.



Back story 1 (above): From the backing on which the print was mounted, the tale was related that the little feline had been found in a devastated part of France by the Germans, who looked after it, but that later it apparently stalked out of a German dugout and joined advancing British forces in the Champagne sector of the country, becoming an official British mascot.

Back story 2: An alternative interpretation appears in a book by Susan Bulandra, *Soldiers in Fur and Feathers*, which says that the kitten, born in the trenches, was orphaned when his mother was killed but was adopted and nursed back to health by an officer of the Belgian Army, Lt Lekeux. Named **Pitoutchi**, the cat followed him everywhere and one day saved his life. This story is recounted [here](#) (March 2014 – archived copy).

Either of the stories may be true (or not), but there is very specific detail in the IWM's description for the image, it is noted as being part of the 'Ministry of Information First World War Official Collection', and the officer does seem to be in British uniform.

▣ November 1918: A canteen supervisor named Mrs Chisholm is pictured with an unnamed cat at Kantara, Egypt (below left), in what was then the Suez Canal Zone. Image: [Australian War Memorial](#)



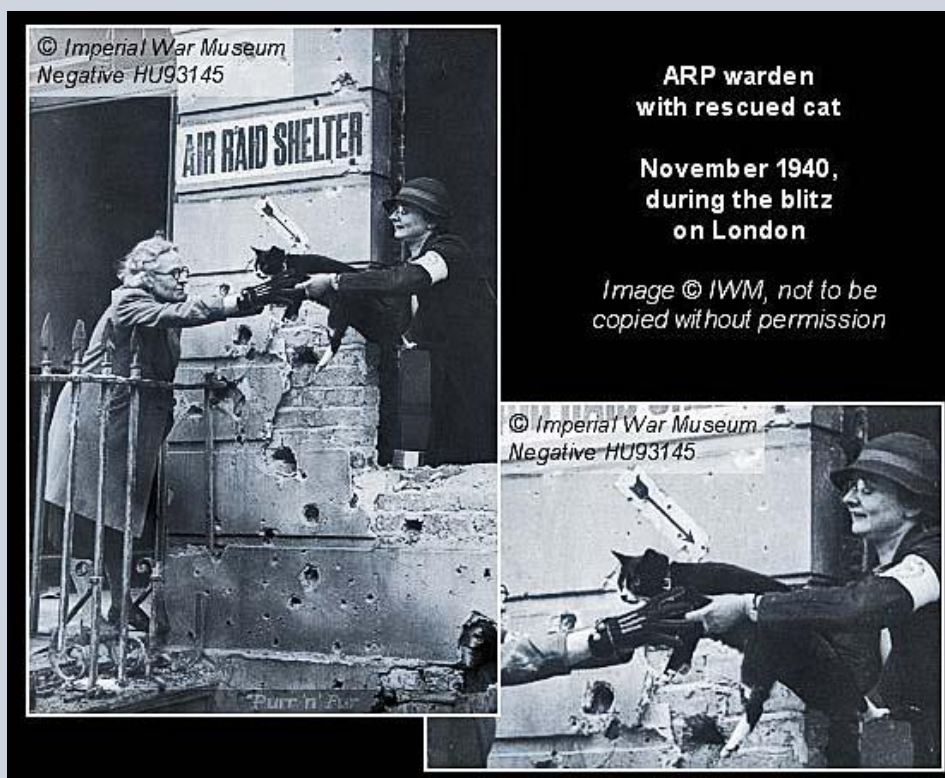
▣ Many soldiers kept pets of various kinds during World War 1 to alleviate the horrors and the boredom of the trenches. Here is one such, with the only information being that it's a British soldier holding his pet cat outside the entrance to a dugout (above right).

▣ In Australia, the Darge Photographic Company had the concession to take photographs at the Broadmeadows and Seymour army camps during the First World War. Here are two of their studio portraits (*below left*): Private Francis Edmund Bilton of the Australian 5th Battalion in 1915, with a cat curled up in the corner by the tent, and from 1916 one J G Harrison (no further details) holding a kitten (*below centre*). Images source: Australian War Memorial - [Bilton](#) and [Harrison](#).



▣ Gaza, Palestine, June 1940: Australian Pte D. Noonan pictured with a kitten in between air raids (*above right*)
Image: [Australian War Memorial](#)

▣ Animal ARP (Air Raid Precaution) volunteers did sterling work during WW2 rescuing family pets and abandoned or injured animals from bombed-out buildings. Here (*below*) a cat is rejoining its owner following an air raid during the dark days of London's blitz, November 1940. Image © and reproduced by kind permission of the Imperial War Museum, London.



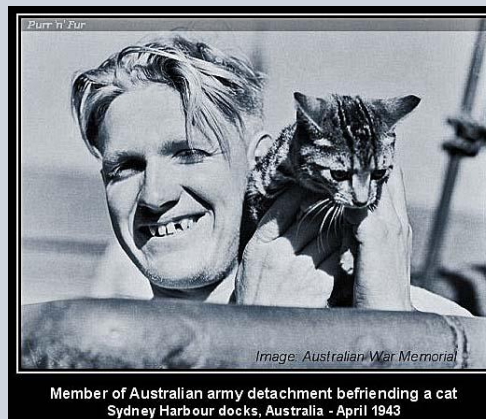
▣ Haifa (now in Israel), December 1940: a wharf-side cat photographed as a batch of Italian prisoners-of-war invaded her domain (*below*).

Image: [Australian War Memorial](#)



▣ In April 1943 an Australian army detachment was working at Sydney Harbour during a strike of dock workers. A member is shown befriending a young cat (although the cat doesn't seem sure about it!).

Image: [Australian War Memorial](#)



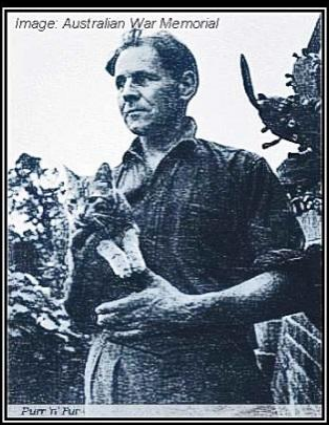
▣ This cat (*below left*) awaits rescue from a bombed building. Cats might flee during an air raid, but would often return to the wreckage of their former homes.

Image © and reproduced by kind permission of the Imperial War Museum, London.



▣ The photo (*above right*) shows Claudette Blance with her cat. She was an intelligence officer in the French Resistance (the Maquis) and an officer in the Free French Army. Her home was used as a safe house by the SOE (Special Operations Executive) Jedburgh team during 1944. Image © and reproduced by kind permission of the Imperial War Museum, London

▣ During the London blitz a 19-year-old young lady called Iris Davies, a volunteer with Our Dumb Friends League (now the Blue Cross), spent a lot of time rescuing cats from bombed houses with the aid of a 'lasso'. She rescued several hundred cats in this way; photo from November 1940 (*below left*). The right-hand image shows a woman feeding cats during the blitz, probably in London's East End.



▣ Sydney: official Australian war artist Arthur Murch with his cat in about 1945.

Image: [Australian War Memorial](#)

Coming a little more up to date, I was interested to learn that Israel had a Cat Welfare Society (CWSI) that attempted to rescue cats that had been left abandoned or injured by wars or terrorism. Begun following the Gulf War of 1991, when thousands of pets were abandoned as their owners fled their homes in panic, it aimed to provide shelter for abandoned cats, organise teams of people to feed feral cats, set humane traps and search for injured cats after attacks. Practically all their money came from donations and fund-raising activities. A symbol of their work was a cat called **Phoenix**, who survived a direct missile attack on his home that killed his owners; taken in by a CWSI volunteer, he lived another 12 years in relative peace.

The organisation was based in an agricultural town called Even Yehuda, and its shelter provided boarding facilities for cats, veterinary care, pet supplies, educational groups to teach children how to care for cats, and a nationwide spay-and-neuter programme. Unfortunately, as of mid-2009, the CWSI was no longer operating. I don't know exactly when it closed, but the cause was a lack of funds.

However, the Israeli animal-rescue organisation Hakol CHAI continues to work for animals in distress, and did sterling work helping abandoned animals during and following the Israeli conflict with Hezbollah in 2006. See also the CHAI [home page](#) (English version; also available in Hebrew and Arabic from menu links; *archived copy*).
(I think the organisation was no longer operating by 2025.)

Also in 2006 a number of abandoned cats and dogs, 150 of each, were [flown to the USA](#) (Sept. 2006 –*copy link to Edge*) for rehabilitation and rehoming, under an agreement between the humane society Beirut for the Ethical Treatment of Animals ([BETA](#)) and America's largest refuge for abused and abandoned animals, the [Best Friends](#) animal sanctuary based at Kanab, Utah. This was part of the 'Paws for Peace' programme.

It's heartening to learn that there are such organisations dedicated to animals caught up in human wars through no fault of their own.

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See also: <https://www.facebook.com/PawsOfWar> and <https://pawsofwar.org/> (although bthey seem to be mostly concerned with dogs0.

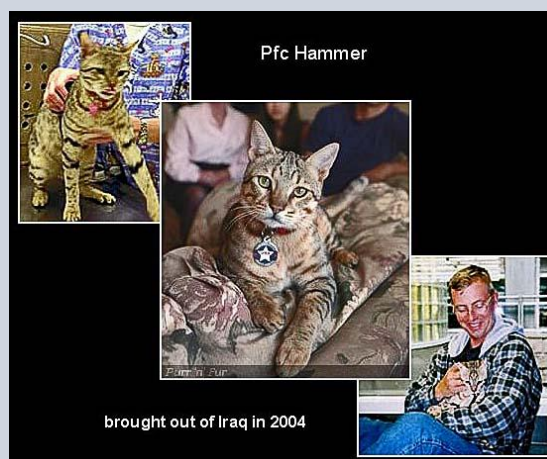
Iraq cats

(1) Daniel Kemp tells the story of a cat he met when serving in Iraq

'The cat was a permanent fixture in the ammunition holding area, which also kept him safe from higher-ranking officers. No one ever wanted to go back around the ammo bunkers looking for unauthorised pets. He lived there for a few months, then the brigade maintenance officer took him in for the second half of the deployment. When we were rotating out, I found the little guy a happy home with the camp manager (a private contractor) who was also a cat person. Good, friendly cats were a combat-multiplier over there and he was well taken care of in return for his mousing and companionship duties. Besides, I already had three back in the States.'

(2) Pfc Hammer gets a new home

In 2004, when the Iraq war was at its height, an American unit called the Hammers befriended a kitten born at their site; he played with them, kept their quarters rodent-free and acted as a significant morale booster. When the time came for the unit to leave, Staff Sergeant Bousfield didn't want to leave the cat behind, as he was regarded as one of their team. With the help of the American organisation [Alley Cat Allies](#) the leggy Egyptian Mau, by then known as **Private First Class Hammer**, was taken to Kuwait and put on a flight to San Francisco. From there he was flown first-class to Colorado Springs, where he was met by Rick Bousfield to start a quite different and mortar-free life with the Bousfield family and their various animals. See the full story [here](#) (April 2004 – *archived copy*) and photo below. Sadly it seems Pfc Hammer died in about 2016. [NBC News](#) (July 2004)+

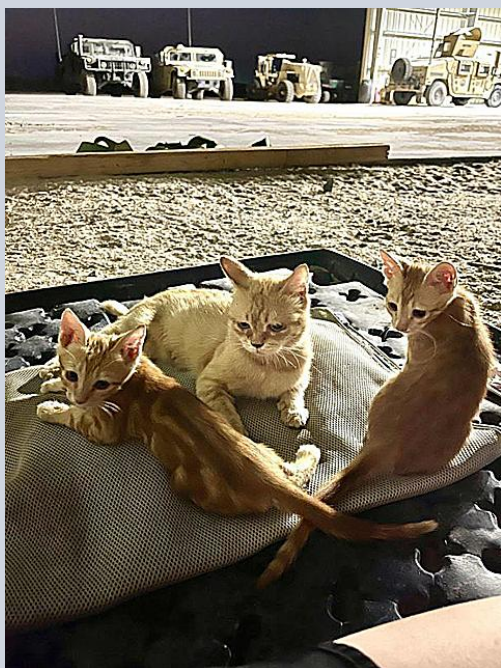


(3) Sergeant Whiskers

Six weeks into her tour of duty in the Middle East in 2008, Sgt Kelsey came across a beautiful ginger cat who was, though, in poor shape. She was malnourished, had wounds on her eyes and nose and a broken tail. She needed help; so patiently Sgt Kelsey worked to gain her trust, and to nurse her back to health. She named her **Sergeant Whiskers**.



The mama cat then decided it was safe to introduce her two kittens, who were still nursing and which she'd hidden near the base but away from humans. The little family was a great comfort to Kelsey in the very harsh conditions she worked under – and she decided they needed a proper home and she would try to have them returned to the USA with her when she was due to return herself.



Sgt Kelsey contacted [Guardians of Rescue](#), a New York-based non-profit organisation dedicated to relocating animals to safe homes. They were happy to help, and so eventually – although it isn't stated in the source article – I think all three cats were brought back to Sgt Kelsey's home state.



(4) Tabby

Very little information here, but in early 2025 it was reported on the Paws of War Facebook page that a little cat, now named **Tabby**, was born into a harsh environment in Iraq, but captured the heart of a US soldier serving there, who determined to take her back to the United States. Paws at War helped with the expense and the complicated requirements to ensure that she was healthy and fit to travel and to enter the US – and she arrived there safely and was being looked after by the soldier's sister until the latter returned from her tour of duty.



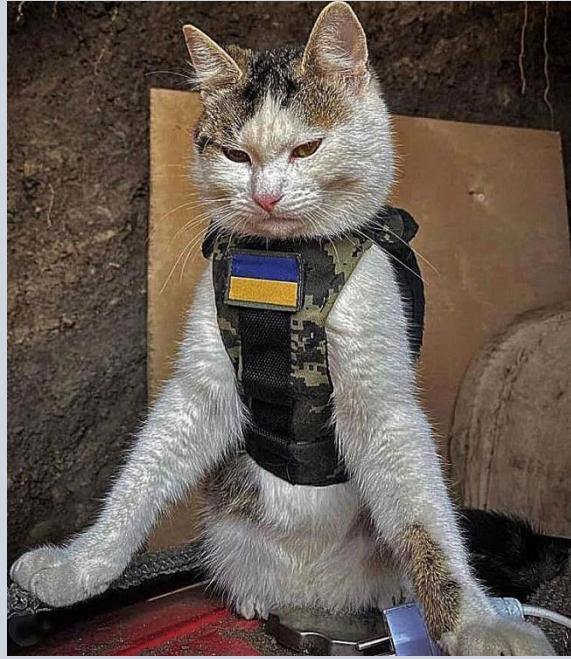
[Nine thousand years](#) (April 2023 – archived copy) | [Cole & Marmalade](#) | [Bored Panda](#) (both Sept. 2021)

Note: For details of various cats rescued from Afghanistan see [Featuring / Escapes & Rescues 7](#).

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Shayba, Ukraine cat

There have been a number of cats reported as being rescued during this horrifying war and being adopted or looked after by soldiers, but one who has become more well-known is **Shaybe** (or Puck, as he's sometimes called).



It was not long after the start of the war, in October 2022, that a platoon of Ukrainian soldiers serving on the southern front, in the Odesa region, went to a village for supplies. They found there, abandoned at a shop entrance, a little group of kittens. They couldn't leave them there, and one in particular who'd been on his own in a cardboard box, caught the eye of Oleksandr Liashuk. The pair quickly bonded when they were back with their unit and, now named Shayba, the kitten grew up among the troops.

As he matured he kept mice away from the soldiers' gear, but probably more importantly provided companionship and emotional support during the harsh realities of war. To make him fully part of the team, Oleksandr made him a miniature uniform, complete with camouflage and Ukrainian insignia, and the cat 'patrols' on his shoulder.



Oleksandr (or 'Alex') began sharing details and photos of his life with Shayba on social media, where they have become well-known. Alex has used their fame to raise funds for various humanitarian causes, including an organisation that helps injured soldiers, a veterinary service that rescues and rehabilitates animals from combat zones, and he's even been able to fund vehicles and equipment for his military unit.

In late July 2026 Shayba had his fourth birthday, with a special celebration; see this [Facebook](#) page. He has his own [Instagram](#) account – and has even met President Zelensky!

[UIA Postcards](#) (undated) | [Animal Wellness](#) (March 2025)

Note: For details of various cats rescued from Afghanistan see [Featuring / Escapes & Rescues 7](#).

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War in the Air

As would be expected, cats were nothing like as commonly found on aircraft as on ships, but there were a few exceptions; and there were those that lived at air bases.

▣ This delightful kitten (*below left*) was called **Aircrew** and was the WW2 mascot of the flying training school at Cressy, in Victoria, Australia. Image: [Australian War Memorial](#)



Aircrew
Mascot of RAAF
flying training school
Cressy
Victoria, Australia
March 1943
Image:
Australian War Memorial



Bundle of station kittens
RAAF flying training school, Cressy, Victoria, Australia
March 1943

▣ Six kittens were airbase residents at Cressy, shown (*above right*) in March 1943 with three sergeant-pilots of the Royal Australian Air Force relaxing between flights. Image: [Australian War Memorial](#)

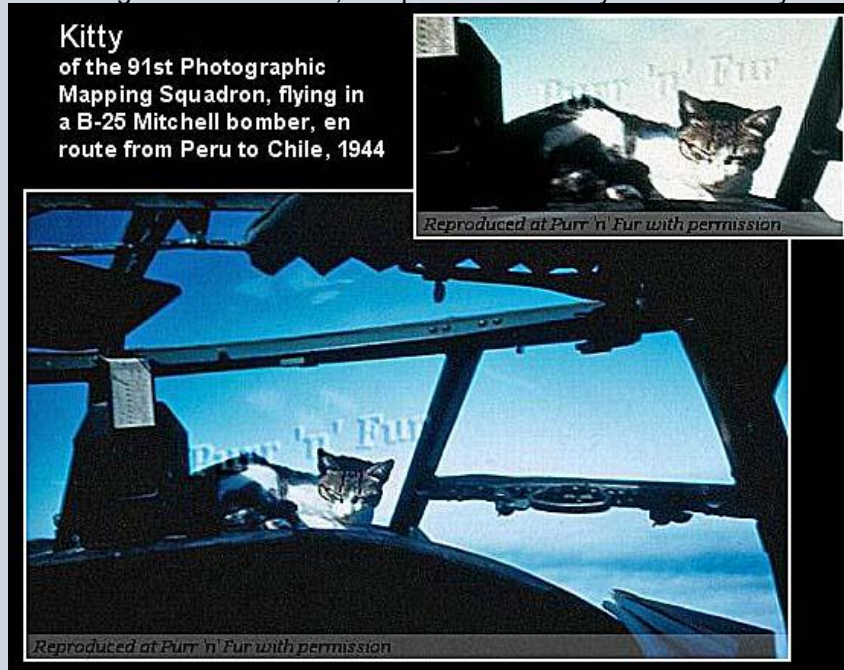
▣ **Jinx** (*below*) was wartime mascot at a Texas base for training heavy-bombardment crews. She didn't see any action, but was a real 'flying cat', chalking up plenty of hours in the air.



Jinx
from a Texas
training base
for heavy-bombardment
crews in WW2

▣ This astonishing photo (*below*), kindly sent by Kent Jeffrey, shows a cat in the cockpit of an American B-25 Mitchell bomber belonging to the 91st Photographic Mapping Squadron, part of the 311th Photographic Wing which operated throughout Central and South America. It dates from 1944 and is likely to be the only known photo of a cat in the cockpit of a military aircraft during flight in wartime. The calico kitten was, unsurprisingly, called **Kitty**, and the photo was taken by pilot Ole Griffith. The circumstances were a move from one base to another, when it was not wished to leave the cat behind — although it was against regulations to fly animals on the planes. Later the picture was published in a magazine and a couple of books, but Ole remarked that he was saved from disciplinary action by the Statute of Limitations (generally 5 years)!

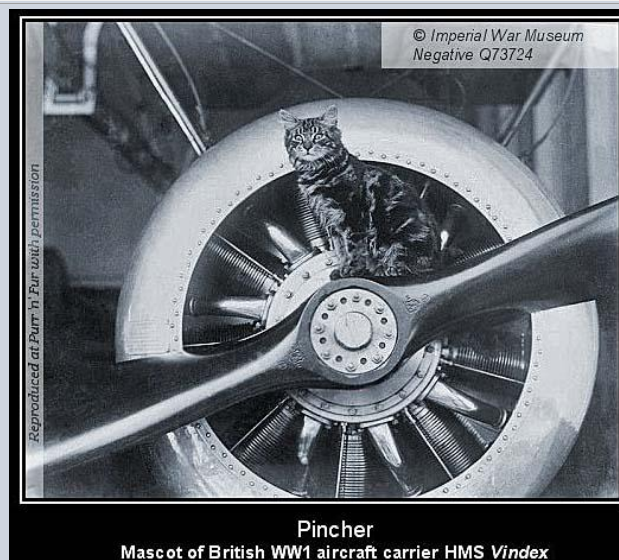
Image © Ole C Griffith, and provided courtesy of Kent Jeffrey



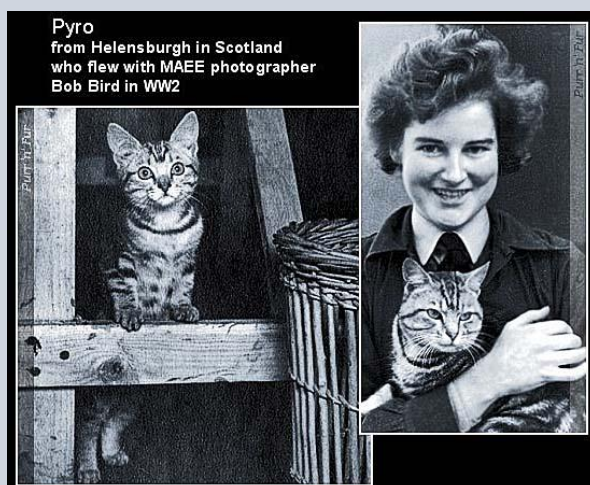
▣ There was a report of a grey tabby kitten called **Tiger**, from New Hampshire, who was the mascot of a US pilot based in Brazil and accompanied him on all his flying missions, but it's unconfirmed. See [this link](#) (Sept. 2012).

▣ **Pincher** was the WW1 mascot of HMS *Vindex*, which was one of Britain's first aircraft carriers. He is seen here sitting on the propeller of one of the seaplanes the ship carried, which is the reason for his entry being here in the Air section as well as on the separate 'War at Sea' page.

Image © [Imperial War Museum](#), London



Pyro (*brlow*) was a tabby kitten found in 1942 at the Marine Aircraft Experimental Establishment ([MAEE](#)) in Helensburgh, Scotland, by Liverpool-born military photographer Bob Bird. The cat was looking for a warm place to stay in the darkroom, and Bird decided to adopt him after accidentally trapping his tail in a door and having to take the animal to the base's medical officer for treatment. He was named Pyro from the photographic developing chemical pyrocatechol.



After that Pyro would hang around the base waiting for Bob to return from his flying missions: but Bird noticed that the cat was miserable when left alone, so he began carrying him in his flight jacket. Bird's son Robin said, 'Pyro used to love to fly. He wasn't scared at all. My mother told me that Bob would whistle when he was going flying and Pyro would come running.' He said Pyro earned his wings one winter's day in early 1943 when, flying at 20,000 ft (nearly 7000 metres), ice covered the plane his father was flying in. The photographer took off his glove to change a camera lens and started to get severe frostbite in his fingers, but was able to use the heat from the cat in his jacket to warm his hands. After a two-week stay in hospital recovering, he was told by doctors the cat had saved his fingers.

The pair continued their partnership throughout the rest of the war, and the aircrews believed that Pyro kept them safe during the flights. 'Those missions were very dangerous and a lot of crews died,' said Robin, 'so they were very superstitious and Pyro was very important for morale.'

In 1945 photographer Bob was transferred to RAF Beaulieu in Hampshire. He took Pyro with him, but the tale ended in tragedy when he returned to base one day to find that Pyro, who was by then fully grown and too big to fly, had been hit by a truck and killed while waiting for him to return. Robin Bird added: 'My dad used to talk about Pyro all the time. He had a really strong affection for him and he was devastated when he got killed.'



In 2011 Pyro's wartime exploits were honoured by the award of a special posthumous commendation (*photo above*) from the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals charity (the PDSA). The presentation took place during a Remembrance Day edition of the BBC's *Antiques Roadshow* broadcast in November 2011, when Robin told his father and Pyro's story and a photo was shown of the pair together. [A clip is available](#) at the programme's website. The citation for Pyro on the certificate reads: *For providing comfort and moral support to his master and RAF crews flying secret operations during WWII.*

▣ **Salty** (*below*) was a US Coast Guard mascot and became the first cat to take part in a rescue mission when she stowed away, with her kitten, on an amphibian reconnaissance plane just before it took off to effect the rescue of a pilot who had come down at sea. She was based at the San Diego Coast Guard Air Station in California.



Salty and kitten
based at the San Diego Coast Guard Air Station, California - WW2

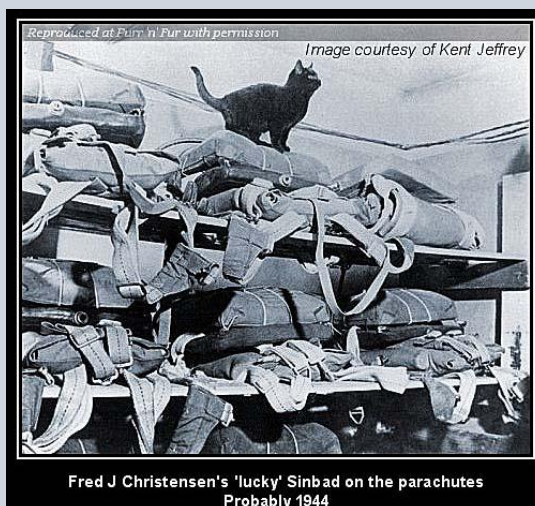
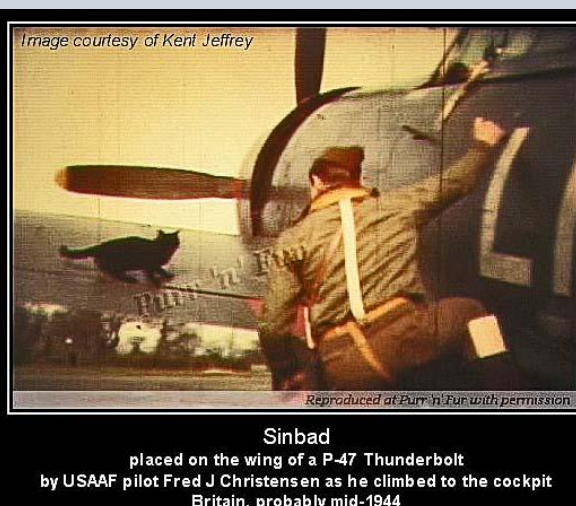
▣ [Colonel Fred J Christensen](#) was an American World War 2 flying ace, thought to be the last surviving one until he died in April 2006. He flew P-47 Thunderbolts with the 56th Fighter Group, known as [the Wolfpack](#), and is credited with shooting down 22.5 German warplanes, including an amazing six in just a few minutes of one day in 1944. From early in 1943 the Wolfpack was based in Britain.



P-47 Thunderbolt pilot Fred J Christensen, 56th Fighter Group
based in Britain, pictured in a Spitfire with
Sinbad
probably in 1944

Christensen attributed much of his good luck to a small black kitten (*above*) he had found and adopted while in Britain; he called it **Sinbad** and it flew in the cockpit with him on many of his missions — not at high altitude, which could have harmed it, but the Thunderbolt in any case flew mostly on lower-altitude ground support sorties. One of the colonel's daughters, Diane Haagensen, said that seeing her father return safe and sound, complete with Sinbad, was a great help in motivating other pilots.

On one occasion a war correspondent and photographer visited the base to do a feature on the Wolfpack, and of course wanted a picture of Sinbad — but the cat played hard to get and kept leaping around and cavorting among the stack of parachutes! Eventually a photo was obtained (*below left*) and it's reported that all the pilots whose parachutes Sinbad touched that day returned safely, many with victories to their credit. Naturally this increased the cat's prestige and reputation for being lucky.



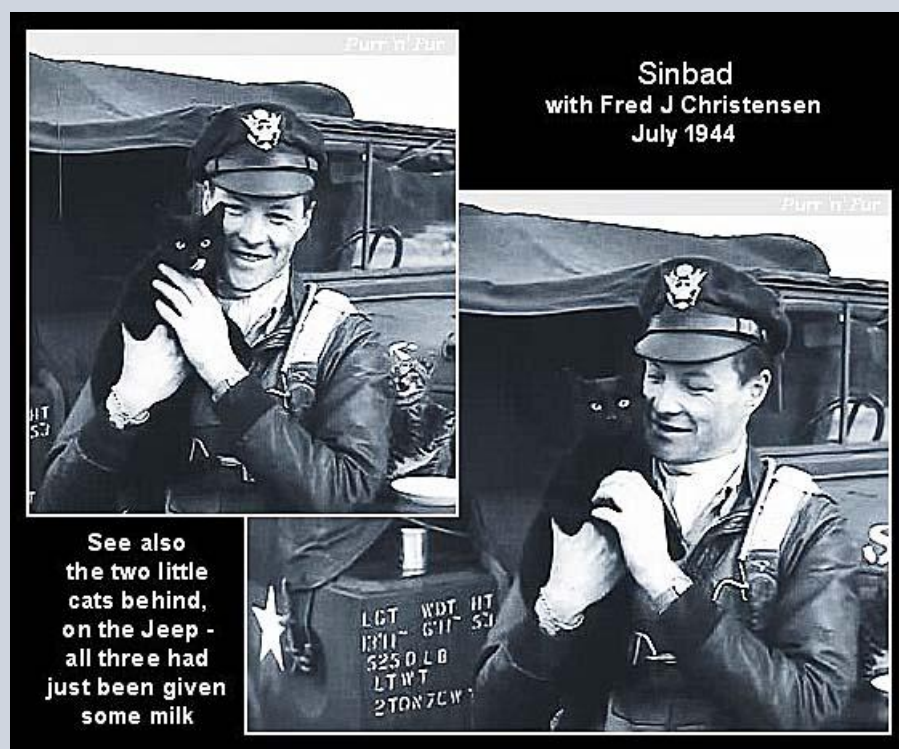
Sinbad survived the flying unscathed and in September 1944 returned with Christensen to the United States, when his tour of duty ended, to live with his family — and surprised them all by producing kittens! Sinbad had been a female all along, and went on to have several litters of youngsters. Sadly, as with all too many cats, and having survived the perils of WW2 flying, she was killed by a car in the early 1950s.

The photo of Sinbad and Fred Christensen in the aircraft cockpit was taken in a Spitfire, not a Thunderbolt. The reason isn't clear, but the 56th did use Spitfires for training although not for combat missions. Maybe it was considered appropriate that a British kitten was photographed in a British plane. The colour image above is from a short sequence taken with Christensen's own home-movie camera.

British Pathé has a clip taken in July 1944 during the Wolfpack's time in Britain, about a week after Christensen had downed six planes in minutes. It seems likely to have been 'staged' footage following this notable achievement, and shows a black cat, who it's assumed must be Sinbad, being held affectionately by Christensen. This would have been not too long before the pair returned to the US in September 1944.

[Pathé Clip](#) | [Boston Globe](#) (April 2006) | [New York Times](#) (April 2006) | [Ace Pilots](#) (July 2011) | [Veteran Tributes](#) (*undated – archived copy*)

Warm thanks to Kent Jeffrey for supplying information and images.



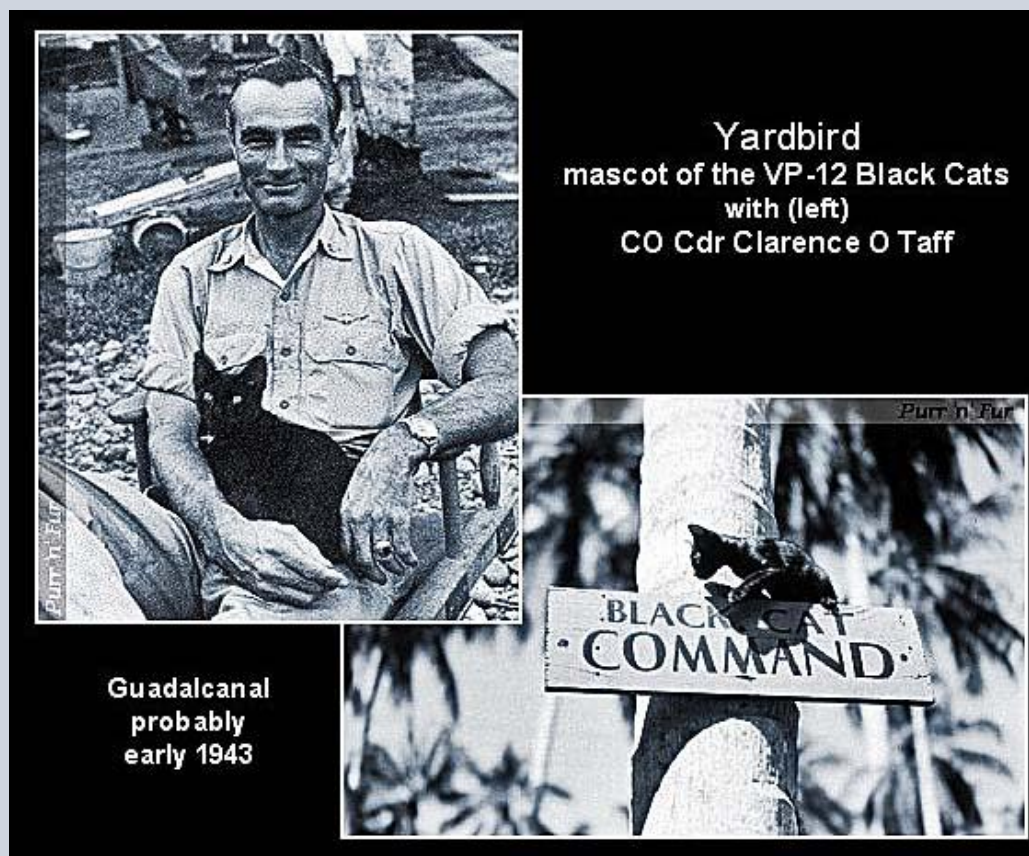
During WW2 a German bomber was shot down near Newport, in South Wales, and was found to have a cat on board. He became the first feline prisoner of war when he was taken to an animal shelter in the area, run by Our Dumb Friends' League (later part of the PDSA). He was named **Tiger**, and initially was said to 'show several German characteristics' (not enlarged upon). After living in the League's care for a while, he apparently became 'a docile, well-mannered and well-behaved cat'.

As well as his well-known black Labrador dog Nigger, Wing Commander Guy Gibson, of Bomber Command and Dambusters fame, had a cat named **Windy** that apparently accompanied him on many of his hazardous wartime missions. He was described as 'an all-swimming, all-flying cat, who put in more flying hours than most cats'.

VP-12 Squadron commanding officer Commander Clarence Orville Taff is shown with

the black cat mascot **Yardbird** (*photo below*). VP-12 was the original Black Cat Squadron, which flew Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boats on reconnaissance missions from December 1942 to February 1945 and was based at Guadalcanal. The planes were painted black for night work, hence their name.

Several more images of Yardbird can be seen at David Hanson's photo gallery for the [Black Cats](#).



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