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Real-life War Horse who led the charge into legend as icon of courage under fire



As Michael Morpurgo's novel becomes a film, racing journalist Brough Scott tells Tom Richmond the true story of a real War Horse.

IT was a momentary pause that illustrated the bravery of Warrior, the most fortuitous survivor of World War One and who became known as “the horse that the Germans could not kill”. As General Jack Seely prepared to lead one of the Great War’s last cavalry charges against the German enemy, at Moreuil Wood, France, on Holy Saturday, 1918, he instinctively looked round to give his final orders. “I turned in my saddle and told my comrades that the faster we galloped the more certain we were of success,” Seely, a close colleague of Sir Winston Churchill, later wrote of the battle that took place in the shadows of Amiens. “That I would tell the infantry to redouble their fire as we passed through them, and that the day was ours. But I could hardly finish my sentence before Warrior again took charge. He was determined to go forward, and with a great leap started off. All sensation of fear had vanished from him as he galloped on at racing speed. He bounded into the air as we passed our infantry, and I remember shouting to a young infantry officer just on my left, ‘Fire as fast as you can’.” Three days earlier, Warrior had emerged unscathed from his overnight stable that had been shelled by the Germans. His survival astonished his owner as he surveyed the wreckage. A day after this imposing bay gelding led the 1,000 horses of the Canadian Cavalry, Warrior trod on a flint stone and was rested on humane grounds. In a twist of fate and irony that

“Warrior again took charge. All sensation of fear had vanished as he galloped on at racing speed.

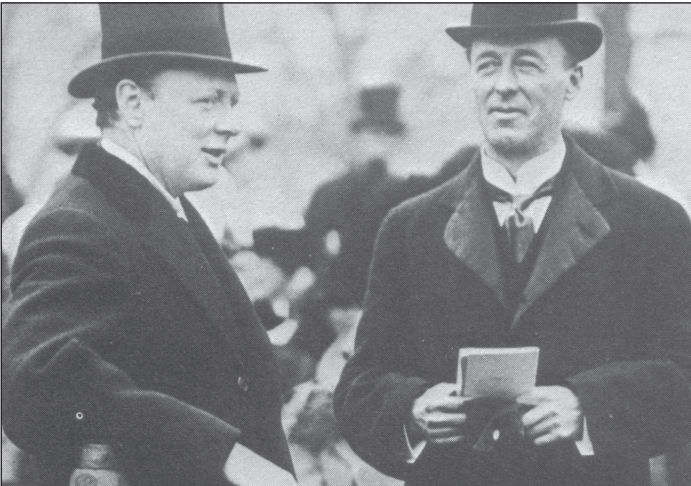
was symptomatic of a horse who epitomised his name like no other, General Seely’s replacement was killed by the enemy – and the rider gassed. Their war was over. It is why Brough Scott, one of the voices of horse racing – and also General Seely’s grandson – does not hesitate in placing Warrior on an even greater pedestal to that occupied by the likes of Red Rum, Aldaniti and the unbeaten Frankel, Sir Henry Cecil’s unbeaten wonder-colt. It is a story faithfully retold by Mr Scott, who has now edited and republished his grandfather’s account of Warrior’s life, as the children’s author Michael Morpurgo’s fictional story *War Horse*, becomes a hit stage show in London, and which Steven Spielberg is now adapting into a film already being tipped for Oscar honours next year. Yet, while *War Horse* is an epic tale of loyalty, hope and tenacity, one horse’s relationship with a young stable hand, *Warrior* is a true story about a horse that went to war – and returned to these shores as a hero. While eight million horses, donkeys and mules perished, this was a thoroughbred that defied the odds – and the German bullets. “I have always believed that Warrior was the greatest horse that ever lived and the arrival of all the *War Horse* film interest has given me the chance to show the world why,” said Mr Scott, a leading luminary with the Injured Jockeys’ Fund that is finalising plans for a rehabilitation centre in Malton. “In many ways, the real life Warrior is socially the



THE ANIMALS OF WAR: Above, *War Horse* performed at the National Theatre; left, British troops and horses march in the muddy conditions in the closing stages of the Battle of Somme in 1916; right, General Jack Seely meeting Sir Winston Churchill.

complete opposite of Michael Morpurgo’s fictional Joey, the star of *War Horse*. Joey is the farmboy’s friend who is bought at market, conscripted into the Army, is lost and battered through terrible ordeals on the Western Front before a triumphantly happy ending. Warrior is the charger my grandfather bred and rode himself for over 30 years, including through all the major battlefields of the Western Front. “He was an equine hero who had grooms and batmen to look after him and whose other riders, then and later, included judges, Field Marshals, jockeys and even my mother when her arms were feeling strong. Very different

worlds and yet their single most attractive quality is one that is equally shared. It is the simple, unspoken, uncomplaining nobility of the horse from which men and women have drawn such inspiration down the ages. “Warrior may have been at the head of the column, but that only made him more of a target. He may sometimes have had a roof over his head rather than the open sky, but it remains a miracle how he survived all four years of the war form Ypres, to the Somme, Passchendaele, and Cambrai before finally himself leading a cavalry charge which, crucially, checked the great German offensive on the spring of 1918.”



Four years later, and Warrior was winning a point-to-point race on the Isle of Wight where the Seely family lived. Could he have made a racehorse and Frankel, the Classic-winning colt at the heart of Mr Scott’s forthcoming book on his trainer Sir Henry Cecil, made a cavalry charger? “Warrior had a 50 per cent strike rate - but I think the number of runners was pretty low. Frankel, he may have been first into battle, but would he have stopped and obeyed orders?” As well as being a story about one man’s war with his faithful four-legged servant, the book also reveals the General’s friendship with the equine artist Sir Alfred

Munnings whose drawings illustrate *Warrior: The Amazing Story Of A Real War Horse*. The artist went to the front line to paint a striking picture of this fearless animal with a prominent white star on his head. General Seely had bred the horse himself, ridden him in the sea – the sound of the waves cashing against the horse’s hooves preparing for the horrors ahead. He was once interrupted at the War Office, where he was War Minister, with a letter from “Young Jim” – the stablehand tasked with looking after the horse when his owner was in London. “The problem was whether to train Warrior as a racehorse or as

a charger,” the General wrote in his post-war book that Mr Scott has now edited with the backing of Sir Peter O’Sullivan, the Voice of Racing, whose father served alongside the author’s ancestor. “Young Jim pleaded that he might be a racehorse, for he had discovered Warrior’s remarkable turn of speed. I said: ‘No, if he is constantly racing, he will never be the perfect charger; even his kindly nature will not stand the restraint of military exercises after the thrilling contests of the racecourse.” This, says Mr Scott, is key – Warrior’s temperament meant that he did not flinch when a horse next to him was shot dead. “We will never send horses to a war again, but a horse remains a symbol of bravery,” he told the *Yorkshire Post*. “The horse that you see standing at football grounds or on the streets of London during the riots, they are great creatures. Perhaps my favourite picture of all is of my grandfather, at the age of 70, riding Warrior in 1938 who was 30 – their combined age was 100. Can anyone better that?” “What I do know, even with Frankel, is that it is very easy for the public to get hooked on a horse. It is a very physical, visual connection that draws them in. You can imagine why the Canadians, on the front line, did not say ‘here goes the General’, but ‘here comes good old Warrior’. This was a horse who did not cower when shells were being fired around him, when his stable was collapsing, when he was being pulled from

“The soul of a horse is a great and loyal soul, quite unspoiled by the chances and changes of human kind.

the mud in Passchendaele, when a horse next to him in a field was being blown up. It is wonderful to overcome that. How many horses have their own obituary in a national newspaper. The *Evening Standard*’s report in 1941 was headlined ‘Horse the Germans could not kill’. It said it all.” As Mr Scott talks, his sport – horse racing – was in turmoil over rules governing the use of the whip. Yet, while racing could not be further removed from the sorrow and bloodshed of the Great War, he notes General Seely’s opinion on why Warrior was such a faithful servant, and what he might have made over the whip furore. “I am persuaded that the real reason why he has this impressed his personality and character upon all those who have been brought into contact with him, in peace and in war, is the fact that he has never been ill-treated, never badly used, never beaten when he was doing his best,” noted the General as he recalled his “intimate friendship” with Warrior. “The soul of a horse is a great and loyal soul, quite unspoiled by the chances and changes of human kind.” It is why proceeds of Mr Scott’s book will go towards a memorial, on the Isle of Wight, to Warrior – a horse who was ultimately put down in the Second World War because of food shortages. “Warrior was not just one of the most magnificent creatures of all time – but he was the bravest horse of all time,” Mr Scott added. Few would disagree. tom.richmond@ypn.co.uk

WARRIOR'S WAR RECORD

- 1908: Born at Yafford, Isle of Wight.
- 1914: Lands at Le Havre to join Allies on Western Front.
- 1916: Involved in Battle of Somme.
- 1917: Cavalry attack at Guynecourt; stuck in mud at Paschendaele.
- 1918: Alfred Munnings paints the legendary horse; Warrior leads charge at Moreuil Wood.
- 1922: Wins point to point race on Isle of Wight.
- 1941: Warrior put down because of World War Two food shortages.
- *Warrior: The Amazing Story of a Real War Horse* is published by Racing Post Books, price £14.99. To order call the Yorkshire Post Bookshop on 0800 0153232 or online at www.yorkshirepostbookshop.co.uk

Britain's vital race to recruit thousands of female engineers

Girls may no longer be forced to do home economics and needlework, but most still think science is dull. Sarah Freeman reports.

LAST year some 5.5 million people were employed in engineering. Only a tiny fraction of them were women. In fact the figure hovers around one in 10 – the lowest proportion across the whole of the European Union and the reason for the lack of interest is simple. Teenage girls in Britain think a career in engineering will be dull, far too technical and crucially that when you compare it to becoming a lawyer or an accountant it doesn't pay well. While most other industries have achieved greater equality between the sexes, engineering has struggled to shrug off its white, male-dominated image and according to those now trying to redress the balance that comes with a cost.

The UKRC, set up to champion the importance of women in science, puts the loss to the UK economy as a result of female engineers and scientists either being vastly over qualified for the positions in which they work or not employed in the field at all at £2bn. “Girls understand what doctors and vets and pharmacists are so they can see themselves in these roles,” says Terry Marsh, a former director of the Women into Science and Engineering campaign. “What we need are for engineers who can emotionally engage with students at the same times as explaining their career path and decisions. Only then might we have a hope of counteracting the negative

whispering that surrounds the word engineer, which is particularly potent for girls. In the past television has made forensic science attractive and if the mainstream media could start doing the same for engineers we might start to see an increase in those entering the field.” There are exceptions. Like Katy Deacon, an energy engineer with Kirklees Council. Previously named Young Woman Engineer of the Year, Katy has also leant her support to open up the field to more females. “Taking someone’s problem and creating a solution – that’s what I get a buzz from,” she said. “I help spearhead the council’s drive to improve energy efficiency in buildings and make a greater use

of renewable energy. The work is always interesting and helps improve the way we live.” However, UKRC along with groups like Talent 2030, which has come up with an 18-year plan to increase the number of female engineering graduates, are now stepping up the campaign. One of the main criticisms has been that schools don't encourage enough students and in particular girls, to continue maths and physics until they are 18. In 2009, of those who achieved a grade A in physics at GCSE, 93 per cent dropped the subject. “Unless the UK is developing thousands of female engineers by 2030, it could well drift downwards in the advanced manufacturing and engineering

league table,” says a spokesman for Talent 2030. “A nation is only as good as its talent. This was as true in the first Industrial Revolution as it will be in the next and how a nation’s education system nurtures, develops and rounds out talent will be a mark of its economic success. “The manufacturing and engineering intake of 2030 are being born now and the management teams who will be waiting to recruit them are just starting university. “The intervening period will pass in a blink of an eye, but if we don’t start laying the foundations for highly successful, globally competitive businesses now, we could be left behind forever.” sarah.freeman@ypn.co.uk



TOP JOB: Katy Deacon from Cleckheaton, a former Young Woman Engineer of the Year.