

The horse who became a war hero

Peter Davies

First published in 1934 as *My Horse Warrior*, this life of one of the most remarkable of warfare's steeds, which was ridden throughout the First World War by its owner General Jack Seely and on occasion by Sir John French, has been reissued as *Warrior: the Amazing Story of a real War Horse*.

This new edition of *Warrior* is illustrated with pencil sketches by Sir Alfred Munnings and has an introduction and epilogue by the racing journalist Brough Scott, who is Seely's grandson, and a foreword by the longtime doyen of television racing commentators, Sir Peter O'Sullivan. In this form it takes us from its protagonist's birth in 1908 on the Isle of White through his four years in action on the Western Front, to his retirement and death in 1941 at the age of 32.

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Alfred Munnings's portrait of General Seely and Warrior at the front, 1918

Seely, who had been at Harrow with Churchill and served in the Imperial Yeomanry in the Boer War, where he won the DSO, had, like Churchill been both a Conservative and Liberal MP and served in Asquith's Cabinet. He re-joined the Army as war with Germany

broke out, crossing the Channel to France and walking off the boat with Warrior at Le Havre in August 1914.

As a major-general he commanded the Canadian Cavalry, whose men described the intrepid Warrior as "the horse the Germans can't kill".

Surviving the Somme and Passchendaele, Warrior, with Seely on his back, led a cavalry charge at Moreuil Wood in March 1918 as the Germans launched their last great offensive on the Western Front.

Finally, at the end of a war in which more than eight million horses, mules and asses perished, Warrior embarked again for England at the end of 50 grueling months in harness. After participating in the various victory parades he was able to retire to Mottistone in the Isle of Wight, where he took part in point to points and was still being ridden in 1938.

When he began to fail in the spring of 1941, the extra care and special diet the old horse needed to keep him alive was deemed an extravagance at a time of severe wartime rationing. Seely regretfully allowed him to be destroyed.

The Times granted Warrior a graceful obituary on April 5, 1941. It began: "Warrior, Lord Mottistone's old charger, has died at Mottistone Manor in the Isle of Wight. His age was 32. The severe weather of the last two winters had affected his health..."

Warrior: the Amazing Story of a Real War Horse, by General Jack Seely, is published by the Racing Post Books (£14.99)