

War Memories across Canada Conversation Kit:

War Horses Bar U Ranch National Historic Site Longview, Alberta



GlenbowArchives NA-5262-6

Soldiers weren't the only ones who risked their lives on First World War battlefields. Thousands of Canadian horses also served the war effort. They transported men, hauled equipment and towed heavy guns and ambulances. The large solid draft horse, the Percheron, was well suited to the hard work of war. In addition to being strong they were sure-footed and easy to keep clean in muddy conditions.

Bar U Ranch, in southern Alberta, supplied many of the Percherons to the war effort. Work horses were sent to the battlefields of Europe and breeding stock from the Bar U Ranch allowed the British Army to establish their own Percheron war horses.

Discussion Questions:

Is it ethical to use animals in war? Why or why not? How would soldiers' lives have been impacted if the British Army had *not* used horses during the First World War?

Animals are still used by military forces today. How have the animals' roles changed? How has our appreciation and memorialization of military animals changed over time?

What is the best way to honour the animals that have helped humans in times of conflict?

Activities:

Visit a horse farm in your community. Compare these horses with the Percheron, in terms of size, temperament, strength and other characteristics. Would the horses at this farm have been suitable as war horses? Could they have had another role?

One way horses now serve humans is as therapy animals. Many communities have therapeutic riding associations or organizations that pair horses with persons with disabilities. If there is such an organization near you, consider volunteering to care for the horses, fundraise or help out at an event.

In Ottawa, visit the Animals in War Dedication. This set of sculptures and plaques, designed to honour the animals that have served alongside human military personnel, is located in Confederation Park.

Think of an animal that has helped you or your community. Create a memorial to that animal. Where will you place it? What will it be made of? What will it look like?



Bibliothèque et Archives Canada – Library and Archives Canada/PA-005001 (ca.1916)

Resources:

Websites

Bar U Ranch National Historic Site – Parks Canada
<http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/lhn-nhs/ab/baru/index.aspx>

Animals in War Dedication Project
<http://aiwdedication.ca/>

Animals at War – Imperial War Museum
<http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/animals-at-war>

Percheron Horse Association of America
<http://www.percheronhorse.org/origin/default.html>

Warrior: A Real War Horse
<http://www.warriorwarhorse.com/>
This site includes information about Warrior and the book about his battlefield experiences.

Videos

War Horse is a 2011 movie (by Steven Spielberg) based on the 1982 novel of the same name (by Michael Morpurgo).

War Horse is about a young man whose horse is sold to the army to serve in the First World War.

Companions In The Trenches - Animals of World War 1

A short documentary on The Great War YouTube channel (Mediakraft Networks, 2015).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wRN45tje2X0>

Books

Bunny the brave war horse : based on a true story, by Elizabeth MacLeod. Kids Can Press, 2014.

Bunny was a police horse who served during the First World War.

The animals' war: animals in wartime from the First World War to the present day, by Juliet Gardiner. Portrait, 2006.

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