

MILITARY MASCOTS

Text and Photos: James H. Hillestad

James H. Hillestad reflects on the unique and at times bizarre roles played by animals such as goats, sheep and elephants in British military history and traditions

Close-up of the USMC "Tuefel Hunden" by Martin Ritchie.



When stationed overseas, British soldiers often adopted an extraordinary menagerie of animals. Some of these remained pets, some rose to become regimental mascots and a few became recognized

as "official" mascots.

Official mascots are those recognized by the British Army Honours and Distinction Committee. Such mascots, of which there are nine, receive a regimental number, assume a proper rank (with prospects for promotion) and get a fair share of Army rations.

Some mascots are indicative of the recruiting area of a regiment. Examples include the Staffordshire bull terrier, Irish wolfhound and Welsh goats.

commanding officer of the regiment asked one of his soldiers whether he could try to rescue the animal. The soldier agreed and off he went, braving heavy gunfire.

Commemorating the successful deed, the ram received the Indian Mutiny medal, which is worn on a beautifully embroidered coat to this day. The 95th soldier's reward for rescuing the ram is unknown.



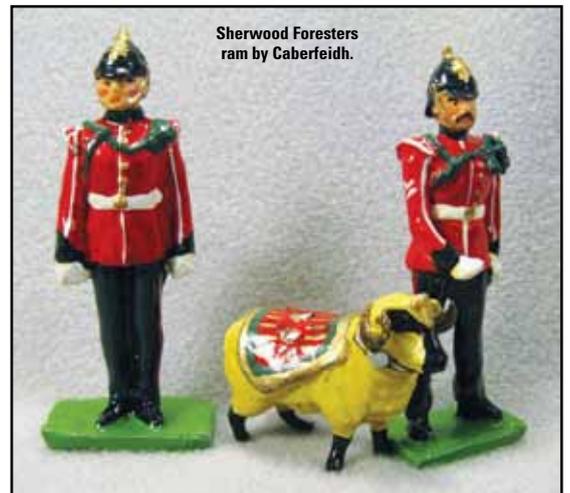
THE BEAR OF THE ROYAL HORSE GUARDS.

Cigarette card depicting "The Bear of the Royal Horse Guards."

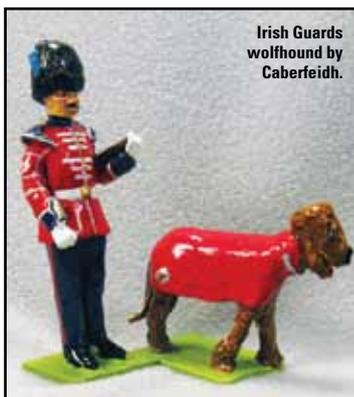
BUNKER HILL GOAT

The earliest record of a regimental mascot is a goat adopted by the Royal Welch Fusiliers during the American Revolutionary War. After wandering into the Battle of Bunker Hill during the 1775 Siege of Boston, the goat wound up leading the Fusiliers' Regimental Colours off the battlefield.

The mascot of the 95th Regiment (later the Sherwood Foresters) originated in the Indian Mutiny of 1857, when a ram had been tethered to a stake awaiting consumption by the mutineers. The



Sherwood Foresters ram by Caberfeidh.



Irish Guards wolfhound by Caberfeidh.



Royal Irish wolfhound by Caberfeidh.

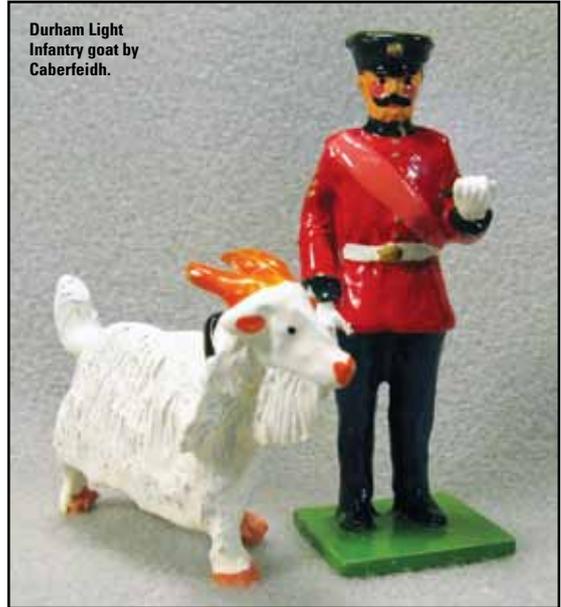


Royal Regiment of Wales goat by Caberfeidh.

Argyll and Sutherland
Highlanders pony by
Caberfeidh.



Durham Light
Infantry goat by
Caberfeidh.



SHETLAND PONIES

The Imperial Light Horse of South Africa have as their mascot "Queen's Hussar I." The black Shetland pony was given the name because of the late Queen Mother's special affection for the mascot and the Light Horse's regimental alliance with the 4th Queen's Own Hussars. A plume in regimental green and gold is fitted to the top of the pony's bridle.

The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were presented with a Shetland pony in 1929 by their Colonel-in-Chief, HRH the Princess Louise, Duchess of

Argyll. The horse's name was Cruachan, the war cry of the Campbells of Argyll.

Noteworthy was his green shabrack with yellow border -- the regimental colors. Cruachan was playful, though on one occasion he kicked a drum major. The offense was not taken quite as seriously as it might have been because the drum major was a Gordon Highlander.

The Parachute Regiment also took a Shetland pony as a mascot. It was named after Pegasus, the winged horse of Greek mythology.

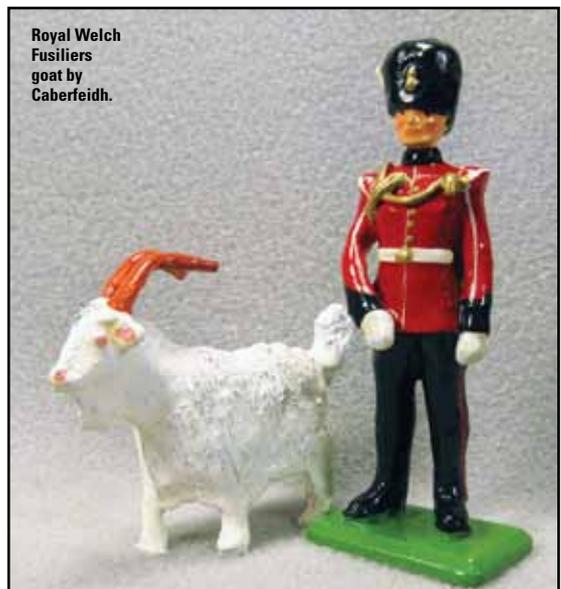
Imperial Light Horse
pony by Caberfeidh.



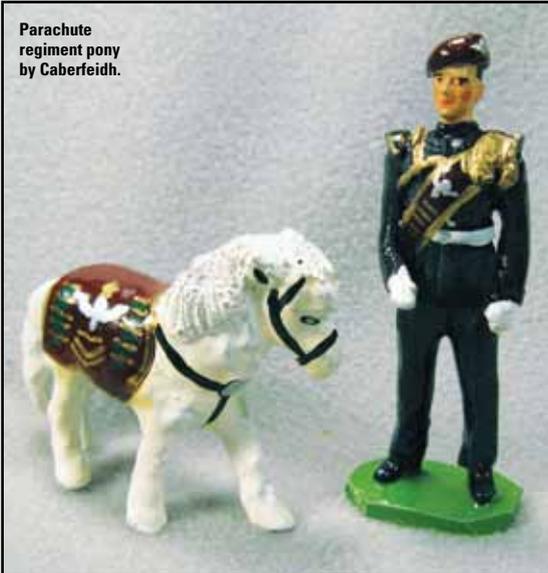
Argyll and Sutherland
Highlanders pony by
Drill Square.



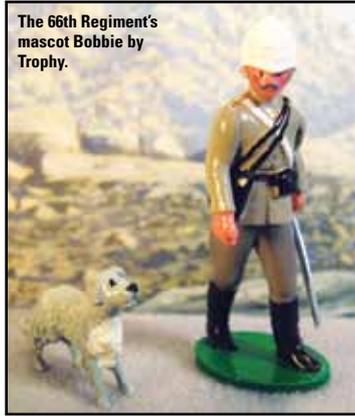
Royal Welch
Fusiliers
goat by
Caberfeidh.



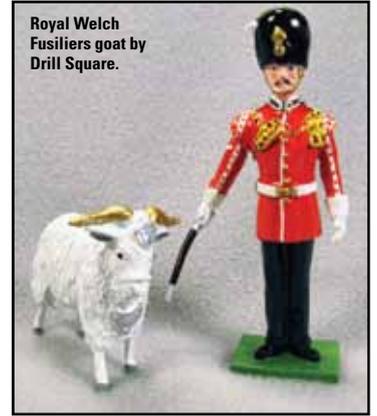
Parachute
regiment pony
by Caberfeidh.



The 66th Regiment's
mascot Bobbie by
Trophy.

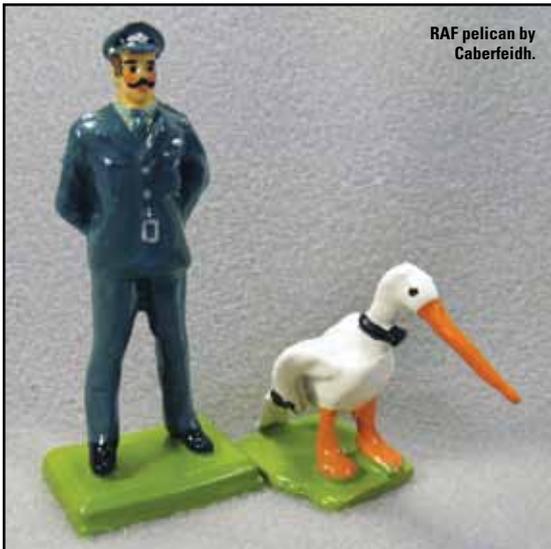


Royal Welch
Fusiliers goat by
Drill Square.



DON THE BABOON

Frederick, a South African pink-breasted pelican, was recruited into the Royal Air Force by members of the Central Flying School in 1971. He began in the rank of "Senior Under Pelican" and



RAF pelican by
Caberfeidh.

was later promoted to flight lieutenant.

When the 2nd Battalion, Middlesex Regiment, returned home from South Africa in February 1903, the soldiers brought with them a rather special mule named Jimson. He served with them through two wars, carrying ammunition under fire in India and South Africa.

Jimson was dressed out in a lemon-yellow shabrack (yellow being the color of the regiment's facings), edged with scarlet and bearing the Prince of Wales's feather crest. In addition, the mule was decorated with a red and white throat plume.

The Middlesex Regiment also brought back Don, a pet baboon.

ANTELOPE HALTS PARADE

Tradition has it that the Royal Warwickshire Regiment acquired the badge of an



Cigarette card portraying "Plassey, The Tiger Cub of the 102nd Royal Madras Fusiliers (Now 1st Battn., Royal Munster Fusiliers)."

U.S. MARINES' CHESTY BULLDOG

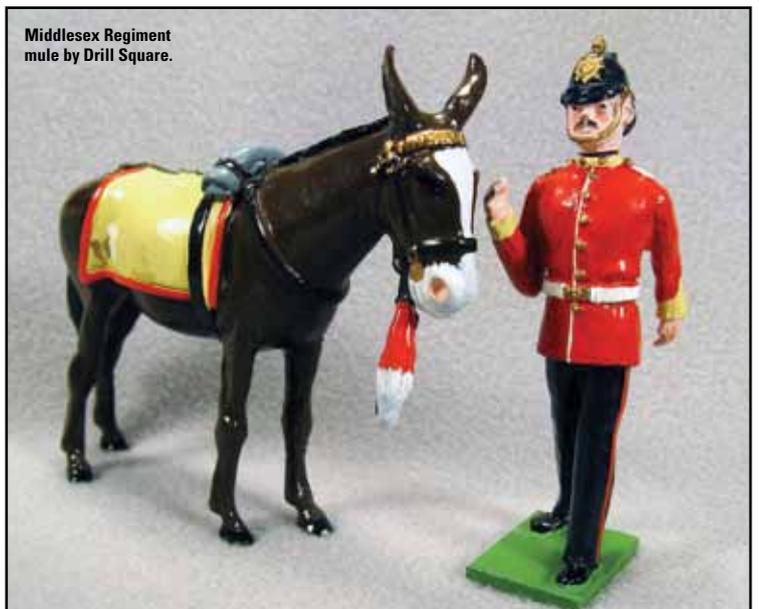
Not to be overlooked, the U.S. Armed Forces are also known for their mascots. Highly visible at parades and sports events are the mascots of the various service academies and the Marine Corps.

Since 1922, the USMC has used a bulldog as its mascot. Each has been named "Chesty" after the famous Marine Lt. Gen. Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller Jr. The dog lives at the Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C., where he appears in weekly parades.

The adoption of a bulldog as a mascot was inspired by the name "Devil Dogs" or "Teufel Hunden," given by the Germans to the Marines who fought so ferociously at Belleau Wood in World War I.

--James H. Hillestad

Middlesex Regiment
mule by Drill Square.





Dick the fox terrier of Rorke's Drift fame by Trophy.

“ When stationed overseas, British soldiers often adopted an extraordinary menagerie of animals. Some of these remained pets, some rose to become regimental mascots and a few became recognized as ‘official’ ” mascots.

antelope in 1707 during the War of the Spanish Succession. One of the standards captured from the Moors carried the antelope as its emblem.

The first live antelope dates from 1871 and was obtained when the regiment was stationed in India. The animal was named Billy. Since then, the mascots have been named variously Bobby and Charlie.

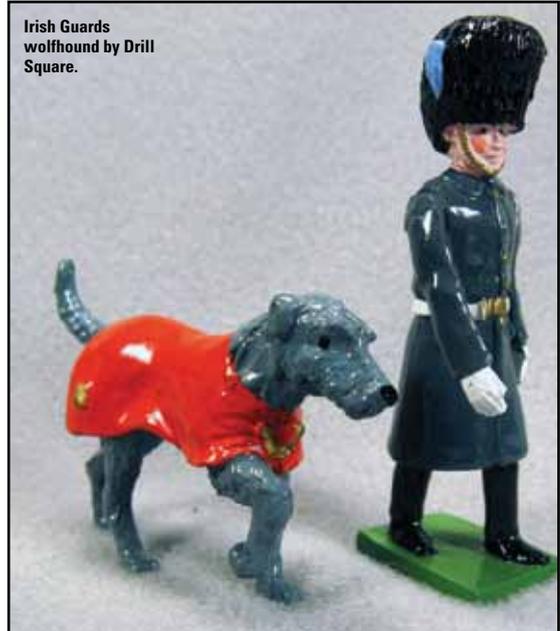
Though amenable to discipline, the antelopes have been known to have a mind of their own. At a military review in Aldershot, the then current mascot, Bobby, chose to lay down as he was being led past

King George V and proceeded to nibble the grass, thus halting the parade.

In 1968, the Royal Warwickshire Regiment was absorbed into the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, where the tradition of the antelope mascot carries on.

BOXER BOUNCES BACK

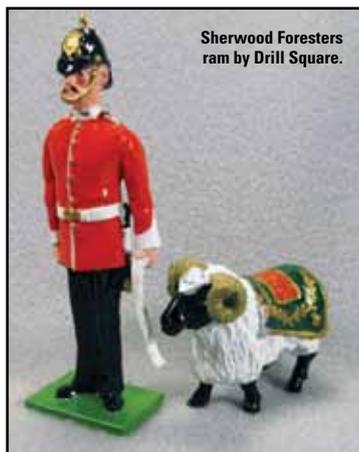
The mascot tradition in the regiments of Staffordshire reaches back to the 19th century, when the South Staffordshire Regiment was ordered to march with Lord Wolseley in an attempt to relieve Gen. Charles Gordon,



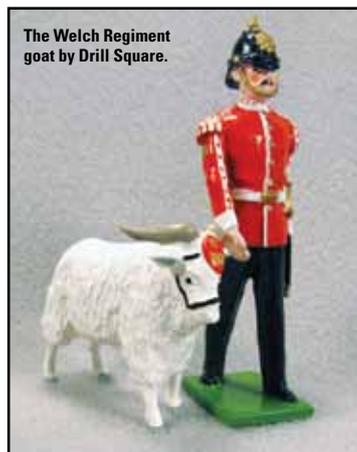
Irish Guards wolfhound by Drill Square.



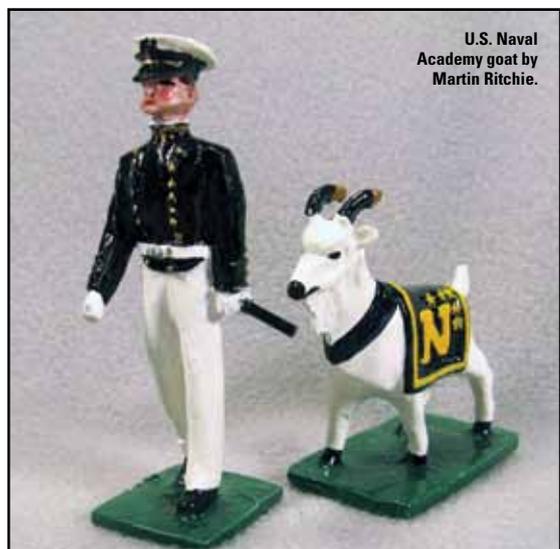
Canadian Irish wolfhound by Caberfeidh.



Sherwood Foresters ram by Drill Square.

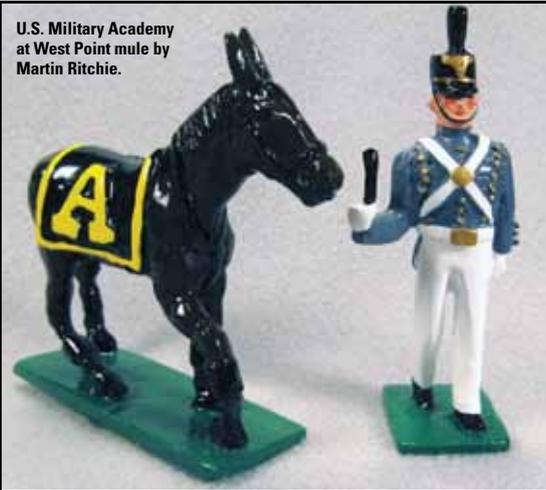


The Welch Regiment goat by Drill Square.

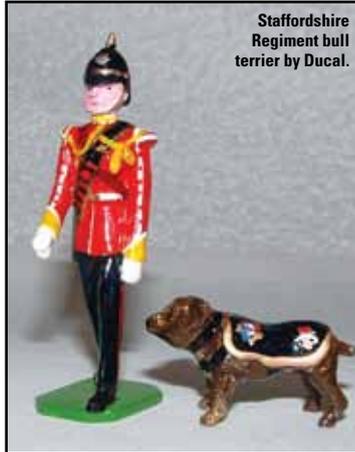


U.S. Naval Academy goat by Martin Ritchie.

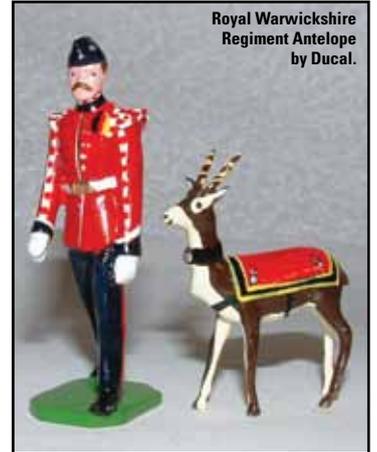
U.S. Military Academy at West Point mule by Martin Ritchie.



Staffordshire Regiment bull terrier by Ducaal.



Royal Warwickshire Regiment Antelope by Ducaal.



who was besieged by Mahdists in Khartoum, Sudan. The regiment entrained at Cairo with their Staffordshire bull terrier named Boxer.

Startled by the sudden noise of the locomotive's engine as it departed, Boxer leaped from the moving train. He was seen lying, presumed dead, at the side of the tracks.

A few days later, Boxer showed up at the regiment's encampment at Assiut -- very thin and bedraggled after having walked more than 200 miles along the railway tracks in the scorching heat. This feat marked the beginning of the tradition of having a bull terrier as regimental mascot.

MASCOT GETS DEMOTED

In a rare occurrence, a British military mascot was demoted in June 2006.

A 6-year-old goat named Billy was downgraded from the rank of lance corporal to fusilier -- the same status as a private.

A member of the Royal Welch Fusiliers, Billy became uncontrollable while on parade at a British base in Cyprus. In the presence of United Nations dignitaries, he darted from side to side, throwing the soldiers off their stride.

Capt. William Rose, who was present at the parade, said that the goat "was trying to head-butt the waist and nether regions of the drummers."

--James H. Hillestad

IRISH BRIAN BORU

In 1902, the Irish Wolfhound Club presented the Irish Guards with a prize dog for a regimental mascot. He was named Brian Boru, after the famous King of Ireland (926 to 1014).

During ceremonial parades the wolfhound always occupied a position at the head of the regiment, led by the smallest drummer boy.

To this day, the Irish Guards is the only regiment in the Household Division to have an "official" mascot.

LEGENDARY BOBBIE

Then there is the story of Bobbie, a mongrel from Reading who was the property of Lance Sgt. Peter Kelly of the 66th (Berkshire) Regiment.

Bobbie accompanied the 66th to Afghanistan in 1880 for service in the Second Anglo-Afghan War. After the disastrous Battle of Maiwand, in which the 66th suffered 62 percent casualties, Bobbie was lost during the survivors'

retreat. Nevertheless the spunky dog managed to trek some 50 miles from the scene of the defeat to the British lines in Kandahar, where he was reunited with his wounded owner and the regiment.

Bobbie returned with the 66th to England. Along with a group of soldiers receiving their Distinguished Conduct Orders, Bobbie was presented to Queen Victoria.

Sadly Bobbie was accidentally run over by a hansom cab and killed in Gosport about a year later. The dog was stuffed, decorated with an unknown soldier's Afghan War medal and put on display in the regimental museum in Salisbury.

RORKE'S DRIFT DICK

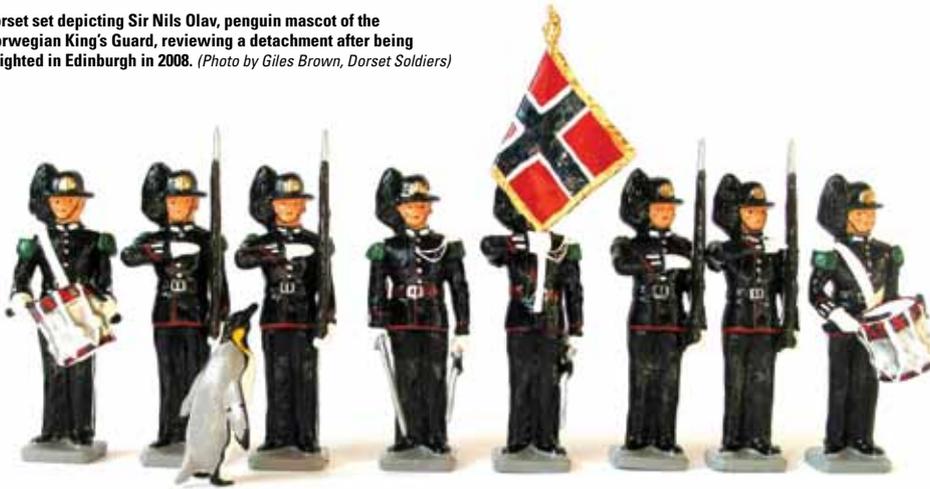
Another illustrious dog was a fox terrier named Dick, the constant companion of Surgeon Major James Reynolds.

The physician was with British troops who defended Rorke's Drift during the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. Despite being



The Parachute Regiment's Shetland pony leads a parade of mascots from various W. Britain limited edition sets in the collection of TS&MF contributor Clyde Cocke. Following are the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers antelope, the Staffordshire Regiment bull terrier, the Royal Irish Rangers Irish wolfhound and the Royal Welch Fusiliers goat. (Photo by Eilene Harkless Moore)

Dorset set depicting Sir Nils Olav, penguin mascot of the Norwegian King's Guard, reviewing a detachment after being knighted in Edinburgh in 2008. (Photo by Giles Brown, Dorset Soldiers)



attacked by overwhelming numbers, B Company, 2nd Battalion, 24th Foot, managed to repel the Zulus after a 12-hour siege.

Dick appears in a famous painting of the battle by Adolph Alphonse de Neuville.

HIGHLANDERS' ELEPHANT

A most conspicuous mascot was the elephant of the 78th Highlanders (later Seaforth Highlanders), acquired in Ceylon in 1838. "The Elephant" was thought appropriate as it commemorated the Battle of Assaye in 1803.

The elephant was brought home to Scotland, where it marched with the band, much to everyone's delight.

Unfortunately, his keeper, a Pvt. McIntosh, was fond of his wee drams of whisky and allowed the mascot to indulge as well. The elephant took to the habit, developed a mean disposition and had to be "transferred" to the Zoological Society of Edinburgh.

KING PENGUIN

Though not affiliated with the British military, probably the most unusual mascot is "Colonel-in-Chief Sir Nils Olav," a king penguin who resides in Scotland. He was adopted as the mascot of the Norwegian King's Guards when they participated in the Edinburgh Military Tattoo in 1972.

Aug. 15, 2008, the penguin was awarded a knighthood, an honor approved by Harald V, the King of Norway. Sir Nils resides in the Edinburgh Zoo, which has a penguin colony.

MINIATURE MASCOTS

Given the colorful and at times fanciful assortment of regimental mascots, it is not surprising that they have captured the attention of a number of toy figure makers past and present through the years, including Drill Square,

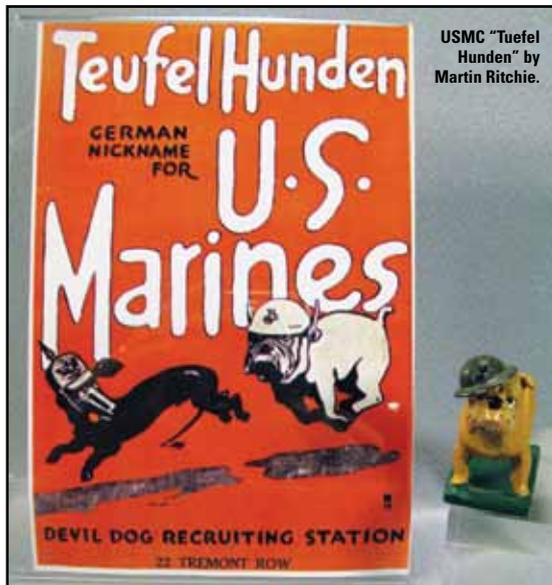


Cigarette card showing "Pet Crane, 16th Lancers."

W. Britain, Caberfeidh Miniatures of Scotland, Ducal Models, Dorset Soldiers, Trophy Miniatures of Wales Ltd. and Martin Ritchie of U.S. Military Miniatures. Photos of some examples of 54-mm, painted metal mascots accompany this article. ■



The USMC's Chesty mascot by Martin Ritchie.



USMC "Teufel Hunden" by Martin Ritchie.



U.S. Air Force Academy falcon by Martin Ritchie.

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