

PO Box 12468
Shawnee Mission, KS
66282-2468

Fax: 913.341.4225
www.kcvma.com

Built on the Shoulders of Veterinary Giants: The Dog Who Went to War **BY: DR. STEVE JOSEPH, KCVMA HISTORIAN**

In honor of Veterans Day here is a story about a WWI hero dog.

Rags was a mixed breed terrier who became an Army mascot. He was so named because he was found abandoned on a Paris street by Private James Donovan, who thought the dog was a pile of discarded clothing.

Donovan feared he was late reporting to his unit and developed a story to avoid punishment. He told military police that Rags was the missing mascot of his infantry division, and Donovan was part of a search party who found him. Rags played that role for many years and became a hero and military celebrity, receiving many medals and awards.

Rags remained with Donovan when the private was ordered to the front lines. The soldier had many duties, including repair of communication wiring damaged by shellfire. Maintenance was slow and time consuming. Runners were frequently called on to carry the word, but they were often wounded or killed. To help the runners, Rags was trained by Donovan to carry messages attached to his collar.

During a battle in the summer of 1918 Donovan and his infantry unit were surrounded by the enemy. Rags carried a message that resulted in an Allied artillery barrage and reinforcements that rescued the soldiers. News of Rags's heroism quickly spread throughout the division.

In the fall of the same year Donovan and Rags were called on to carry more messages to secure a major objective. This action saved countless lives.

Later, Donovan and Rags were victims of shellfire and gas attacks. Both were taken to several hospitals with "priority orders" from headquarters. Donovan died in a US hospital in early 1919. Rags experienced a severe wound to his paw along with facial and eye injuries. Major Raymond Hardenbergh and his family took over Rags's guardianship.

It was said of Rags that during the war he would lie flat on the ground with paws extended when his superior canine hearing detected incoming artillery fire. Soldiers followed his lead. He also learned to salute by extending his paw above his right eye.

After the war Rags became a well – known celebrity. The *New York Times* carried articles about him and a book was written about the hero dog. In 1928 he marched down Broadway with troops as part of a 10th anniversary WWI reunion.

Rags died in 1934 at age 20. He was buried with honors at Aspen Hills Memorial Park and Animal Sanctuary in Maryland where an impressive monument was erected to honor the hero.



Notes and picture provided by the U.S. Army at Fort Riley and the Cantigny Library in Wheaton, IL.