

## A Dog's Journey

“Now, I want you home safe and sound, as soon as possible. Oh and I want to hear...”

“Mother.” Curiously, my ears pricked as I heard the familiar voice of my beloved owner. My sleepy eyes flickered open like a candle in the darkness and I realised the world had not yet woken up. As I took in my surroundings, I saw two towering figures standing by the kitchen door. Lingering in the air, the beautiful smell of beef stew reached my damp nose. The room was still warm from the comforting heat of the oven. Without warning, my owner came towards me. Bending down, he ruffled my fur and scratched me behind my ears (which he knows I love) to show my appreciation I wagged my tail. Then he walked across the farmhouse kitchen to the door. It creaked open and he walked out into the bleak darkness. That's when my adventure really began. Without hesitation, I followed my owner into the cold night air.

Running. It felt like I had been running forever but I could finally see a flickering light through the darkness up ahead. All around me, I could hear muffled voices and the crashing of the waves on the coast. Quickening my pace, the scent of my owner became as strong as ten men. Suddenly, I was blinded by dazzling light and became aware of my confusing surroundings. Even though it was very dark, I could see the outlines of tall stallions and metallic battle ships. Also I could see many glimmering objects in the faint moonlight. They looked like long, silver and shiny sticks with triggers; although I love sticks- something about them made me feel rather uneasy. Then I saw him, my owner. However, he was surrounded by strange khaki giants that I had never met before. Panicking, thoughts swam around in my head while I tried to piece the puzzle together on what was happening. Not realising, my owner was suddenly gone! Closing my eyes, I tried to convince myself that this was just an upsetting dream. Hoping that when I opened my eyes again I would wake up and be back in the warmth of the kitchen. I opened my eyes. It didn't work. It just made me feel worse. Whimpering, I wandered around looking for a place to curl up and go to sleep. After wandering around for about half an hour I found a hard, wooden crate full of soft, blanketed and khaki coloured uniforms. Strangely, they smelt strongly of smoke. Looking up at the starry sky, I saw a shooting star and wished that I was playing in the field (behind the house) with my loving owner, rather than here in this gloom. Lowering my head, my eyes began to feel heavy as if the weight of the world was lying on top of them and then, while dreams danced in my head, I fell into a deep sleep.

MRRR! MRRR! Nearly jumping out of my fur, I was awoken by a deafening sound and a loud voice that shouted, “We have arrived at port Le Boulogne in France.” How long had I been asleep? Hours? Days? Maybe even months? The crate – which I was still comfortably settled in – began to move. Peeping through a crack in the crate, I saw that around me was no longer engulfed by the bleak darkness; straight ahead of me I spotted many more of the strange, khaki dressed men. Feeling restless, I cautiously tried to push the lid open with my head, however it proved too difficult. Impatiently, I pounded the materials beneath me with my paws. I didn't like waiting. Not even as a puppy. Never had. Never would. After what felt like forever, the lid of the crate was yanked open and I saw a pale, thin face staring curiously

down at me. As his hands reached to pick me up, I was tempted to bite him but I knew that it could cost me my life. Struggling to break free, the bright, blue, vast sky came into view. When I saw this, I began to relax as the human's warm hands patted my head. Surprisingly, he was very familiar. I couldn't think where I had seen him before. Maybe one of my owner's friends? Then, it hit me; he had one looked after me when my owner had been away. I tried to get him to recognise me. He said, "Hello boy? Have you lost your owner?"

A few metres away, I could hear him (my beloved owner) laughing and joking with his friends. It had been several days since the kind man had made me a mascot dog for the British Army. I felt proud to be serving my country. Fortunately, I knew it would be over by Christmas and I'd shortly return back home. Wanting to run to him, I carefully looked around to make sure that none of the soldiers could see me. Without hesitation, I began to run. The silhouette of my owner came into view. Was it really him? As soon as he turned around, I knew it was him. Looking deep into his eyes, I could see that he recognised me. His eyes had a look of both confusion and contentment. Soon I was back in the embrace of my owner's arms. But I knew I couldn't stay with him. He was in a different battalion to the soldiers I was serving. As I found myself looking longingly back, I had to walk away. Stopping for a moment, I looked back and saw he was as disappointed as I was. However, he knew I couldn't come with him.

It's all I could think about while I returned back to my dreaded duties. I knew that there was a chance that I would never see my owner again. Even though I didn't mind the company of these other soldiers – they treated me like a real hero – they would never be my master. They would never replace my owner. They would never receive my whole affection. However, later that evening none of this mattered.

Thrashing like a defenceless creature in the powerful jaws of a crocodile, I watched the fire from a shell explosion violently tear through no-man's land. It swallowed men whole and smoke engulfed the trenches. This time the Jerries had gone too far! All around me, I could smell toxic, dangerous and poisonous gas. Desperately trying not to breathe it in, I pushed through the smoke; my stomach was tying itself in knots. Like dominos, the soldiers fell to the floor one after the other. I had to get to him. My owner. I just had to. He was my family - and family stick together. Through the flames up ahead I could see him staggering towards me – barely staying on his feet. I sprinted to him. Just as I reached him, he fell. This couldn't be happening! Slowly he closed his eyes as I nuzzled his face. Letting out a howl I lay at his side. I watched his chest rise and fall as his poisonous breaths became more laboured. Then there was silence.

**By Freya Perry**