

## THE WAR HORSES

*“Without our War Horses our Armies of millions would have been immobile and impotent.” “The best animals for army services are also the most valuable for agriculture, commerce and sport.”*

Field Marshall Sir Douglas Haig  
Commander-in-chief 1918.

The War Office had learnt from the loss of 300,000 horses in the Boer War (1899-1902) that the demand for horses in any subsequent conflict would be great but had never anticipated that over a million would be required in the Great War, a demand that would be completely beyond the capacity of the home front to supply.

Only horses and mules could transport the guns, supplies and casualties from and to the railhead across the cratered mud of northern France and Belgium. With one exception the anticipated role of the cavalry to follow through when the infantry broke the enemy lines was never to happen in the static stalemate of trench warfare, it was only in the middle East that the mounted regiments were to prove their worth.

The hunting field of Leicestershire were soon denuded of both riders and their mounts, the farms lost their cart horses, the vanners were impressed; the remaining wheels of agriculture and commerce were stretched to the limit. Horses, often unbroken, were imported from North America and transferred to established remount depots at Woolwich, Melton Mowbray and Aborfield. New depots, increasingly staffed by women were established at Porley, Romsey and elsewhere.

The Cavalry consisted of many regiments; Household Cavalry; Line Regiments and Yeomanry raised in Britain, the Empire and Colonies. One of the few successes in France took place on October 18, 1918 at Cateau when Canadian mounted units advanced eight miles and captured four hundred prisoners, but the cost was heavy, 168 troopers and 171 horses were killed or wounded. Less