

When We Replaced the War Dog with Drones, We Lost More Than We Saved



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In the forests outside Portland, the last generation of military working dogs now live in quiet retirement. Some are missing limbs. Others bear psychological scars or sensory overload. Many were abandoned by their handlers, only left with battlefield trauma. Most people don't know this—our wars are cleaner now. There are drones. Robots. AI living learning machines that don't bleed, that don't speak out or suffer post-service fates. As time keeps unapologetically moving forward, we need to crack down on our lack of historical knowledge. We need to remember that for centuries, animals were the ones that bore the burden of our warfare.

As someone who served alongside real creatures, not code, I'm writing to ask that we finally recognize both what we did and failed to do for them.

Throughout history, and most recently in the 21st century, animals were indispensable tools in war. Dogs detected bombs when no robot existed that could. Dolphins located underwater mines. Even bees and rats were trained to sniff out danger and find decommissioned IEDs. We

used them because they were better than us. We used them because they didn't ask questions or talk back. But as we also know very well, they didn't volunteer, either.

For decades, our military hailed these animals as "heroes," while quietly retiring them with minimal care. Some were euthanized overseas, deemed too costly to bring home, too much of a hassle. Others were abandoned after their usefulness ended. The public saw cute videos of service animals with goggles, boots, and vests. But few saw the trauma they carried, the lives they saved, or the pain they were forced to endure for years on end.

In our great state, we pride ourselves on being environmentalists, animal lovers. We protested the unnecessary wars the country got itself in and the unjust military-industrial complex that supported it. But we stayed largely silent on the use of animals in these wars. Perhaps it was too inconvenient a contradiction. After all, who wants to argue against a dog saving lives in Kabul?

Now, in the current day, we no longer deploy animals. AI models outmatch them in speed, endurance, and thought. Autonomous drones don't fatigue. They don't flinch or run away. But as we've shifted to these soulless machines, I fear we've lost something human in the process: empathy. When we fought with animals, we were forced to remember war was alive and had consequences. That suffering wasn't abstract and that our tools could feel physical pain. In replacing them, we pacified conflict, but we also distanced ourselves from the responsibility we once held.

We shouldn't bring animals back into combat, that's not what is being said. For that chapter, rightfully so, has ended. But we owe them a memory and justice that they have yet to receive. Oregon should lead in creating the first Veterans Memorial for Military Animals, not just for dogs and horses, but for the generations of our silent fuzzy friends whose names we never learned. Let this be our legacy. Not just smarter, more practical wars, but more humane ones. Our past is paved with bloody paw prints. We don't get to forget that just because the future doesn't need them anymore.