



'WE ALSO SERVE'

*The obverse of The Dickin Medal.
On the reverse are engraved the details of
the recipient.*

'We Also Serve' is the inscription on the obverse of The Dickin Medal, which is known as the animals' VC. In the seventy-three years since its introduction in 1943 by Maria Dickin, the founder of the PDSA, the Dickin Medal has only been awarded on sixty-five occasions. The latest recipient *would have been* Police Dog *Diesel*, a Belgian Shepherd of the Paris Municipal Police.

The Paris atrocities of November 2015 had murdered 130 people. On Wednesday 18 November 2015, *Diesel* was involved in the raid on the premises to where the 'mastermind' of the atrocities had been traced. *Diesel* was sent into the flat, and 'did a tour of the first room', said his handler, 'then he went into the second room and dashed forward. I think he'd found someone. Then I lost sight of him and the gunfire started again. His role was to open the way. I had absolute confidence in him'.

It had been believed that *Diesel* was shot by the suspects, and hence why the Medal was being awarded. However, it later emerged that *Diesel* was shot by his own side, the Paris police, and the award of the Medal was deferred for further deliberations. However, at the time of writing (January 2016) it looks as if it may be cancelled altogether.

Diesel would have been the latest of thirty dogs to be awarded the medal - but there have only been three horses who have won the award. And all three were Metropolitan Police horses decorated for service during the 'London Blitz' of the Second World War; and all three survived.

Metropolitan Police Horse 78 *Upstart* was stabled in Hyde Park, close to where there were numerous anti-aircraft batteries. When the stables were damaged by bombs, *Upstart* was moved to stables in the East End, although these also were damaged by flying bombs. On Tuesday 22 August 1944, *Upstart* was being ridden on patrol by District Inspector J. Morley in Bethnal Green. A flying bomb was heard to be falling, and it exploded only seventy-five yards away from horse and rider. Both were showered with debris and broken glass, although neither was hurt. *Upstart* and his rider immediately took charge in controlling the traffic, so as to clear the way for the ambulances and fire engines. They remained on the scene until all casualties were cleared.

Metropolitan Police Horse 195 *Olga* was patrolling in Tooting on Saturday 1 July 1944. Her rider that day was PC J. Thwaites instead of her normal rider PC A. Rayner. Falling less than seventy yards away, a flying bomb completely demolished four houses and damaged many others. *Olga* felt the full force of the blast and when a plate glass window crashed into the roadway immediately in front of her, she bolted for nearly a hundred yards. Her rider managed to pull her up and induced her to return to the incident, where he was the first police officer at the scene. *Olga* remained at the scene and helped the rescue organisations by excluding any sightseers and by maintaining the free flow of traffic.

Metropolitan Police Horse 52 *Regal* won his award for two displays of courage. On Saturday 19 April 1941, a cluster of explosive incendiary bombs fell close to the Muswell Hill Police Station where he was stabled. The forage room was set ablaze and the fire spread to the horse box where *Regal* was standing. Having no rider to guide him, *Regal* stood calmly with the flames creeping ever closer, showing no signs of panic. When help arrived, he allowed himself to be lead away quietly to safety, without exhibiting any of the wild terror usually associated with horses when confronted by flames.

Three years later, on the night of Thursday 20 July 1944, a flying bomb exploded within twenty yards of his stable block. Once more extensive damage occurred, and *Regal* received minor injuries from flying debris and glass. But also, the roof had collapsed half on top of him. Once again, instead of becoming panic-stricken, *Regal* remained calm, and thus reduced the danger to himself and his handlers had he become uncontrollable.



Left to Right : *Olga*, *Regal* and *Upstart*.

References :

BOURNE, Dorothea St. Hill *They Also Serve* (Winchester Publications Limited, London 1947)

HAWTHORNE, Peter *The Animal Victoria Cross - The Dickin Medal* (Pen & Sword Military, Barnsley 2012) ISBN 978-1-78159-042-3