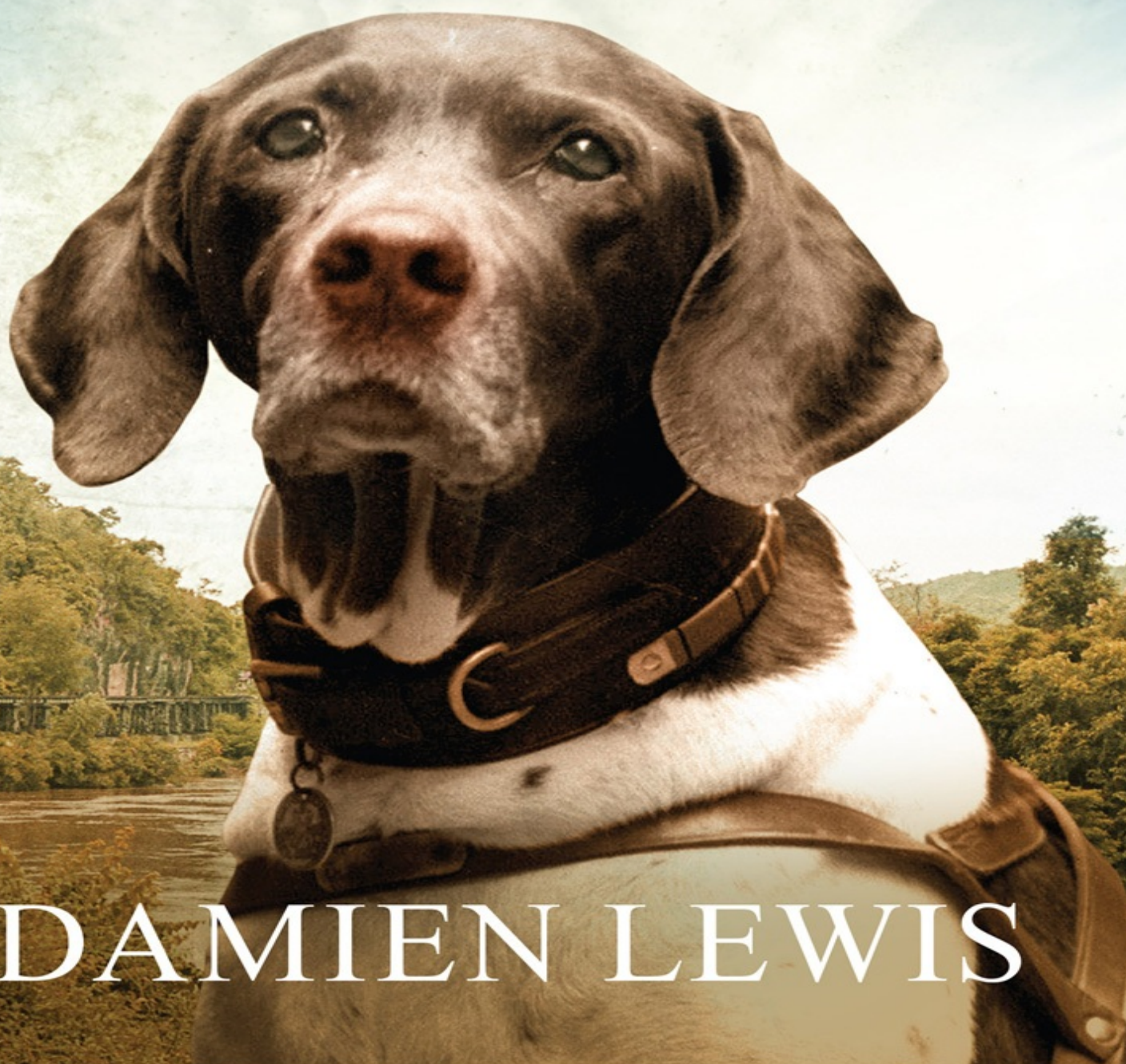


JUDY

A DOG IN A MILLION

**The Heartwarming Story of WWII's
Only Animal Prisoner of War**



DAMIEN LEWIS

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JUDY

A Dog in a Million

Damien Lewis

Quercus

First published in Great Britain in 2014 by

Quercus Editions Ltd

55 Baker Street

Seventh Floor, South Block

London

W1U 8EW

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

HB ISBN 978 1 84866 536 1

EBOOK ISBN 978 1 84866 537 8

TPB ISBN 978 1 84866 542 2

(HB only) Endpaper illustrations taken from the collection of Museum The Hague.

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Minitus acuminatae – ‘Protected with a sting’ Motto of the Yangtze River Gunboat, HMS *Gnat*

‘... even the mosquito was sick of the taste of blood’ Alice Renshaw, pupil at Pensby High School for Girls, on the Japanese POW camps of the Second World War.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks are due to the following for their help in bringing this book to fruition. My literary agent, Annabel Merullo, her assistant, Laura Williams, and all the team at PFD, including but not limited to Rachel Mills and Alexandra Cliff. My film agent, Luke Speed. Richard Milner and Josh Ireland, my editors at Quercus, plus the entire team there – including but not limited to David North, Patrick Carpenter, Jane Harris, Caroline Proud, Dave Murphy and Ron Beard. Heartfelt thanks to you all. Thanks also to Simon Fowler, for your expert and tenacious research capabilities, and to Tean Roberts for reaching out as you did to survivors and their families.

Special thanks are due to the following who gave freely of their time, their expertise and/or their life experiences to enable me to bring this story to life on these pages. First and foremost Rouse Voisey, who shared his incredible life story with me. Rouse, I am hugely and forever in your debt. Captain George W. Duffy, for sharing your incredible life story, for your fantastic written work, and for the on-going assistance and encouragement. Peter Fyans and Fergus Anckhorn, author and subject of the book *The Conjuror on the Kwai*, which tells the story of Fergus's life and his extraordinary survival as a Japanese prisoner of war. Thank you for your time, your memories and your help. You were and remain an enormous inspiration to me. Lizzie Oliver, for your inspiration and enthusiasm and for your grandfather's sketches and memories, and for reading various drafts. Meg Parkes, for your peerless expertise and your father's diaries, and for your continuing assistance unto the very end. Phillip Wearne, for reaching out to some of the key people on my behalf, which proved invaluable. Adrienne Howell, of the Mere Literary Festival, for the generous introductions to those who were able to be of so much help in the writing of this book. David Tett, for the excellent volumes of postcards and correspondence from the POW camps. Henk Hovinga, for your persistence in getting your book to me and your steadfast help and advice. Les Parsons, for sharing some of your great uncle's experiences as a prisoner of war of the Japanese. Imogen Holmes, for sharing some of your father's experiences as a prisoner of war of the Japanese. Tony Spero, also for sharing some of your father's experiences as a prisoner of war of the Japanese. Tyson Milne, for sharing some of your grandfather's experiences as a prisoner of war of the Japanese. Amanda Farrell and Jonathan Moffatt for your assistance in the research and for providing invaluable contacts. My thanks are also due to those others who were of assistance to me, but preferred to remain unacknowledged.

Finally, special thanks to my wife, Eva, and to David, Damien Jnr, and Sianna-Sarah, for putting up with Dad's grumpy hours spent locked away in his study writing. Again.

Author's Note

During the Second World War and the years leading up to it, Judy, the dog whose story is told in these pages, adopted many human companions. However, there are sadly few if any survivors from those years. Throughout the period of the research for and the writing of this book I have endeavoured to contact as many of Judy's adopted human companions as possible, plus surviving family members of those who have passed away. If there are further witnesses to her incredible story who are inclined to come forward, please do get in touch with me. I may be able to include further recollections of this wonderful dog in future editions.

Particularly when dealing with the prisoner-of-war years there are few written accounts of what took place. So many people remember Judy, her companions and their adventures: so few document those memories. This is understandable. The time spent by Allied servicemen as prisoners of war of the Japanese was terribly traumatic, and many did not want to speak about it. Many chose to take their stories to their graves. I am very grateful to those few still living who felt able to speak to me. Moreover, memories tend to differ, and apparently none more so than those from an environment like the Far East prisoner-of-war camps, in which so many days felt like a repeat of the hellish days that went before. There were so few milestones with which to mark the passing of time, or to anchor the memories.

The passage of the decades has also served to further obscure memory. The few written accounts that do exist also tend to differ in matters of detail. Locations and timescale are often somewhat uncertain. That being said, I have done my best to provide a comprehensible sense of place, chronology and narrative to the story as told in these pages. In the POW years in particular the methodology I have used to reconstruct where and when events took place is the 'most likely' scenario. If two or more testimonies or sources point to a particular time or place, I have opted to use that account as most likely. Where necessary I have recreated small sections of dialogue to aid the story's flow.

The above notwithstanding, any mistakes herein are entirely of my own making, and I would be happy to correct any in future editions. Likewise, while I have endeavoured to locate the copyright holders of the photos, sketches and other images used in this book, again this has not always been straightforward or easy. I would be happy to correct any mistakes in future editions.

For all at Sunninghill.

A little slice of paradise.

For giving
David, Damien Jnr and Sianna
the chance to be who they can be.

Preface

Only one animal ever achieved the dubious accolade of being made an official prisoner of war of the Japanese in World War Two. It was a dog. She was a beautiful and regal-looking English Pointer, and perhaps one of the most extraordinary of our canine companions ever to grace this earth.

In September 1942 she was given Japanese prisoner-of-war number '81A-Medan'.

Her real name was Judy, or 'Judy of Sussex' as her shipmates came to call her – for she spent most of her service life as the mascot of the Royal Navy gunboats the *Gnat* and the *Grasshopper*. But Judy of Sussex was much, much more than just a ship's dog. The way in which I came across her story drew me to it, inexorably, convincing me that this was a tale that absolutely had to be told.

In the spring of 2013 I wrote a book called *War Dog* (although I prefer the title my American publishers gave it, *The Dog Who Could Fly*). It tells the story of Ant, the extraordinary German Shepherd puppy rescued from no-man's-land who went on to fly numerous sorties with the RAF in the Second World War. In recognition of his heroic wartime exploits Ant – or Antis as he was renamed – was awarded the Dickin Medal, more commonly known as The Animal VC.

Ant's master was the Czech – later British – airman Robert Bozdech, with whom he flew into battle with RAF Bomber Command, was wounded, crash-landed and faced death countless times. In among the photos of the post-war Dickin Medal ceremonies, I found one that appeared to show Antis receiving his medal along with two other dogs. The animal to the right of the photo was a striking-looking liver-and-white English Pointer.

There was something compelling about that image and the animal it portrayed – a sense somehow of the dog's extraordinary courage and spirit that spoke across the decades. When next I met the Bozdech family – Robert Bozdech's surviving children – I showed them the photo, and asked who the mystery dog might be. We were at Pip's – the eldest sister's – lovely Devon farmhouse, having a family get-together to celebrate the publication of the book telling their father and Antis's story.

Pip took a look at the photo. 'I think that must be Judy. Yes, it's got to be her. Isn't she lovely? She's another Dickin Medal winner and she has the most wonderful story ...'

Pip told me the little she knew of Judy's wartime exploits. Indeed, it did sound quite remarkable. My curiosity piqued, I made a promise to myself to try to find out more about the dog – but I was working on another book at the time, and any thoughts of looking into Judy's history fell by the wayside. That was until a second chance happening.

Some months later I was giving a talk at the fantastic Mere literary festival, in green and leafy Somerset. At some stage after the talk I happened to mention to the festival organizer, the delightful Adrienne Howell, my interest in the story of the only animal ever to become a prisoner of war of the Japanese. She threw me a shrewd look, as if trying to assess just how much she should reveal to me.

'Well, you know, Mere has a long history associated with the prisoners of the Japanese in the Far East,' she remarked. Adrienne paused for moment, then went on: 'In fact, my uncle was one ... And there are any number of other POW families in the area. But the man you should really speak to is Phillip Wearne. His father, the Reverend Wearne, was a prisoner along with my uncle. He buried my uncle and brought the news of his death back to my grandparents.'

Adrienne very kindly offered to put me in touch with Philip Wearne, who she explained was very active in the FEPOW (Far East Prisoner of War) community.

'Of course,' she added, 'we've all heard of Judy's story. She was simply a wonderful dog. Extraordinary. What she did on the ships and in the POW camps – well, there's nothing quite like it.'

Two chance conversations; two people telling me the same thing – *this dog was absolutely out of the ordinary*. My appetite for the story quickened. As Adrienne had predicted, Phillip Wearne was

most forthcoming and helpful. He advised me that, among others, I really needed to talk to one Lizzie Oliver. Her grandfather, Stanley Russell, was in the same camp as Judy; one of her many POW-companions. And while it almost beggars belief, he'd somehow managed to keep a secret diary of his time in the camps, which, had it been discovered, could well have cost him his life at the hands of the Japanese and Korean guards.

Lizzie and I duly met at the Frontline Club, a London venue for those who write about, report on or otherwise deal with the field of the frontline and war. In the refined quiet of the wood-panelled clubroom, Lizzie explained to me that she was in the final stages of completing her PhD on the Far East POW camps, much of which was inspired by her grandfather's diaries.

Her next comment to me was this: 'Whenever you mention the Sumatran railway or the camps, everyone says: *Oh, you mean the railway with the dog? Judy, wasn't it?* It's amazing: absolutely everyone you talk to remembers her with such affection.' She laughs. 'There were *people* suffering there also, as well as a dog, but she seems more famous than the railway or the camps! That gives you a sense of just how much she was loved by all who came across her.'

Lizzie had a point. After serving for several wild, war-torn years as a ship's dog on the Royal Navy's Yangtze River gunboats, Judy had been bombed and shipwrecked repeatedly, before ending up in the POW camps of north Sumatra, part of modern-day Indonesia. She and her fellow POWs had been forced to work on the so-called hell railway – driving a single-track railway through impossible jungle and knife-cut mountains in the centre of what was then a land of utter wilderness, a veritable world lost in time.

This wasn't the Thai-Burma Death Railway, which is relatively well known today – the one immortalized in the 1957 film *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, and more recently in the movie *The Railway Man*, starring Colin Firth. This was the *other* death railway – one built over 2,000 kilometres away, in Sumatra, by the Japanese, using Allied POWs and locals as slave-labour.

If anything its story is even darker. Today, few if any have heard of Sumatra's hell railway, or the terrible horrors endured there. But people might just have heard of the camp's dog – Judy!

With some reverence, Lizzie produced from her bag a large and heavy, bound book – her grandfather's diary. 'There's something I want to show you.' She opened the diary at a place that she'd bookmarked. 'There.' She pointed at the page, proudly. 'Recognize it? So, who d'you think that is? It's unmistakably Judy. What other dog would ever look like that?'

Taking up half of one page was a hand-drawn sketch of a beautiful liver-and-white English Pointer. She was snuffling about in the tropical undergrowth, seemingly searching for a rat to catch among one of the bamboo huts in which the prisoners were forced to live, packed in there like sardines.

'It's something that's almost never been written about,' Lizzie explained. 'There's so much told about the horrors of the camps: the brutality, the unspeakable things that were done to the POWs. But those are the things they were forced to suffer. They had no choice, of course. That wasn't how they survived. In part they survived by the choices they made – and keeping a dog or another pet was something that helped keep them going. It was a thread that pulled them back to a little piece of normality. It was something extra to keep alive for during a hard day's labour, and to come back to at the end of the day. It offered a hint of home life; of family; of domesticated pets in the home.'

Lizzie told me I really had to go and see Rouse Voisey, a ninety-two-year-old veteran of the Japanese prison camps. As far as she knew he was the last living British survivor of the Sumatran railway, and no one would be better qualified to add layers of richness and texture to the story of the forgotten death railway and its celebrated dog. But before doing so I should meet Meg Parkes, she said. Meg's father had been a Japanese POW and again, in a way that almost stretches credulity, her father had managed to keep incredibly detailed diaries of his time in the camps.

The way in which a handful of POWs managed to keep these diaries is a gripping story in itself.

More often than not they used scraps of paper, scribbled on in the dead of night, then secreted in old jars or tins, which they buried in the camp graveyard. The two things the Japanese guards seemed utterly fearful of were insanity and death. Those POWs who had lost their minds were shunned by the Japanese, and anything to do with death was also to be avoided. It was their extreme necrophobia – their fear of death and dead bodies – that made the graveyard such a perfect hiding place for the illicit diaries.

In due course I did meet with Meg and she very kindly gave me a copy of her father's diaries, writings that spoke of the extraordinary relationship he had with a pet cat in the camps, among other animals. Meg echoed Lizzie's sentiments – that the whole history of how the POWs relied upon animals to help get them through their hellish ordeal had never really been written about. There were even camps wherein the POWs tamed and then trained pigeons to carry messages to and from the outside world, either to secure news or let the world know they were still alive.

Simply extraordinary.

Meg was involved in a fantastic schools project, with Pensby High School for Girls, in Yorkshire. Tom Boardman, then a ninety-two-year-old survivor of the POW camps, had come to the school to talk about his experiences. The eleven- and twelve-year-olds were asked to write short poems, imagining themselves to be an animal – any animal – in the camps. Meg gave me a copy of the booklet they'd produced with snippets of their poems. They were incredibly poignant.

'And the cat said ... the prisoners stroke me and think of home. I like it, but I am afraid of the hunger in their eyes.' Elena Davies

'And the dog barked ... why are we here? And why do some of us disappear?' Sophie Burns

'And the pigeon said ... I'll carry their sad messages. I am their family and they are mine.' Alice Renshaw

But there was no story to rival Judy's, Meg added. She was truly a dog in a million. Meg, like Lizzie, advised me that the one person I really did need to meet was Rouse Voisey. In due course I drove up to rural Norfolk to meet the man himself. My satnav took me to a pretty bungalow that looked out over wild woods and rolling fields lying to one side of the neat row of houses in which he has his home.

Rouse had clearly been awaiting my arrival. He greeted me on the garden steps – an incredibly sprightly and sharp-looking ninety-two-year-old. We shook hands. He scrutinized me with a quick, piercing look, as if trying to appraise the calibre of the 'young man' who had driven such a long way to come and speak to him about events that lay some seven decades in the past.

He glanced at the scenery, which was lit by a bleak winter's midday sun. 'You know, on some days the birdsong is so loud that I can't hear myself greet my neighbours across the fence.' He smiled. 'I love it here. You're very welcome.' He gestured to his half-open door. 'Please, come in, come in.'

Rouse was a remarkable man, to put it mildly. Not only was he a survivor of Sumatra's railway hell, he'd also lived through what by his own admission was a 'worse' slave-labour project under the Japanese. He was among a group of Allied POWs who were forced to clear the coral island of Haruku of its jungle, in order to hack out a landing strip from the bare rock – in preparation for Imperial Japan's planned invasion of Australia, something that of course never happened. Haruku is an island in the Moluccas – the so-called 'Spice Islands' – but under the blistering sun, and in the scorching heat and dust, building that runway had all but killed Rouse, and so many of his fellows had died.

If that wasn't enough, he had then been loaded aboard one of Imperial Japan's so-called hell ships

rusting death traps used to transport POWs like slaves of old from one forced labour project to another – for a journey which he feared would be his last. So ill was he that he could remember little of the voyage, prior to the sinking of the ship, the *Junyo Maru*, by a British submarine. It was, at the time, the worst maritime disaster of history in terms of confirmed loss of life: some 5,600 Allied prisoners of war plus local slave-labourers perished at sea.

Somehow Rouse survived the shipwreck. In doing so he made it to Sumatra, to join the many hundreds of POWs slaving in that living hell. It was then that he first heard about Judy, the de facto mascot of the trans-Sumatran railway. As with all those who'd spoken before him, Rouse was unable to mention Judy's name or recall her memory without a warm smile. He glanced at a photo of his own dog – now deceased – hanging on the living room wall.

'That was my dog, Shona. She was a tri-colour English Setter. She was the most loving, wonderful companion you could ever wish for. I used to take her to the office where I worked – she'd sleep under my desk. She had the most lovely nature. I put the leg of my chair on her ear once by accident. She didn't snarl or bark at me. She just rolled her eyes and whined, as if to say – *hey, that really hurts, you know*. I never got another dog after Shona. I couldn't – not after her. And Judy – she was exactly that kind of a dog. There wasn't another like her.'

Rouse went on to share with me stories from his time in the prison camps, with his fellows and their camp dog – ones that perhaps he'd never discussed with anyone before, not even his recently deceased wife. He ended our chat with this.

'I was amazed that a dog could survive it all. That Judy outlived the hell of that place – it was incredible. The Korean camp guards in particular – they used to eat dogs. And they had the power of life or death over us all. It makes you wonder how anyone got away with it – keeping a dog like Judy. It's all part of the wonder of her story.'

I left Rouse's little bungalow with a box heaped full of yellowing newspaper articles, dog-eared books, photos and reports from the POW camp survivors – much of the 'library' that Rouse had built up over the years.

'Yes, yes – take it all,' he reassured me, as I asked again if he really was happy with me borrowing his 'library' for a while. 'I've got little use for it at my age. And if you need to come and talk to me again, please do. I'm here on my own with nothing much to do other than watch the box – and there's never anything on but repeats these days!'

I loaded the precious container onto the back seat of my car, but as I went to say a last goodbye Rouse held out a hand to restrain me. 'You know, there's one question you never asked which people always tend to: *After what happened, do you hate the Japanese?* I rather like it that you felt you didn't need to ask that of me.'

Rouse shook his head, his eyes lost in memories of the past. 'No, no – I don't hate the Japanese. How can you hate an entire people? I hate the guards who did those unspeakable things to us. But I could never hate an entire people. I think the hate would eat you up. It would consume you.' He laughed. 'So that's probably how I've lived to such a ripe old age!'

After visiting Rouse I spent time with other survivors of the POW camps, and their relatives and families, learning more about the story that was beginning to captivate me. Fergus Anckhorn, the irrepressibly youthful ninety-five-year-old who survived the POW camps due to his use of magic – he was once the youngest and is now the oldest member of the legendary Magic Circle – told me about his own incredible relationships with pets in the POW camps, including a dog, monkeys and even a chameleon! The chameleon would lie on his chest at night while he was sleeping, and flick out its tongue to catch mosquitoes. It was his de facto mosquito net!

'Those pets – they kept us sane, you know. They were a little tiny slice of the familiar, of what we knew – of home. And somehow, you knew you had to stay alive and return at the end of a day's hard

labour to look after your dog or monkey, or whatever was waiting faithfully for you! You had to stay alive for *them*.’

Fergus told me about the value of those pets in sustaining the prisoners’ morale – or more accurately, their will to live. In many cases, individuals opted to share some of their meagre ration with their pet animal, rather than allowing another living being to starve to death. Fergus loved dogs. He had a relationship with them that went very deep and was incredibly enduring. He was a cat-lover too.

‘Once I spotted a tiny bird like a sparrow on a bush,’ he told me, a rare sadness creeping into his mischievous, fun-filled eyes. ‘I stalked up to that bird on hands and knees. On the other side of the bush was an emaciated cat. It was a race between the two of us. I saw the cat spring, the bird took off to escape and – pow! – I caught the tiny bundle of feathers in mid-air. I cooked that little bird and ate it that very evening. But when I looked at the pile of bones afterwards, I felt so guilty that I’d left the cat to starve. I never could forget it, or forgive myself.’

Like Rouse, Fergus believed that those POWs who hated the Japanese were eventually consumed by their hatred. Those who forgave lived longer and happier lives. And Fergus was one of many who go on to explain to me the vital role that pets played as the unsung heroes of the prison camps. It was a story that few had told, and one that Judy epitomized more than any other animal that had made it through the hell of the prison camp years.

This, then, is Judy’s tale. It opens in Shanghai several years before the start of the war, when British gunboats still cruised the mighty Yangtze River, guarding British interest far into the heart of China. It commences with a tiny bundle of curiosity who ran away from home and ended up serving as the mascot of the doughty Royal Navy gunboat the *Gnat*. It follows Judy and her fellows’ extraordinary adventures over the years – from the Yangtze River to the Sumatran hell railway, and everything in between.

People often say that truth is stranger than fiction. Undoubtedly, Judy of Sussex’s story is one that anyone would find distinctly challenging to make up.

It is certainly one that I feel privileged to have been able to tell.

Damien Lewis
Cork, Ireland, December 2013

Chapter One

The tiny puppy wiggled her nose a little further under the wire.

Blessed with a gundog's excellent peripheral vision she was keeping one eye on those to her rear – her fellow siblings, plus the kennel staff, who would little appreciate yet another escape attempt. Ahead of her, just a breath away, lay the outside world – the teeming hustle and bustle of life that lay all about, but which she and her fellow pups were seemingly forever forbidden from experiencing.

It was all just so tantalizingly close.

The English-run Shanghai Dog Kennels had bred the beautiful liver-and-white English Pointer puppies to serve as gundogs for various English gentlemen then resident in Shanghai. But this one pup, it seemed, had other ideas. The Kennels were like an island of calm amid the sea of chaos that was 1936 Shanghai – chaos to which the puppy poised halfway under the wire felt irresistibly drawn.

Before her very nose rickshaws – ancient-looking wooden carts pulled by human bearers – tore back and forth as they weaved through the dusty streets, carrying the better-off Shanghai residents trussed up in formal-looking top hats and dress-coats. Those rickety carriages fought for space with trams and buses, chugging their ponderous way past roadside stalls selling freshly fried and spiced delicacies. And everywhere bright red cloth banners hung from the shopfronts, advertising their wares in exotic-looking Mandarin and Wu calligraphy.

Why it was only she of her siblings who felt this insatiable urge to see, to smell and to taste the wider world – *to escape* – she didn't know. But ever since birth, curiosity had seemed to get the better of this still nameless puppy. And now here she was, glistening nose thrust under the wire and twitching at the bewitching smells that assaulted it, round and chubby backside still within the safe confines of the kennel, but with only a few more wriggles and a final squeeze required to break free.

Doubtless, one voice inside the pup's head was telling her: *don't do it!* But another, equally strident voice was urging – *go for it, girl!* In that moment of indecision as she peered beneath the wire the little puppy heard a yell of alarm from behind. *She'd been spotted!* It was the cry of Lee Ming, the local Chinese girl whose mother lived and worked at the kennels, raising the alarm. Lee Ming was quick and nimble and would be on her like a flash unless she got a move on.

Tiny forepaws thrashed and scrabbled at the dirt, as she fought to squeeze her way under the wire. The wrinkly folds of puppy fat rolled and gave beneath her, as she got her belly down even lower and wriggled like a fat fish stuck on an angler's hook. The bare stub of a tail, sticking out behind her like long and rigid finger, twitched to and fro as she strove with all her might to break free.

Behind her Lee Ming came to a sudden halt and reached to grab the disobedient puppy, but as she did so the tiny ball of irrepressible energy gave one last Herculean effort and she was through. An instant and a scamper later and – *pouf!* – the diminutive four-legged figure was gone, paws flying as she was swallowed up into the noise and dust and utter disorder of downtown Shanghai.

For a horrible moment Lee Ming stared after the puppy that had disappeared, in complete dismay. There were so many dangers stalking those city streets that she didn't have the heart to imagine the half of them. If there was one thing the little puppy wasn't, it was streetwise. In her headlong confusion she might be run over by a rickshaw. In her fright she might tumble into one of the city's myriad open sewers. But worst of all, a roly-poly puppy like her would offer a tantalizing meal to those partial to dog meat – which included the large majority of the city's native population.

In 1936 Shanghai the flesh of man's best friend was much sought after, being seen as something of a 'sweet'-tasting delicacy. A young and tender dog that no one seemed to own or to care for would be fair game. Lee Ming turned back towards the large, colonial-style house that lay in the centre of the kennel compound. She headed for reception to report the bad news, and to help raise whatever search

party they would send after the wayward pup. But her heart was heavy and a dark foreboding lay upon her.

She feared very much that was the last they'd ever see of the puppy that had run away.

*

The Shanghai that the puppy had made a break for was no place for any defenceless being, let alone an English Pointer barely a few weeks old. Then a city of some three million inhabitants, Shanghai – a port city lying in the very centre of China's coastline – was a bustling metropolis red in tooth and claw. Positioned at the mouth of the mighty Yangtze River – Asia's longest, and a vital conduit for trade and commerce into China's vast interior – the great powers of Britain, America and France had long-established trading settlements in the city.

For decades, Shanghai had been known as 'The Paris of the East', but in recent years she had become a city beset by troubles. Weak leadership and infighting among the Chinese government had allowed vicious gangs of bandits to thrive. Warlords had taken control of large tracts of the nation's interior. Increasingly, Britain, America and France had been forced to send gunboats far into the interior on the Yangtze, in an effort to dissuade these lawless elements from disrupting their lucrative trade in silk, cotton, tea and other valuable commodities.

Recently, trouble had piled upon trouble, in particular with the resurgence of China's age-old enemy – Japan. In an escalating series of bloody skirmishes the Japanese Navy had bombarded Shanghai. As they had with the British and the other 'great powers', the Chinese were forced to sign a treaty with Imperial Japan, allowing the Japanese to establish a permanent presence in the 'treaty ports' of Shanghai. Imperial Japan made little secret of her desire to conquer and subjugate the entire Chinese nation, and Shanghai was the gateway to China's then capital city, Nanking.

This then was Shanghai, the city that the escapee from the kennels had absconded to – one menaced by gangland banditry, and whose streets were increasingly plagued by soldiers from Imperial Japan, who showed ill-disguised contempt for the local inhabitants. So it was something of a miracle that several weeks after her dramatic breakout, the puppy who had run away was still very much alive and breathing.

The silky chubbiness was long gone, of course. Instead, adolescent ribs poked through a liver-and-white coat that had lost much of its shine and lustre. Her nose was dry and cracked, a sure sign that she was in a dreadful condition. Only her eyes seemed to demonstrate their signature brightness, betraying a strength of character that had distinguished her from birth, and perhaps led to her present, unenviable predicament. They shone with a burning curiosity and a zest for life, despite all that she had suffered since her ill-fated 'escape'. But there was something else now in her gaze – uncertainty and vulnerability, a sense that the young dog had realized to her cost that not every human was her natural friend and ally.

How stupid she had been, she now recognized, to run away. She had traded the comfort and luxury of the kennels for a battered old cardboard box lying in a smelly, fly-blown Shanghai alleyway. She'd traded the companionship and playfulness of her brother and sister puppies for the loneliness of life on the streets. And in place of the English kennel owner's natural love for and protection over her dogs, she'd faced cruelty and abuse at every turn in this overcrowded human zoo of a city.

All apart from one individual – Soo. For whatever reason, Soo the Chinese trader was an unreconstructed lover of dogs. Her shabby box-cum-home lay to the rear of his store, and ever since the puppy had found her way to it Soo had taken it upon himself to deliver titbits of food to her, of an evening when his long day's work was done. It was hardly the kind of diet she'd grown accustomed to at the kennels, but at least it had served to keep her alive.

Like many Chinese, it wasn't in Soo's nature or family tradition to keep a dog at home as a pet. In the China of 1936 dogs had to earn their keep as working animals, or they were invariably for the pot. In fact, the eating of dog meat in China had a history stretching back thousands of years, the meat being thought to possess mystical medicinal properties. There were even some breeds of dog that were kept specifically for human consumption, especially in times of seasonal hunger.

Fortunately, Soo wasn't one of those who were partial to having dog on the menu, and the lost puppy from the Shanghai Dog Kennels was lucky indeed to have fallen by chance under his protection.

But tonight, all of that was about to change.

With a sixth sense that was to become her absolute trademark, the lonely pup detected the danger before it was audible or visible to any human ear or eye, Soo's included. A Japanese gunboat had docked in the port of Shanghai, and the sailors of His Japanese Imperial Majesty's Ship were making their noisy way along the very road upon which Soo's shop was situated, no doubt in search of alcohol and some locals on which to vent their aggression. It was late evening, but the hard-working Soo was still there, his being one of the few stores on the street remaining open.

That alone offered enough of an excuse for the gunboat crew to pounce.

As the Japanese sailors started verbally abusing Soo and helping themselves to his wares, he of course protested. Voices were raised in anger, but the Japanese sailors didn't stop there. Within minutes Soo's shop had been plundered, its rickety wooden shelves torn down and smashed to pieces. As for Soo, he was set upon by the Japanese sailors, who were working themselves up into a towering rage.

Hearing her one protector in the world being so cruelly assaulted, the adolescent pup had stolen out of her alleyway and sneaked around the corner to see if there was anything she could do to save him. Inching forward on her belly, she alternately whimpered in fright and tried to muster her most threatening growl, as the strange figures in their baggy trousers over knee-high black boots kicked and punched her protector.

Then one of the aggressors spotted the cowering dog. He stepped away from Soo and took a few paces towards her. Moments later one of those perfectly polished boots was swinging towards the adolescent puppy's midriff. The powerful blow lifted her from the cobbles and flung her across the street into a pile of rubbish on the far side. There she lay, whimpering and in agony, and hoping beyond hope that these cruel men in their strange uniforms wouldn't come for her again.

By the time their oppressors had departed, Soo had been beaten so badly that he had to be helped away from the scene. The dog that had until now viewed him as her protector was forced to take refuge in the empty shadows of a nearby doorway. Into it she crawled, body sore from the kicking, belly sore from that and the ravaging hunger, and her spirit numbed by the trauma and the cold of the long night that lay ahead.

Even though the Japanese sailors were long gone, the lonely puppy sensed that tonight her dream of escape from the Shanghai Kennels had descended into the blackest of nightmares – but as is so often the case, the darkest moment is just before the dawn.

As the sun crept above the city's grand, colonial-style skyline, a familiar figure began to pad her way along the street on which the young dog lay. The lone puppy was shivering and crying to herself and lost in misery – so much so that she almost didn't notice the pitter-patter of footsteps come to a halt, or to hear the words uttered in amazement in her direction.

'Shudi? Shudi? Oh, Shudi! What happened? Where have you been?'

The long tail of the Pointer – now stained off-white with the dirt and soot from her street-side existence – almost failed to wag in any sign of recognition. But the young dog *had* recognized the soft tones of the voice, just as surely as the little girl from the kennels had recognized the distraught puppy. Her distinctive markings – a sleek liver-brown head, a similarly-coloured saddle-like marking

thrown across her shoulders, plus the large formless splodge of colour splashed across her rear right flank – had been instantly recognizable to Lee Ming.

No doubt about it – this was the one that had run away!

In a sprawling city of some three million inhabitants the girl from the Shanghai Kennels had, by chance, chosen to walk that morning past the very door where the lost and injured dog was sheltering. Lee Ming bent, scooped the puppy up and thrust her deep inside her jacket. With that she ran and skipped through the largely deserted streets, eager to announce her find to the English lady who ran the kennels.

By the time she had reached the big house that lay inside the compound and unzipped her jacket, the puppy had fallen fast asleep.

‘Look! Look! I find Shudi!’ the little girl announced ecstatically.

The Englishwoman peered doubtfully over the high desk behind which she sat. Spying the puppy, she reached out uncertainly and took the little dog from the girl’s outstretched arms. She pulled her closer, stroked her and fondled her just behind the ears, as she studied the markings and tried to compare them to those in her memory. The puppy opened one lazy eye, saw where she was, seemed to smile exhaustedly, then slipped back into a sweet sleep.

It was the turn of the Englishwoman to smile. ‘*It is her*. It really is the one who ran away.’ She glanced at Lee Ming, who was beaming with happiness. ‘So, I think it’s time you gave her a good bath and a dinner, don’t you?’

Lee Ming nodded enthusiastically. There was nothing she’d like more than to feed and comfort the wayward pup. She held out her arms so ‘Shudi’ could be returned to her and she could whisk her off for some much-needed tender loving care.

The woman handed the pup across. She glanced at Lee Ming curiously. ‘But tell me, why do you call her Shudi?’

Lee Ming placed the warm but exhausted bundle back inside her jacket. ‘I always call this one Shudi,’ she replied shyly. ‘Shudi means peaceful. Peaceful is how she looks, yes?’

The woman reached out and caressed Lee Ming’s face. ‘She does. Yes she does. And Lee Ming – that shall be her name from now on: *Judy*.’

So it was that the puppy who had run away and come back again against all odds was given a name perhaps most ill-suited to her nature: the Mandarin word for the peaceful one – *shudi* – or rendered into ‘Judy’ for whichever lucky Englishman might be her future master.

As the little girl carried Shudi – Judy – off for a good pamper, little did she realize how a dog with such inauspicious beginnings would go on to distinguish herself in the coming bloody and all-consuming conflict ...

Lee Ming could have no idea how famous the English Pointer from the Shanghai Kennels would become, once the Second World War drew to a close.

Chapter Two

Even in the summer of 1936, four years prior to the start of the war, the signs of Japanese Imperial aggression were sweeping through the streets of Shanghai and across wider China.

Using her military might Imperial Japan would strike a hammer blow through Shanghai and into the Chinese capital, Nanking – a name that would become synonymous with unspeakable terrors and brutality. But for now such dark horrors lay far in the future, and much of the city of Shanghai and the Yangtze River remained under the stewardship of the British and Allied gunboat fleets.

The British gunboats were of the Insect Class, a name that belied their true purpose, which was to patrol the shallow seas and rivers across the more war-torn reaches of the British Empire. Built by the Lobnitz shipyard on the Clyde, the Insect Class ships had initially seen active service during the First World War, in what was then Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq), patrolling the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

By 1936 they were two decades old, and were by no means state-of-the-art warships. But they remained relatively fast, nimble and well armed. With their flat bottom and shallow draught, they were designed specifically to operate in rapid-flowing rivers like the Yangtze. Known colloquially as the ‘large China gunboats’, they boasted two Yarrow engines and boilers, each driving a separate propeller set in a shaft sunk into the hull, to minimize the chance of snagging in the river shallows.

As Shudi – Judy – settled into the blissful comfort of kennel life once again, one of those British gunboats was just completing her annual refit at Shanghai docks. She was preparing to return to patrol duties, deterring piracy and banditry on the lower reaches of the Yangtze – covering a length of river stretching almost one thousand miles inland.

HMS *Gnat* had not been a particularly happy ship of late, and much of the crew’s angst centred around two key aspects of ship’s life that were in distinctly short supply right now. The first was the ship’s stocks of beer. The China gunboats were unique in the Royal Navy in that they carried with them a stock of beer from which, when on operations, every crew member got a daily allowance. But as the Captain of the *Gnat*, Lieutenant Commander Waldegrave, had commented in the ship’s log, there was only a few weeks’ supply of the precious brew remaining, even with strict rationing in force.

Recently a United States Navy gunboat had docked alongside the *Gnat*. The officers and crew had been invited to share in the British gunboat’s hospitality – chiefly her beer – but only once a week on Saturday nights, in an effort to preserve stocks. In exchange, the officers and crew of the *Gnat* had been invited to the thrice-weekly movie screenings held in the American ship’s cinema.

The second problem was unique to the *Gnat* among the British gunboat flotilla then on the Yangtze: she lacked a ship’s mascot, which if anything was even more unthinkable than running out of beer. On her sister ships HMS *Cricket*, *Cicada*, *Ladybird*, and the flagship, the *Bee*, there were variously cats, dogs and even a ship’s monkey. But the crew of the *Gnat* possessed no furry, four-legged or even a feathered friend, and so it was that the ship’s Captain set his junior officers the task of finding one.

The junior officers had in turn called upon the resources of the *Gnat*’s Canteen Committee in an effort to decide which would be the most suitable species of bird, mammal or reptile to grace the vessel’s deck. The nominations had flooded in, but many – Chinese soft-backed river turtles, giant pandas and alligators included – were judged as being somewhat impractical and inappropriate, if good for the laughs.

The Canteen Committee decided that any mascot for the *Gnat* had to possess three essential qualities. Firstly, as the ship’s officers and crew could really do with some female company she would have to be distinctly feminine. Second, she would have to be easy on the eye. And thirdly, for practical reasons she would need to be able to earn her keep. So it was that on an early November afternoon in

1943 a delegation of junior officers left the *Gnat* to pay a visit to the Shanghai Kennels.

Like most 'gundogs', English Pointers are blessed – or cursed – with a surfeit of energy. They have been bred to be powerful, alert and absolutely tireless no matter what extent of terrain they are tasked to cover. Such are the qualities required of a dog whose purpose is to locate, chase after, flush out and – very often – retrieve game. Essentially a hunting dog, Pointers should be always at the ready to let fly.

Judy had certainly proved herself ready to let fly when she'd squirmed under the kennel wire and run away. Even for an extremely high-energy breed like Pointers, she'd shown herself to have an extraordinary abundance of get-up-and-go. On first consideration, these weren't perhaps the ideal qualities for a ship's mascot – one that was going to be constrained to the confines of a vessel that measured 237 feet from stem to stern and 36 feet across. But as soon as they'd spotted her, the junior officers of the *Gnat* seemed oddly convinced that Judy was the one for them.

By now she was approaching six months old, and had fully recovered from her stint as a Shanghai street dog. She was striking-looking, holding herself with a poise that seemed to mark her out as a true aristocrat of the breed. She carried her head high on a graceful but powerful neck, and her dark eyes – like glistening coals – were set well back from her long, sweeping muzzle. She gazed at these strange men in their smart uniforms who had come to inspect her, displaying the shy reserve natural to a female of the breed.

To the delegation from the *Gnat*, blissfully unaware of Judy's epic escape and long sojourn in the back alleyways of Shanghai, she seemed like the perfect lady. As an added bonus she was a gundog, which would mean that any shooting parties sent ashore to secure meat for the galley would have a dog to root out and retrieve game. Though not specifically bred as retrievers, Pointers can be trained to chase down and gather anything that has been shot – *or at least, that's the theory.*

Back at the *Gnat* the last of the ship's stores and ammunition were being stowed away below deck in preparation for pending departure – including supplies of bread, beef, fuel (petrol and kerosene), plus coal. The last licks of paint were being applied to cover the odd patches of rust on the superstructure. The Chinese mess-boys – locals employed to help cook and make tea in the galley – had returned from their shore leave, and they were preparing the first brews back aboard ship.

A gaggle of seamen were milling about on the mess-deck, situated in the ship's bows, preparing to change into fresh white uniforms for one of their final nights ashore. It was then that the head of the Coxswain – the officer in charge both of steering the vessel and of managing the ship's crew – appeared through the open hatch from the main deck above and made an announcement.

'All hands on deck in ten minutes!'

As the sailors pulled on their uniforms, they wondered what on earth might be up. Surely, not something that would prevent them from having one of their last nights ashore? In keeping with her wild and exotic reputation Shanghai was a party town par excellence, and no one wanted to be kept from the bars where the beer flowed freely – as opposed to the dwindling supplies aboard the *Gnat*.

The men gathered anxiously on the foredeck, forming two ranks beneath the long canvas awning that stretched practically from one end of the ship to the other. It lent the vessel a somewhat odd appearance, the lengthy covering resembling almost a roof, and making the *Gnat* seem from a distance like an elongated tramcar at sea. But the awning had proved hugely useful during long patrols up the Yangtze, providing shade to the main deck and shelter from the monsoon rains that would sweep the length of the great river.

'Atten-shun!' the ship's Coxswain called, once all were present. 'Ship's company mustered, sir,' he reported to a figure standing close by.

The *Gnat*'s First Lieutenant, R. Haines, stepped forward and mounted an empty wooden ammunition crate, one that would normally carry rounds for the ship's .303 calibre Maxim machine

guns. Three of these light machine guns – a weapon that had become synonymous with the projection of Great Britain’s colonial power – were positioned on either side of the boat, giving her impressive all-around firepower. But right now it was far less war-like matters that the First Lieutenant had on his mind. Having given the order to ‘stand easy’, he began to address the men, the faint suggestion of a smile flickering across his normally inscrutable features.

‘A few weeks back the Canteen Committee, with myself as chairman, passed a resolution to the effect that we would have a ship’s pet.’ He paused, as if checking a sheet of paper in his hand, then continued, the smile creeping further into his eyes. ‘To remind you, we decided on having some female companionship; a lady, who would be attractive and could earn her keep. I have studied your very interesting suggestions, most of which I regrettably had to discard.’

The First Lieutenant eyed the men ranged before him. ‘On the *Bee* they have two cats,’ he continued. ‘The *Cricket* has a dog – of sorts. The *Cicada* has a monkey – heaven help them!’ A long, weighty pause. ‘As for the *Gnat*, from this moment onwards no shooting party will be able to return to ship claiming to have shot twenty-three quail, but that only one could be found.’

He turned and let out a cry: ‘Quartermaster!’

A figure emerged from the door behind him, one that led into the ship’s superstructure and up to the bridge. A few paces to his rear a head appeared at knee level, peering curiously around the doorframe. As the Quartermaster – the ship’s store-man – pulled gently on a lead, the rest of the figure stepped into the light. It was a four-legged creature – a white English Pointer, with dramatic liver-coloured markings across her head and body.

The Quartermaster moved to where everyone could see. All eyes were on the dog. Not yet fully grown, she had an odd, endearing, floppy kind of a walk, as she padded across the deck on paws that still seemed too big for her body. Man and dog came to a halt between the First Lieutenant and the phalanx of ship’s crew ranged before him. Judy proceeded to plonk herself down, her well-bred, ladylike air evaporating as a large floppy pink tongue lolled out from what appeared to be a decidedly goofy grin.

It was as much as the men could do not to dissolve into laughter.

The First Lieutenant swept his arm theatrically across the dog now squatted before him. ‘Here she is, then, gentlemen. Meet the first lady of the gunboats. Meet Judy – RN!’

Judy was given a right royal welcome by the crew of the *Gnat*. They picked the nickname ‘Judy of Sussex’ for her, in keeping with her purebred, aristocratic kind of attitude. Sussex was chosen for no other reason than it was a very long way from Shanghai, and because several of the ship’s crew hailed from that part of England.

The natural choice for the important post of ‘Keeper of the Ship’s Dog’ fell to Able Seaman Jan ‘Tankey’ Cooper. Tankey was in charge of the ship’s food stores and fresh water, but more importantly he was also the ship’s butcher, which meant he was able to lay his hands on a regular supply of bones.

Via Tankey, Judy was allotted an open-topped box – an empty ammunition crate – positioned near the ship’s bridge, plus a ship’s blanket as her sleeping quarters. But in the coming weeks and months she would be found as often as not elsewhere, so much preferable was it to be curled up fast asleep with one of the ship’s crew.

Judy was even given an official ship’s book number. Every man serving in the Royal Navy had a unique set of letters and numerals assigned to him – for example, JX125001. It identified him as serving in one of four pay grades: 1. Seaman and Communicators; 2. Stokers; 3. Officers, Cooks and Stewards; 4. All others. Judy’s number identified her with the ‘MX’ prefix, meaning she was an ‘All others’, and that she had joined the service after 1925, before which a different system of numbering and lettering was in place.

Judy's ship's number didn't confer any wage-earning status on her, for it hadn't been formally logged with the Admiralty yet. ~~But had the officers of the *Gnat* so desired, they could doubtless have got away with it, for the ship's number system was famously confused and confusing.~~ Many a Royal Navy sailor had the same number as another, only one letter in the prefix differentiating the two.

But in any case, Judy would have little need of money now she was aboard the *Gnat*. Life as a ship's dog was going to prove as fine an approximation to doggie paradise as any – or at least in the early months it would. On the *Gnat*, Judy of Sussex was going to have everything she could wish for or that money could buy, including a surfeit of food, good company, warmth and companionship.

Being a gundog and one intended to 'earn her keep', Judy was supposed to be kept away from the crew, in the officers' quarters positioned – unusually – towards the front of the ship. Indeed, it was the ship's Captain, Lieutenant Colonel Waldegrave, plus the Chief Petty Officer, Charles Jefferey, who had forked out the money to buy her on behalf of the ship's company. As such, they reckoned they had every right to keep her to their quarters, and to train her 'for the gun' – to act as a ship's officers' gundog.

Pointers are bred to do just as their name suggests – to point out prey. A Pointer is supposed to adopt a rigid pose whenever a game animal is scented. Though it can differ from dog to dog, classically speaking an English Pointer is supposed to adopt the following pose: head lowered, tail held horizontal in line with the head, one leg raised and bent at the wrist, paw pointing to guide the hunter to the target.

But as the officer's mess-boy aboard the *Gnat* was among the first to point out, in Judy's case there seemed to be a fatal flaw in her 'pointing' abilities. In her first forty-eight hours aboard ship she only seemed to go rigid or to point at one thing: whenever she could smell the delicious aroma of dinner wafting around the *Gnat*, she'd point unerringly at the ship's galley!

No problem, the ships' officers argued. They'd train her to point at the right kind of thing – chiefly the duck, quail, antelope and gazelle that they were keen to hunt along the Yangtze. But there just seemed to be no way of controlling where this taut bundle of energy would be found next aboard ship. Her inquisitive nose took her to just about every nook and cranny, and it was only ever from one quarter – the Chinese mess-boys and cooks – that she seemed to receive anything other than a rapturous welcome.

No matter what the officers' intentions, from the very start the ship's company treated Judy as a much-favoured pet. It was as if she was everybody's companion – which, indeed, as ship's dog arguably she was supposed to be. Owned by nobody, she was everyone's dog, and therein lay the impediment to any serious attempts to train her for the gun. Likewise, Tankey Cooper's strict efforts to regulate her meals proved equally frustrating. Whenever his back was turned squares of chocolate and even the odd glass of beer were slipped in the young dog's direction.

By the time HMS *Gnat* was ready for departure from Shanghai, in the second week of November 1936, the ship's Captain and Chief Petty Officer – those who had originally procured the dog – had accepted Judy's shortcomings with reluctant good grace. She was first and foremost a ship's dog and not a gundog, and in that she was proving herself wildly successful. Not a man among the *Gnat*'s crew hadn't warmed to her, and Judy's presence aboard ship had proved a much-needed boost to morale.

Having survived the menacing streets of Shanghai, Judy appeared to be set for a long and happy career aboard HMS *Gnat*, gallant ship of the Royal Navy's Yangtze gunboat fleet. But as chance would have it, Judy's next close encounter with mortal danger was but a few turns of the ship's screw away.

And once again, it was curiosity that would almost prove the death of her.

Chapter Three

For decades the scientific study of dogs – and much of the theory around their training – has relied upon the example provided by their ancient ancestor, the wolf. Unlikely as it may seem, all modern-day dogs – from Pekinese to Great Danes – are descendants of one species, *Canis lupus*, the grey wolf. Dogs share 99.96 percent of their DNA with the wolf.

But those genetics have been overlain with up to 30,000 years of selective breeding and, more importantly, domestication. Many millennia ago humans and dogs began what was to be the most long-lived and enduring man-and-animal partnership of all. The dog was the first animal that we domesticated, and today they possess an ability to bond with and relate to humans that no other being can match.

The belief that dogs would revert to behaving like wolves in the absence of human influence long ruled the way we trained our canine companions. Studies suggested that wolves were pack animals, with two dominant adults – one male, one female – threatening violence or expulsion to subjugate those under them. Using the argument that dogs are essentially wolves, humans were thought to have to dominate their canine pets, to prove they were ‘the master of the pack’.

In recent years much of this thinking has been turned on its head. Most studies of wolf packs were carried out in captivity, generally in zoos. Captive ‘packs’ were made up of a discordant group of animals thrown together arbitrarily, and with little relevance to the wild. Recent studies of wolf ‘packs’ as they occur in nature prove them to be nothing more menacing than extended family units.

In nature the wolf pack usually consists of one breeding pair, plus their adolescent offspring who help the adults to bring up new cubs. The pack can turn violent, but only against another pack that tries to encroach upon its territory. Wolves, then, are naturally sociable, family-oriented animals. Within the family unit – the so-called pack – they exhibit cooperation, kindness and care towards each other.

Likewise, most dogs simply want to feel part of the family and to enjoy family life, as others in the family unit – whether human or canine – do. Viewed in this context, training dogs by employing dominant behaviour, threats and even physical punishment is about as appropriate as doing so with a child. What dogs respond to best is love, reward and play – and crucially, being made to feel an integral part of the family. And luckily for Judy, she’d just fallen into the biggest, most playful and fun-loving family she ever could have wished for.

Life aboard a Yangtze gunboat was by necessity close-knit and familial. With a crew numbering in the fifties – Chinese cooks and kitchen boys not included – the *Gnat*’s company wasn’t a great deal bigger than your average wolf pack. Most such packs are happy family units, wherein disagreements do happen but are usually resolved harmoniously. Cooperation, not coercion, is the rule.

While Judy had yet to find her two-legged ‘master’ aboard the *Gnat* – someone with whom to bond absolutely – within the first few days of coming aboard she was at one with the close-knit band of the ship’s crew. She was at home with them all. And by the time the *Gnat* was ready to set sail Judy of Sussex appeared to have grown well accustomed to life aboard ship. She seemed to be finding her sea legs, and to be more than ready for the long voyage into the country’s interior.

At 0800 hours on 10 November 1936 the *Gnat*’s crew began stowing away the last of the stores, in preparation for the departure. At 0900 hours the special sea-duty crewmen and cable parties prepared to cast off. Like all dogs, Judy had an uncanny ability to read human body language and actions. She dashed about the *Gnat*, sniffing excitedly as cables were slipped and fenders hauled aboard.

Ten minutes later the *Gnat* had slipped anchor, the throb of the twin engines beginning to shake and vibrate the deck. Twenty minutes after that the ship pulled into shore again, and tied up alongside the Asiatic Petroleum Company’s wharf where 68.1 tonnes of fuel oil were to be pumped aboard. Judy had

just endured her first short voyage 'at sea', and all aboard were mightily impressed by how she had behaved. But all of this had been in the comparatively sheltered waters of the Shanghai port. The word Shanghai itself means 'on the ocean', and the city sits at the confluence of the Yangtze River and the East China Sea.

Fuel oil pumped aboard, the vessel did an about turn, and at 1220 hours she began to steam to a new wharf, where she would load ammunition supplies. In addition to her six Maxim machine guns mounted aft of the bridge, the *Gnat* boasted a 12-pounder anti-aircraft gun, and a pair of 6-inch Mark VII guns, which were able to fire a 45-kilogram shell over a ten-kilometre range. The 6-inch guns were the largest calibre of any gunboat then serving on the Yangtze, lending the Insect Class boats a punch that belied their name.

Life aboard the Yangtze gunboats was colourful, but it was also fraught with danger. Hostile vessels menaced the river waters. The Yangtze was wild and unpredictable in places, and ships could easily be driven ashore or dashed to pieces on the rocky sides of the gorges through which they passed. The constant tension and danger took an inevitable toll, and young sailors needed quality downtime in which to destress and unwind. Shanghai, with its wild bars and subterranean clubs, offered them ample opportunity to do so.

But as always was the case when young sailors went partying, there were some at least who were loath to leave the joys of the shore behind them. In the past few days Captain Waldegrave had been forced to send two of the *Gnat's* crew to the Military Detention Quarters, in Shanghai, for thirty days punishment. No doubt the sailors in question had found the beer supplies aboard the *Gnat* somewhat wanting, or perhaps they had balked at leaving a local girl behind them.

But at the same time, the Captain had also found cause to issue a number of good conduct badges to his crew, and he had written up at least one for a Good Conduct Medal. Overall, the seamen were pulling together admirably, and the Captain put that down in part to the newest arrival among them. But while she'd brought them great joy and a renewed sense of purpose, Judy was about to prove that she could also bring them a great deal of trouble.

It was on the morning of 14 November when the *Gnat* finally slipped her mooring for the long voyage upriver. She steamed eastwards at first, heading out to sea, before turning west into the churning maw that forms the vast expanse of the Yangtze River delta. Taking full advantage of her fourteen-knot speed and triple rudders – which gave her a tight turning circle, crucial for operating in the narrow confines of the river's higher reaches – the *Gnat* began to battle against the ten-knot current that was sweeping this massive expanse of fresh water out to sea.

Here, where the mighty Yangtze drains into the East China Sea, the delta is over twenty miles wide around the same width as the English Channel at its narrowest. Gazing out over the grey November water both man and dog would need to remind themselves that this was a river, and not an ocean. With eddies and currents swept beneath the flat bottom of the *Gnat's* hull; powerful waves and swells the size of ocean rollers rumbled past her sides. The cold, muddy, grey-yellow water was heavy with silt, and every now and again a swirling whirlpool spun across their path, sucking nameless debris into its depths.

As the port city faded into the distance, land was barely visible. Instead of the steady hustle and bustle of Shanghai harbour life, a new sound filled the crew's ears. It was the unearthly, hollow rushing of the river as the *Gnat* fought her way upstream, passing over the sandbanks and mudflats that litter the Yangtze's final approach to the sea. The noise rose to a deafening roar each time the flat-bottomed vessel clawed over the narrowest of shallows, where the depth decreased to a matter of a few feet, then died down again as the riverbed plunged to some 100 feet or more in depth.

During the weeks that she'd spent living on the streets of Shanghai, Judy had become accustomed to the roar of the city – the ceaseless cacophony of engines, voices, industry and human endeavour.

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