

“There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man.”
— **Winston S. Churchill**

World War I caused a lot of victims on the front, not only humans but also horses, war horses.

During the war, the British military had bought more than 1,100,000 horses from Britain, the U.S. and Canada making a great investment. And these horses did a good work because transported weapons and supplies, mounted cavalry charges, pulled heavy guns and transported dead and wounded soldiers. Of course, many of them died for exhaustion, harsh winters and bombs. Actually, many horses lost their life more than human beings.

The British government did everything possible to maintain a constant supply of horses, during the war. Also farming horses were taken from families who loved them. When the war ended, the soldiers returned to their families, but the horses were abandoned in foreign countries.

Winston Churchill, then forty-four years old, was Secretary of State for War at the end of World War I, but he had also served, when younger, on the front lines. When he understood the problem of the abandoned horses, he did not accept the situation. He did not want horses to suffer from starvation and disease and not even accepted they were sold to French and Belgian butchers.

So, on February 13, 1919, he sent a brief but powerful message to Lieutenant-General Sir Travers Clarke, who was then Quartermaster-General:

“If it is so serious, what have you been doing about it? The letter of the Commander-In-Chief discloses a complete failure on the part of the Ministry of Shipping to meet its obligations and scores of thousands of horses will be left in France under extremely disadvantageous conditions.”

Immediately many ships were added to take horses back to England., about 9,000 horses per week.

This fact was forgotten for a long time, till Steven Spielberg decided to shoot a little film, based on a 1982 children’s book, by Michael Morpurgo. The story called War Horse, is about the attempt of a young man to be reunited with his beloved farm horse, the unfortunate fact is that very few horses were actually returned to their original owners.

Terry Charman, senior historian with the Imperial War Museum, says Churchill was an animal lover and his motivation could have been based purely on animal-welfare concerns.

'It is quite possible he could have been moved by the plight of the animals,' he said. 'He loved everything from cats to canaries. There is a famous story that on one occasion he was unable to carve a goose which had grown up at his home in Chartwell.

