

The Animals' War: Personal accounts

Horses in WWI

Mud

Following heavy rainfall and heavy shelling, the battlefield often turned into a muddy quagmire. As well as making it hard work for horses and mules pulling heavy loads, it could also be extremely treacherous.

Private Sidney Smith, the Somme 1916

There was nothing the eye could see except waves rippling the mud as the wind blew, I had the terrible experience to witness three horses and six men disappear completely under the mud. It was a sight that will live forever in my memory. The last horse went to a muddy grave, keeping his nostrils above the slush until the last second. A spurt of mud told me it was all over.

Source: *The Animals' War*, Juliet Gardiner p40

Lieutenant Reginal Hancock, Veterinary Officer, 61st Howitzer Brigade, Royal Field Artillery (RFA), 1916

Tales got around of men slipping from the duckboard paths in darkness and sinking inch by inch, in some cases to drown in the liquid sea of mud around them. Some of my battery horses suffered thus and either drowned slowly by inches or had to be shot before they did so. Once, when a unit was trying to get out of its wagon lines to get back to refit in rest billets, I was summoned to half a dozen horses just visible above the ground. There was nothing to do but shoot them.

Source: *Tommy's Ark*, Richard Van Emden, p176