

The Animals' War: Personal accounts

Horses in WWI

Transportation

The British Expeditionary Force went to France in 1914 with 40,000 horses and mules. The animals shipped across the Channel had to endure terribly cramped conditions on board ship often in rough seas.

Driver Charles Keller, Royal Horse Artillery (RHA), 1914

The horses had been packed below deck, side by side and so close that they couldn't move. It was probably the only way that so many could be transported. They suffered terribly. Those that could staggered down the gangplank, but many had to be lifted off with slings. It was a relief to see them on the dock where they had a chance to move around. Lines were strung out on the dock for them to be tied while being watered and fed, and after that had been attended to we got something to eat ourselves. We spent the night behind the horses with our saddles for a pillow and during the next four years most of our nights were spent in this manner.

When the brigade was ready to move, the horses were loaded on to box cars: eight to a car, four each end with their heads to the centre and the centre space was filled with hay, pats, harness and four drivers' equipment and blankets. This left hardly any room for the drivers who had to sit in the door openings. We sat there the whole journey.

Source: *Tommy's Ark*, Richard Van Emden, p24