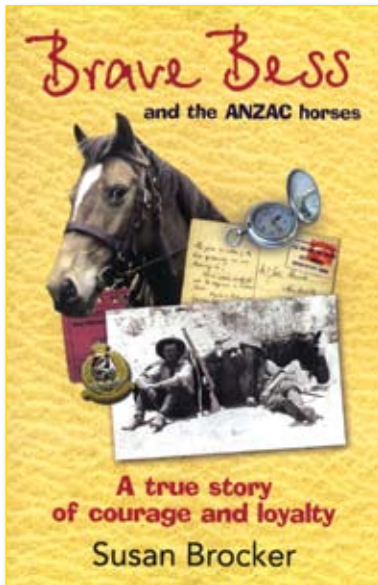


Brave Bess and the ANZAC horses by Susan Brocker

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An ENGLISH UNIT FROM



Brave Bess and the ANZAC horses is the third novel for Kiwi kids by prolific Tauranga-based author Susan Brocker. Her love and understanding of animals again feature strongly in this moving story as they did in her two previous novels, *Restless Spirit* and *Saving Sam*. Mutual respect, trust and the special relationship that can develop between humans and animals is again a significant theme in this novel. But it is much more than this. It brings the brutality, horror and futility of war into sharp focus through the eyes of Bess and the thousands of horses that were sent to serve with the New Zealand Mounted Rifles and Australian Light Horse Brigades in the Middle East during World War One. When we think of this war, we normally associate it with the horrors of the trench warfare in Europe. Meticulous research by Susan Brocker has brought to light the sacrifices and the huge contribution that these little-known ANZAC brigades made to the outcome of the war. Not only does it serve as a fitting memorial to the brave soldiers who fought and died in this war, but it brings to light the incredible bravery and deeds of the 10,238 horses who went to war. Sadly, only one of these horses ever returned home. Her name was Bess, and this is her story. The story will appeal to all students from middle primary to secondary levels, not only for its historical value, but as a reminder of the strong bonds, love, trust and dependency that can develop between humans and animals.

Synopsis of *Brave Bess and the ANZAC horses*

After the outbreak of World War One, over 3,700 horses and troopers of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade (NZMR) were sent to serve in the Middle East. The NZMR initially served without their horses at Gallipoli. At the end of this campaign they combined with the Australian Light Horse Brigades to form the Anzac Mounted Division. The task of the Anzacs was to prevent the Suez Canal from falling into the hands of the Turks, and to search for and drive out the Turks from the Sinai Desert and Palestine. Modern automatic weapons meant that the horses were no longer used for front-on calvary charges. Their role was to quickly take troopers up close to enemy lines where they would dismount and attack on foot. Every fourth soldier became a horse-holder and retreated to safety with his own horse and three others. There he would be ready to gallop the horses forward to collect their riders at any moment. As part of their training, the horses had to get over their natural fear of the noise of explosions and gunfire, so they wouldn't take fright and desert their rider. The riders treated their horses with kindness and respect, and the horses in turn trusted and respected their riders. The incredible heat, flies, hard food rations, huge sandhills and constant search for water made conditions almost intolerable for the horses at times. During action at Romani, tied-up horses waiting to retrieve their riders from battle became an easy target for a plane, leaving behind masses of dead and dying horses. The Anzacs finally drove the Turks out of the Sinai and the fighting began on the Palestinian plains. The NZMR, numbering 800 lightly-armed men, won a battle at Ayun Kara against 1,500 Turks armed with machine guns and artillery. Forty-four New Zealanders died along with 41 horses. The NZMR spent a long, hot summer in the Jordan Valley holding up the Turks while the rest of the (by now) large army seized Damascus and the war was over. The troopers were desperately disappointed at not being able to take the horses home because of quarantine reasons. Only Bess returned home and lived out her life at Flock House with her rider, Colonel C.G. Powles. Bess, the heroic horse, died in 1934.

Motivational and pre-reading activities

- Introduce *Brave Bess* as the story of the brave soldiers and horses who fought against the Turks in the Middle East during World War One.
- As a class shared reading exercise, using data camera, read through

the Appendices (pp 145–155). Discuss and list the main ideas developed to help students gain a basic understanding of the background to the war and the history of the horse in warfare.

- Using atlases, locate the countries involved in the conflict and the general area of the Middle East where the story is set.
- The following websites are suitable for students to gain a greater understanding of the causes of World War One:
www.neok12.com/World-War-I.htm (online videos)
www.historyonthenet.com/WW1/causes.htm

During and post-reading activities

- Have students keep a log of all instances in the story which show the growing trust and inter-dependency between the horses and soldiers.
- Can the students find evidence that backs up the statement that 'the desert was a greater enemy than the Turks'? Have them make a comparative table showing the differences between a horse's natural New Zealand environment and the conditions in the Middle East. In what ways did their riders help them to overcome these hardships?
- Discuss the reasons for the use of the horse-holder soldier who retreated from the battle. How did this help the horses?
- Discuss the reasons why New Zealand and Australia would send soldiers and horses to fight in a war on the other side of the world. Have we fought in any wars since? Google 'New Zealand at War' to research this topic.
- From a soldier's point of view, have students write a letter home describing the conditions they were fighting in and how they were trying to make the life of their horses as bearable as possible.
- Use a combination of Google Earth, Google Maps and atlases to locate the places where the Anzacs fought their battles from the formation of the ANZAC Mounted Division to the end of the war. Explain that Israel was known as Palestine during this time.
- Discuss the feelings that the soldiers must have had when they found they couldn't take the horses home. Why did many of the soldiers shoot them? How could they justify this to themselves?
- Discuss the idea of inter-dependency. Highlight times when both horses and soldiers depended on and helped each other.
- Have students write a short obituary for Bess that is suitable for publishing in a book of remembrance. Why do they think it was very important for this book to have been written?