



ANIMALS UNSEEN COLLATERAL DAMAGE

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By Brenda Shoss

War devastates. We grieve for soldiers and civilians lost. But headlines rarely publicize the unseen victims. Animals, crimeless and naive, dodge mortars and armored combat vehicles. Their lives crumble into desertion, starvation, injury, death.

Helena Hesayne, a Beirut born architect, has little patience for the politics behind battle. Her mission is clear: To rescue animals abandoned in Lebanon's exodus of one million people. In late July 2006, Hesayne and three others from Beirut For The Ethical Treatment Of Animals (BETA) navigate smoldering rubble in a small convertible. Israeli soldiers eye their car full of dog and cat food.

Hesayne displays BETA's accreditation papers. She has no fear, only her resolve to get four cats and one puppy locked inside a pet shop. "These animals are banging against a glass door. They are without food and water. I don't know how long," Hesayne recounts. The women persuade a nearby merchant to unlock the pet shop for them. They have no crates, so each animal is carried to their car under a downpour of bombs. "The entire time, this tiny puppy just licks our faces. It is the most amazing thing," Hesayne says.



After Iraq warfare killed all but a dozen or so Baghdad Zoo animals, U.S. veterinarians partnered with the zoo. Above, a sedated tiger is checked by Dr. Mewafak Raffo, left, a veterinary advisor with 1st Armored Division, and Maj. Matt Takara, commander 51st Medical Detachment Veterinary Medicine. 2009, U.S. Army



Photo: Joanne Greene, a Kinship Circle member, on ground in war-time Lebanon



Photo: Best Friends BETA saves Louli in war zone

Photo: BETA / Injured Nougat

A BRUTAL LANDSCAPE

At the onset of conflict in Lebanon, citizens and foreigners fled. Canadian, British and American evacuation protocols banned companion animals. In the chaos, evacuees released animals into the streets or confined them in buildings. BETA believes thousands of companion animals were discarded.

It is a familiar scenario. War casts companion, wild, zoo and farm animals into the shadows, terrified and hungry. Unlike people, animals do not intellectually grasp their circumstances. The U.S. invasion of Iraq ravaged Baghdad's zoo, killing all but 80 of 400 animals. Bombings stranded survivors without food, water, or wound care until U.S. military veterinarians interceded with mobile clinics. Some kind-hearted U.S. troops even shared their ration packs with zoo animals, livestock, horses, donkeys, cats and dogs.

By the time BETA reached a zoo south of Beirut in Tyre, its emaciated animals could barely move. "People fleeing think of animals as possessions, like cars," Hesayne observes. "We leave the car. We leave the animals." BETA confiscated several baboons, monkeys, and one macaque from another municipal zoo and relocated them to a Wales sanctuary.

On July 18, 2006, two bombs swept over BETA's former shelter at the border of the Hezbollah camp and Green Line. Shrapnel lodged between bars inside one dog's cage. Though animals and people escaped injury, dogs sustained psychological scars. One friendly golden retriever "flipped out" after the explosions, Hesayne says. "The next day, he bit my arm. Since the bombing he randomly attacks or bites." BETA's other dogs panic each time a plane flies overhead.

A CULTURE OF CRUELTY

War leaves innocents in the line of fire. It can also breed an impulsive culture of cruelty. As infrastructure crumbles — with paralysis of roads, bridges, ports, communication, water and power sources — some aim their unrest at animals. Videos of U.S. soldiers engaged in animal abuse have circulated the Internet.

Unsettling footage from a CD found in Baghdad's Green Zone revealed servicemen hurling rocks at a dog with a spinal deformity. As the dog wailed, one man laughed, "That is the funniest thing I've ever seen in my life." Another suggested they "go over and kill it." Indiscriminate abuse stems from the illogical premise that animals matter less during war and are easy scapegoats for violence.

For BETA's small volunteer staff, constant uprisings afford little respite from bloodshed. By June 2007, steady shelling and machine-gun fire had resumed in Lebanon as the army cornered Fatah Islam militants in a Palestinian fugitive camp near Tripoli. On June 4, car bombs and hand grenades discharged next to BETA's cat facility in the Ashrafieh neighborhood. BETA's dogs, situated in a former pig farm, were miles away from two cat shelters across the old Green Line. The group hopes to consolidate cats and dogs in a new shelter before the hostility escalates.

In this volatile setting, people "go nuts and shoot animals right and left or poison them," Hesayne says. "We see puppies whose heads were banged against sidewalks or tied in electrical wire. If a dog barks, they just shoot the dog."

Chicagoan Joanne Greene can attest to cruelty during war. From January 15 to February 3, 2007, the Jewish American who runs a dog-walking business joined BETA to feed animals roaming Beirut's "hot zones." Though she'd volunteered for three animal relief missions in post-Katrina New Orleans, nothing prepared her for rescue in a combat zone.

Among Greene's eyewitness accounts, she depicts one particularly "horrid day in Beirut" when she and BETA's Joelle Kanaan respond to a call about three puppies tossed from a speeding car. The dogs are buried in a sack, their mouths tightly bound in electrical tape. Kanaan retrieves two, but the third pup disappears into the rain and mud.

"We leave, praying the tape around her mouth loosens to ease her suffering," Greene writes. "But the day is not over." As Kanaan and another BETA volunteer replenish food stations, they see a sanitation truck hoist a dumpster full of live cats. The drivers ignore the women's cries and pulverize the screaming cats.

ANIMALS IN WAR ZONES

America's Universal Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) contains no anti-cruelty clauses. Defense leaders seldom penalize soldiers for animal torture. The military also advocates lethal rabies control to safeguard troops, despite proof that rigorous vaccination programs inhibit disease transmission more effectively than slaughter.

Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and Humane Society International (HSI) want the U.S. Department of Defense to revitalize rules for animal cruelty and control, as well as permit soldier adoption of animals. General Order 1-A (GO-1A) forbids soldiers to care for pets or mascots. For reasons unknown, the military lumps animal companionship under behavior "prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline of all forces." Since 2005, security clampdowns along borders have blocked soldiers from transporting strays back to the states.

Well, some soldiers. The fiercely determined rely on Iraq's "canine underground railroad." During a 2004 offensive in Fallujah, Ma-



rines found a grubby, flea-infested puppy. With help from a reporter and the Helen Woodward Animal Center, Lt. Col. Jay Kopelman sent "Lava" from Jordan to California. In Kopelman's book, "From Baghdad, With Love," he details arrangements that led to Lava's homecoming. Another army major saved skin-and-bones Bashur during his tour in Kirkuk, Iraq. The dog, now at home in Illinois, traveled 640 miles with a military convoy to Kuwait.

A HOME ON DISTANT SHORES

On September 25, 2006, 150 dogs and 145 cats flew from Beirut's International Airport to Best Friends Animal Sanctuary in Kanab, Utah. Kinship Circle was among others who helped negotiate the complex air lift with calls to U.S. Senators and government officials. The relocation freed an overwhelmed BETA to recover more displaced pets — like Nougat, a blue-eyed Labrador-Husky mix left for dead in a vehicle collision. Nougat suffered a shattered jaw and maggot infestation over four days before anyone notified BETA. But emergency surgery saved Nougat, who is now prime pooch at her new Rhode Island home. BETA hopes to orchestrate more adoptions in the U.S.

If there is any light in war's darkness, it is the miracle of newfound compassion. In Iraq, citizens and members of the 1st Armored Division and V corps formed the Iraqi Animal Welfare Society. No significant humane organizations existed in Iraq prior to the war.

Sometimes the miracle is the animal herself. Before roadside bombs took Justin Rollins' life, the last nose the 22-year old paratrooper nuzzled belonged to a puppy. When his grieving family saw photos of Rollins cuddling a white and brown mutt in Iraq, they campaigned to bring the dog home. With the aid of Rep. Paul Hodes, D-N.H., Hero journeyed about 6,000 miles to New Hampshire. "It was the last bit of happiness Justin had," Rollins' girlfriend Britney Murray told reporters.

Animals like Hero can soften war's impact. Rescuing them from harm doesn't devalue human suffering. In fact, it makes us a bit more human.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

1. Learn about and support animal welfare groups working in war-torn regions.

BETA Lebanon: www.betalebanon.org

Concern For Helping Animals In Israel (CHAI): www.chai-online.org

2. Ask U.S. Department of Defense officials to make regulatory changes for animals in war zones. Specifically, urge the DoD to:

- Insert an anti-cruelty clause in the Universal Code of Military Justice.
- Use non-lethal vaccination to cope with rabies concerns in countries where stationed.
- Implement an adoption system that lets soldiers bring vetted pets home.

CONTACTS: www.defense.gov/faq/pis/dod_addresses.aspx • www.whs.mil/contact.cfm

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