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## Judy

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Originally stationed aboard Navy vessels on the Yangtze river before World War 2, she survived being sunk twice, being stranded on a deserted island, trekking across 200 miles of hostile jungle and internment in a Japanese POW camp. After the war, she retired to a peaceful life in Tanzania with her two medals. All these facts of her life are made all the more interesting by the fact that she was a dog.

Judy, a liver-and-white English Pointer, was born in Shanghai, China, in 1936. She initially lived a comfortable life as a ship's mascot aboard the British gunboat HMS Gnat. Her early years were filled with the routine of ship life, endearing herself to the crew with her spirited personality and boundless energy. She became a favourite of sailors patrolling the world's third longest river and some diary entries gained her some celebrity back in England even then. But to be a peacetime mascot is easy enough. As World War II broke out, Judy would prove to be far more capable and remarkable than a mere mascot with a wagging tail.

By 1942, the British Royal Navy found itself fully embroiled in the conflict against the Axis powers. The Imperial Japanese forces captured much of Asia and the Pacific – and the war against them would take a lot of time and a lot of lives. Initially, the tide of war seemed to be entirely on the side of the Japanese.

During the Battle of Singapore – a disastrous loss for the British – the HMS Gnat was captured by the Japanese. The crew, including Judy, became prisoners of war. This marked the beginning of Judy's journey from a ship's mascot to a war hero. She, along with the crew, was interned in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp in Sumatra. The conditions were deplorable, with overcrowded living quarters, meager rations, and forced labour. Yet for some reason the prisoners were unwilling to get rid of the dog, and the Japanese tolerated her among their prisoners. Despite the adversity, Judy's presence provided a source of comfort and companionship to the prisoners.

Judy's exceptional intelligence and unwavering loyalty became evident in the face of danger. On numerous occasions, she displayed remarkable acts of courage that not only lifted the spirits of the prisoners but also saved lives.

Judy's acute senses and keen perception made her an invaluable asset to the prisoners. She would sense approaching aircraft or warn of potential danger, giving the prisoners a brief but crucial window to prepare or take cover. Avoiding Allied airstrikes was a key to surviving the torturous 200 miles trek through hostile jungle terrain that the Japanese subjected the captured sailors and soldiers to.

One might question the wisdom of sharing rations with a dog – but, remarkably, Judy herself did not. In the dire circumstances of the prisoner-of-war camp, Judy demonstrated a compassionate side. On several occasions, she would share her food with malnourished fellow prisoners, forging a bond of camaraderie and providing solace in times of desperate scarcity.

As the war progressed, the Japanese authorities decided to transfer the prisoners to another location. In a harrowing journey, Judy and the prisoners were loaded onto a ship, the SS Van Warwyck. The ship was torpedoed and sank, forcing Judy and the survivors to endure hours in the water. Judy's presence and swimming abilities were credited with saving lives during this perilous ordeal.

And in one of the most daring episodes of her wartime saga, Judy played a pivotal role in an escape attempt by a group of prisoners. Using her uncanny ability to sense danger, she alerted the prisoners to the approaching guards, allowing them to adjust their plans and avoid detection. The escape attempt ultimately failed, resulting in harsh punishments for those involved, but Judy's bravery and loyalty left an enduring impression.

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Following the end of World War II, Judy and the surviving prisoners were liberated. Her remarkable journey from a ship's mascot to a prisoner-of-war hero garnered attention and admiration. In 1946, Judy was awarded the Dickin Medal, the highest award for animal bravery in wartime, for her acts of valor and devotion during the conflict. She also received the PDSA Blue Cross.

After the war, Judy and her beloved companions faced the challenge of reintegrating into civilian life. The bond forged in the crucible of war remained unbroken, and many former prisoners sought to adopt Judy and bring her home. Eventually, Frank Williams, a Royal Air Force officer who had been interned with Judy, adopted her, and they embarked on a new chapter together.

She eventually passed away in Tanzania – having lived through the most destructive war in human history. Judy's journey from a ship's mascot to a prisoner-of-war hero exemplifies the resilience of the human spirit and the profound impact that animals can have on our lives. Her story is a testament to the enduring bonds formed in the crucible of war and the extraordinary courage displayed by one small canine companion. Judy's legacy lives on, reminding us of the capacity for compassion, bravery, and companionship even in the darkest of times. In the annals of history, Judy stands as a remarkable symbol of hope, a canine heroine whose paw prints left an indelible mark on the hearts of those she served and saved during World War II.