



StubbyDog™
Rediscover the pit bull.

A Hero's Nature

Sergeant Stubby was an American hero, demonstrating the true characteristics of pit bull-type dogs



By Cory Grimm, U.S. Air Force Veteran

It wasn't long ago that I was both a soldier and whatever you call the opposite of a pit bull advocate. It wasn't that I hated the dogs, just that I – like so many others – heard all the horrible things that the breed was known for and flat out was not interested in testing the validity of the stories. Since then I've seen the truth behind a lot of the stigma and have grown to appreciate what the breed is really about.

Pit bulls are protectors and companions. It's bred into their DNA to love and protect people, even if that means putting themselves at risk to do so. It's a trait of the breed that has been exploited too many times to count, but I'm happy to say that there is one very famous dog that proved that the nature of a pit bull is, and always has been, to keep us safe.

Stubby Enlists

Sergeant Stubby was a pit bull type dog that was found and “enlisted” by Private Conroy during World War I. The puppy's short tail gave him a name, and the Army gave him a mission.

Stubby would train with the Army every morning, running and exercising with the unit. It's important to mention that in the military, acting as a cohesive unit not only makes the team stronger, but also helps to firmly bond the members together. Stubby was no exception here, as the soldiers frequently used Stubby to set the pace for running and as a mascot for the unit as they trained for the war. It's also important to mention that dogs are not soldiers and are not shipped off to war.

Except, that is, for Stubby.





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Private Conroy received orders to depart for Europe shortly after training had finished. He and his fellow soldiers were heartbroken at the idea of leaving their K-9 companion and mascot behind, so they worked together to smuggle the dog onto the ship, hide him until they were too far from land to return, then present him to the ship's crew, who quickly adopted the furry fellow as their mascot as well. Stubby served to raise morale on the ship, a job at which he excelled. The entire crew came to love the dog as their own, even going so far as to have the supply officers craft him a custom-fit uniform and the machinists engrave him his very own dog tags. When the ship arrived, the dog was smuggled on land and kept out of sight until orders were received to set out to battle in 1918. Stubby was discovered by the commanding officer. The officer was not about to allow a dog to be mingled with his troops and serve as a distraction.

Private Conroy claimed that he could prove that Sergeant Stubby wasn't just some dog, that he was as well trained as any soldier and could keep morale up during their mission. To prove this point, Conroy ordered Stubby to "Present Arms." That's military speak for saluting. Stubby sat down, raised his right paw to his eye and held it there until ordered to "Order Arms," or military speak for lowering a salute. The commander considered the values of increased morale amongst his men and eventually allowed Stubby to accompany the unit to the battlefield.

Loyal Service

Stubby stayed with the unit for 17 major battles. The dog wasn't a fighter; in fact, he never left the American trenches. He was, however, a protector during those 17 engagements. Stubby was exposed to mustard gas during the war, which nearly took his life. The pit bull was sent to the military hospital and given the same level of attention as the rest of the soldiers. During Stubby's recovery, he would roam the hospital from wounded soldier to wounded soldier, offering a bit of support and affection as the men recovered from battle. Eventually, Stubby was ready for action again.

The dog was returned to the trenches and to his buddy, Conroy. Stubby had learned how to stay low in the trenches during firefights and had learned how to identify injured – but living – soldiers and alert medics to their location. The wounded men would call to Stubby, who would seek them out during the night and help bring them back to safety. Stubby's previous injury even gave him yet another way to protect his comrades: He could smell mustard gas before it was lethal. The pit bull's keen nose and protective nature saved many American lives, as he would detect the toxic fumes before human noses would even know it was there. The entire unit was able to escape chemical attacks that would otherwise kill every last man while they slept.

During the following years Stubby was injured by stray bullets and grenade shrapnel. Each time, he was taken to the medics, nursed back to health, and then returned to the front lines where he served to keep his men safe. Stubby even learned to identify the German language, which led him to a German spy that was mapping out the location of American soldiers. During one of Stubby's routine searches for wounded American soldiers, he found the German hiding amongst the bushes and managed to hold the man in place long enough for Americans to locate and capture the spy. This act was what officially earned Stubby a promotion to the rank of Sergeant in the U.S. Army (a higher rank than Private Conroy).



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True Character

Eventually, Stubby and Conroy returned home to the United States, where Stubby was greeted with both a hero's welcome from the American public, and two visits from Presidents Harding and Coolidge.

The story of Stubby is one that I wish more people knew. After the war, Stubby was not just the mascot of his unit, but of this country. The pit bulls seen with Uncle Sam and standing with soldiers during that era were all based on Stubby. His tenacity and courage was a source of pride for the Army and for America as a whole. The protective instincts and impossibly close bond that Stubby had shown were, at the time, the breed's defining characteristics.

Sadly, it has been many years since Stubby's time. His legacy has all but vanished in today's perspective of the pit bull: Tenacity and courage has been replaced with viciousness and aggression, love and companionship replaced with fighting and malice. As a soldier, I can tell you that the pit bull's nature is one that I would gladly take with me into unknown territory. I would have been honored to have a dog like Stubby watching my back no matter what, keeping my spirits up and, most importantly, keeping me safe.

As a pit bull owner I can tell you that the dog's nature is one that I cherish. I am honored to have a friend that shows me love no matter what, a friend that keeps me smiling, and one that gives me the opportunity to share his amazing breed's true nature with the world. The characteristics of a pit bull that make them frightful in the minds of many are the same that make them incredible in the minds of those that know. They are physically durable dogs, which is great for families with children. They are big dogs, which makes them great for people who choose to go for a jog after dark, or have a couch with big cushions – because make no mistake, if that's where you are, that's where your pit bull will want to be. And yes, they definitely have massive heads with big ol' jaws, which is perfect for a big hug and maybe even a few kisses if nobody else is around to see.

I am grateful for the work that Stubby did in the service to this country, and I'm grateful for the companionship that my dog has given me as well. I am sad to see that the world has all but forgotten about the four-legged Sergeant and his amazing deeds, but perhaps that just means that the world is ready for a new pit bull hero's story. Order arms, Sergeant Stubby.

