

A sample case on animal rights studies: “Red Star” mercy among arms*

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Summary: Throughout history, war has been one of the major ways humans have resolved their disputes, and humans have often used animals during times of war. The failure to treat and deliver adequate care to animals wounded during the South African War was drawn attention of societies on the protection of animals against cruelty and led to the intensification of efforts to establish an association, with a status similar to that of the “Red Cross,” which would provide healthcare services and aid to animals on the battlefield. After protracted correspondence and made efforts, the Red Star (*Etoile Rouge*), The International Alliance of Societies to Aid Animals on the Battlefield was officially established on February 22, 1915. A red pentagram on a white background was chosen as the insignia, and the organization adopted the motto, *Mercy among Arms*. In this study, retrospective method was used in order to investigate the historical development of the practice all use of “Red Cross” protection for wounded animals, based on a document retrieved from the personal archive of the Veterinarian, Emin Çölaşan. As a result, it can be argued that "The International Alliance of Societies to Aid Animals on the Battlefield" has not been able to carry out intended activities due to various problems. However, it can be said that this initiative was provide an international basis for the activities of local animal protection associations.

Keywords: Animal protection, Red Star, war animals.

Hayvan hakları çalışmalarına bir örnek: “Necmi Ahmer” ordulararası şefkat

Özet: Tarih boyunca anlaşmazlıkları çözmenin başlıca yollarından biri olan savaşlarda da hayvanlardan yararlanılmıştır. Güney Afrika savaşı sırasında yaralanan hayvanlar için yeterli tedavi ve bakım hizmeti sağlanamaması, hayvanları koruma derneklerinin dikkatini çekmiş ve savaş alanlarındaki hayvanlara “Kızıl Haç” statüsünde bakım ve yardım sağlayacak uluslararası bir birlik oluşturma yönündeki faaliyetlerini arttırmalarına neden olmuştur. Uzun süren yazışmalar ve çabaların sonunda 22 Şubat 1915 tarihinde “Necmi Ahmer” (*Etoile Rouge*) “Savaş meydanlarında hayvanlara yardım amaçlı derneklerin uluslararası birleşmesi” teşkilatı resmi olarak kurulmuştur. Amblemlerinin beyaz üzerine kırmızı ve beş köşeli yıldız olması ve slogan olarak da “Ordular Arasında Şefkat” ifadesi kabul edilmiştir. Çalışmada, medical tarih araştırmalarında yararlanılan retrospektif yöntem kullanılarak, Veteriner Hekim Emin Çölaşan’ın özel arşivinde bulunan bir belge temelinde, savaşta yaralanmış hayvanlara “Kızıl Haç” korumasının uygulanmasındaki tarihsel gelişimin incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Sonuç olarak “Savaş meydanlarında hayvanlara yardım amaçlı derneklerin uluslararası birleşmesi” teşkilatının, resmi olarak kurulmuş olmakla birlikte, çeşitli sorunlar nedeniyle pratikte amaçlanan çalışmaları yapamadığı ancak bu girişimin yerel hayvanları koruma derneklerinin faaliyetlerine uluslararası temel oluşturduğu öne sürülebilir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Hayvanları koruma, Necm-i Ahmer, savaşta kullanılan hayvanlar.

Introduction

Classical references consider the domestication of animals as one of the major events that underlie civilization, as it allowed the use of animals for food, clothing, transportation and other purposes. Throughout history, war has been one of the major ways humans have resolved their disputes, and humans have often used animals during times of war (7, 9).

It is well-known that, in particular, horses, donkeys, mules, dogs and pigeons have been used both in battles

and for transporting military equipment, water and other logistic support materials (6, 9, 11). A vast number of animals have lost their lives both on the battlefield and while being transported to these areas, as well as due to adverse environmental conditions (7, 12).

One of the best examples of this is the Boer War. In the South African (Boer) War, which took place between October 1899 and May 1902, 326.073 horses and 51.399 mules died on the British side alone. This is widely regarded as proportionally the most devastating loss of

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horses in military history up until that time. A monument was erected at Port Elizabeth in South Africa in the memory of horses that died during the war (Figure 1), (7, 11).

The fact that adequate treatment and care could not be provided for wounded animals on the battlefield during the South African War was clearly documented by military officials and non-governmental organizations. During the war, the idea of “mercifully” killing severely wounded animals instead of leaving them in pain was being voiced in various circles. Various initiatives were launched after military officials indicated that no endeavor could be made on this issue as long as the rights granted to soldiers by the Geneva Convention were not extended to wounded animals. During his visit to the President of Sweden in 1901, Secretary of the RSPCA, John Colam, wrote letters to animal protection societies around the world on the promise of unlimited support and call for their immediate cooperation (8).

In 1897 a society, called Our Dumb Friends League, was founded in London. The society, the aim of which was to provide welfare for working horses on the streets, chose a blue cross as its insignia. During the Balkan Wars, this league started a special fund to help injured horses. During World War I, there were 12 Blue Cross hospitals in France for horses and three hospitals for dogs. A Blue Cross insignia was displayed on the sides of horse ambulances, and veterinary hospitals flew a flag of the blue cross. Having continued its activities during World War II, the League changed its name to The Blue Cross in 1950 (4, 5).



Figure 1. The monument at Port Elizabeth (7).
Şekil 1. Port Elizabeth'teki Anıt (7).



Figure 2. The document found in the personal archive of Veterinarian Emin Çölaşan.
Şekil 2. Veteriner Hekim Emin Çölaşan'ın özel arşivinde bulunan belge.

The objective of this study is to review a document in German, the original of which can be found at the Turkish Ministry of Agriculture Directorate of Veterinary Affairs, and the translation of which was found in the personal archive of the Veterinarian, Emin Çölaşan^a (Figure 2). The document was chosen as the subject of this study as it proposed to implement Red Cross protection for animals wounded during war.

Materials and Methods

Methods commonly used in the analysis and synthesis of medical history (3) were employed in this study. The study subject was dealt using a chronological order. During the study, Turkish Prime Ministry Archives of the Ottoman and Republican Periods, and books, manuscripts and other publications relevant to the subject were reviewed. The study's main material, was a primary source obtained from Veterinarian Emin Çölaşan's personal archive.

Results

In the document, it is stated that there was a proposal, also picked up by the British press, to implement Red Cross protection to wounded animals, as numerous horses and mules were lost during Britain's war in the Transvaal (Republic of South African), which known as the Boer War. It was reported that this suggestion caused considerable consternation, but was brushed aside with indifference, and the discussions that were supposed to take place among the Great Powers did not come to fruition. According to the document, the proposal was raised once again during the Russo-Japanese and the Balkan wars, and as a result of the efforts of the Swiss Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, it was decided to assign persons who were informed about veterinary medicine to each branch in order to put down animals that were wounded or unwell during wars. The Swiss government brought up the issue at the Peace Conference held in London in May 1912 but failed to reach a positive outcome. In June 1914, Capt. E.G. Fairholme, Chairman of the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, made several proposals to be submitted to the Third Peace Conference to be held in the Hague^a.

These proposals included:

1. Establishing units for "Veterinary Rescue Services" regarding military animals in all countries, and to grant them the authority to work

at collection stations for sick animals and animal hospitals,

2. to maintain the impartiality of officials, attendants and veterinarians working on this matter, and
3. to design an insignia other than a red cross in order to prevent the misuse of the Red Cross.

All societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals in Europe were summoned to a meeting that would be held on July 23, 1914; however, the meeting could not be held due to imminent war. Mr. Lassieur, Chairman of The Geneva Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, who was following the process closely, invited the leaderships of all societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals from all nations to conclude an international agreement on behalf of animals used for military purposes similar to the agreement that founded the Red Cross. Finally, in January 1914, he managed to hold a meeting in Geneva, in the same hall where the Red Cross was founded in 1863^a.

According to the documents obtained from the Ottoman Archives of the Prime Ministry, a letter^b dated 17 December 1914 which reported that the meeting would be held on 24 December 1914, was send to Consul General Ziya Bey from Mr Lassieur (Chairman of The Geneva Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals). Despite some lack of correspondence in the related file, it was found that Bab-ı Ali Legal Counsel wrote a letter dated 31 December 1914 to the Geneva Consulate General. In the document entitled "On the Meeting Animal Protection Society to Geneva Consulate General" it was stated that the date of the meeting had passed but it is desirable to follow up the work of the society and to provide a copy of the "Animal Friends" which they published^c.

Even though delegations from Switzerland, Belgium, Britain, Serbia and Montenegro, Austro-Hungary and Turkey participated in the meeting, no conclusion could be reached as Germany, Russia and Japan did not take part. The Berlin Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals desisted from sending a representative to the meeting at the last minute, suggesting that the agreement might be abused in regard to the protection of animals. A meeting in which all parties participated was finally held on February 22, 1915, and *Red Star, The International Alliance of Societies to Aid Animals on the Battlefield*, was founded. A red pentagram on a white background was chosen as the insignia, and "Inter Arma Misericordia", meaning "Mercy Between Arms", was adopted as the motto of the organization. Although a decision to issue an "International Bulletin"

^a The document was recorded in the handwriting of Mr. Emin Çölaşan (retrieved from the private family archive of his grandson, Refik Çölaşan).

^b BOA.HR.SYS.02404

^c BOA. HR. HMŞ.İŞO.00055.00001.002

for the association was made, only one issue of the bulletin could eventually be published^a. However, despite all the researches, the bulletin could not be reached yet.

The second international meeting of the Red Star was held on June 24, 1915, in Geneva, but no joint resolution could be issued. The Berlin representative who participated in this meeting resigned from further sessions, claiming that the conditions for founding an international protection society regarding military animals had not yet come about. After the negotiations, it was decided to ask the Swiss Federation Assembly to arrange an international meeting at an appropriate time to discuss the problem. In the meantime, the issue of Red Star was repeatedly written about by the press. Although the French and Prussian Ministries of War were requested to send two members from each ministry to investigate veterinary affairs behind the lines during the summer of 1915, this initiative was rebuffed by Germany on the pretext of the threat of espionage^a.

The French government, on the other hand, allowed animal hospitals run by the Blue Cross and Violet Cross non-governmental organizations located a very long way from the frontline to be inspected and examined. These two British societies, the Blue and Violet Cross, were founded to protect the military animals of the Allied Powers and established many animal hospitals behind the lines^a.

In 1916, the Austro-Hungarian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals requested the Ministry of War to allow Austrian veterinarians to wear a white brassard with red star insignia. Although this request was not accepted at the time, in 1917 all persons employed in veterinary and farrier work were ordered to wear a maroon star insignia on a white cloth armband on their upper arm, as a “*Veterinary Healthcare Brassard*”. Flags bearing the same sign were also used to indicate the locations of animal hospitals. Therefore, the insignia adopted in Geneva was recognized and used in practice only by a single state engaged in the war^a.

Discussion and Conclusion

The original document that constituted the basis of the study could not be found in the archives. However, the letter of Mr Lassieur to the Geneva General Consulate General and the response of the Legal Consul were documented^d this initiative. Printed and online materials related with the same period confirmed the veracity of the information contained in the document also. Similarly, the historical document or record concerning the initial proposal of The London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals could not be found in the archives either. The only issue of the bulletin published by *The*

International Alliance of Societies to Aid Animals upon the Battlefield could not be obtained either. These issues are for the benefit of researchers who may choose to review this subject matter in the future.

In the subsequent period, the “Red Star” (*Necmi Ahmer*), which was designated as the insignia for aiding animals on battlefield, was arranged as a “*red star on a white background*” by the Turkish Veterinarians Association (1920) and adopted as the first emblem of the veterinary profession in Turkey (Figure-3), (10).



Figure 3. The first insignia of Turkish Veterinarians Association (10).

Şekil 3. Türk Veteriner Hekimleri Birliği'nin ilk amblemi (10).

Within the same period in the United States, the *American Humane Association* began its work using the slogan “*Help the Horse to Save the Soldier!*” and employing the same insignia for the same purpose in 1916 (1).

On the other hand, it appears that the American Veterinary Medicine Association established a committee in order to propose an official insignia. Following the detailed review it conducted, the committee stated that “The International Alliance of Societies to Aid Animals on the Battlefield organized in Geneva, Switzerland, has adopted as its seal and insignia a Red Star, underneath which are the words ‘Inter Arma Misericordia,’ meaning ‘Mercy Between Arms.’” Furthermore, the emphasis that “the Red Star flag is being used by the Field Veterinary

^d Footnotes b,c

Hospitals of the German and Austrian armies, while on the Franco-British lines, the Blue Cross is being used by the London Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals” is rather noteworthy (2).

It could be claimed that the efforts to provide medical and humanitarian aid to animals wounded on battlefield, which first gained currency during the South African War, intensified during the Balkan Wars and World War I. It is also safe to say that the two large non-governmental organizations (i.e. the Blue Cross and the American Red Star Animal Relief), which aim to help animals in difficult situations in various natural disasters, pioneered the work in this field. It is also possible to argue that, even though Red Star, “The International Alliance of Societies to Aid Animals on the Battlefield”, was officially formed, it failed to political reasons and conduct the desired work due to problems faced in practice. Nevertheless, it can be claimed that this attempt provided international and moral support to the efforts of local societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals so as to render them more effective.

Consequently, the idea of forming the Red Star organization forcefully raised the question of how to provide assistance and relief to animals, especially in disasters that adversely affect them and particularly during wars. It can be said that the experiences gained from these circumstances are now being used for the benefit of animals in difficult situations.

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