

*That dog was a Marine!*Human-Dog Assemblages in the Pacific War

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**Abstract:** *A photograph taken on the island of Iwo Jima in 1945 shows an American marine apparently asleep in a hastily dug foxhole. His body swathed in a camouflage poncho, the man's helmeted head presses against the island's black volcanic sand and his rifle lies on the crest of his hole. This form of image, a marine at rest, is a familiar one in the archive of America's Pacific War, but what distinguishes this particular picture is that, even in the midst of sleep, the serviceman's left hand is clutching a leash, at the end of which is a dog, a Doberman. In counterpoint to the 'master', the dog sits at alert, ears pricked attentively, noble gaze directed across the body of the human and outwards towards unseen dangers.*

*This paper will focus on the Marine dog battalions deployed against Japan in the Pacific: the product of a striking confluence of race and animal-based orders of knowledge and orientation. The Japanese, it was hoped (so 'animal-like' in their being according to the prevailing American understanding), would meet an equally sentient and yet superior opponent in the form of the Marine Doberman. Yet simultaneously, the process of combat encouraged the increasing anthropomorphising of the dogs, to the extent that they were assigned ranks within the Marine Corps, promoted and so on. A funeral memorial built on the island of Guam in tribute to a number of individual Marine dogs features in the paper as a key symbol of these processes. Such contradictions, especially as they converge around issues of culture, class, gender and identity, are at the heart of the human-animal nexus and form the concerns of this paper.*

**Keywords:** *War Dogs; Human-Animal Assemblages; Pacific War; U.S. Marines;*

*U.S. Marine Dogs*

**Introduction**

In his 'Letter on Humanism', Martin Heidegger suggests that the 'abyss' between man and animal is far greater than the gap between man and God: 'the essence of divinity is closer to us

than what is so alien in other living creatures' (228). Lacking the ability to reflect on their existence, Heidegger argues, other animals can only ever *exist* in the world, within their environment, and are incapable of engaging with it meaningfully, as world. 'Man' on the other hand stands capable of grasping 'the mystery of his *Dasein*', the essence of being itself. This is because, of all the creatures, only humans have the capacity to objectively understand, apprehend and thereby possess the world of which they are a part, a condition that renders the human 'not the lord of beings' but rather 'the shepherd of Being' (245).

The fundamental differentiation of the human and the animal is grounded in Heidegger's famous observation in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* that 'the animal is poor in world'. For Heidegger, 'Man *has* world' and is '*world forming*'. By contrast, by being *merely parts* of the world, animals and plants have a poverty of world that is distinct from humans' consciousness of the world and their attempts to manipulate and master it. This is registered in their capacity not just to interact with, but to also both transform their environment and to apprehend this transformation as a dimension of their experience of existence, or, in Heidegger's terms, their ability to 'have world'.

Heidegger's persuasive critique of an onto-theological conception of human life and morality is now well recognised, even if, in its place, he unintentionally reinstated a human exceptionalism that was no less hubristic than the metaphysical tradition he sought to overturn. But perhaps more disturbing than the implicit anthropocentrism underpinning his work are the significant historical ironies that accompany his philosophical categories. What if, for instance, the world-forming being who can understand and speak ends up creating a world that is unspeakable? What if the poverty of world that is ascribed to animals is more appropriately understood as the mode of being characteristic of humans? If we shift the perspective to the Pacific War of 1944, and try to adopt a dog's-eye point-of-view of events, we may find that Heidegger's speculation is open to a striking inversion.

## **Becoming Marine**

The island of Guam is located in the Western Pacific Ocean approximately mid-way between Australia and Japan. Humans first occupied Guam around 2000 BC, when Chamoro peoples

from what is now Indonesia migrated to the Marianas. In 1668, a Spanish galleon, home to a hundred or so humans and a few rats, arrived at the island, taking possession of it for the Empire of Spain. This favoured method of European-style imperial conquest – enforcing the will of a distant government with an armed ship – would continue over the next three centuries. In 1898, in the midst of the Spanish-American War, it was the turn of the United States to take charge of the island with a solitary warship. The Treaty of Paris, which resolved the war, consequently transferred ownership of Guam to the United States as part of a package of former Spanish colonies that saw the United States become a (late) imperial power. The Empire of Japan subsequently raised the stakes: on the day after the bombing of Pearl Harbour in December 1941, a small Japanese invasion fleet attacked the island, capturing it, its indigenous population, and its nominal American garrison in just a few days.

By June 1944 America was ready to take its possession back, with an exercise of force hitherto unknown in the island's history. Five US Navy battleships and two cruisers bombarded the island for weeks with their heavy guns, firing more than 28,000 shells onto a landmass of no more than 209 square miles. This preliminary bombardment was initially only supposed to last a few days, but problems with coordinating the various forces involved in the invasion meant that the ships had nothing else to do but stand offshore and devastate the island while the logistics of the landing were sorted out. On the morning of 21 July the 3rd Marine division landed on the coast next to Agana, Guam's principle, and now completely destroyed, town. Despite the devastations of the past month though, most of the 19,000 well dug-in Japanese defenders were still alive to contest the American invasion (Leckie).

The 3rd Marine War Dog Platoon, led by Lieutenant William Putney, a veterinarian from Virginia who had been with the Marine War Dog Training School at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina since June 1943, formed part of the invasion force. In *Always Faithful*, his memoir of the Pacific War, Putney describes the landing:

Red Beach came clearly into sight. A squad of Marines climbed a nose projecting from the cliff. When they had climbed almost to the top, small explosions scattered among them and the men tumbled down the hill ...

I scrambled to the front of the boat, and when the ramp was lowered, I stepped off and into hip-deep water. I struggled to get my balance and moved toward the beach while

the men moved slowly forward and the dogs swam at their sides ... Machine gun bullets kicked up water around us. I yelled for the sergeants to get the men and dogs moving as quickly as possible ...

I saw a major racing toward me, furiously yelling at me and the sergeants and the men to get moving off the beach or die. He was closer now. 'Move your ass, Lieutenant,' he yelled. A mortar exploded down the beach and machine-gun bullets kicked up sand all around his feet. He never even flinched.

Some of the men hit the deck, and encouraged by the advice of the major, I yelled for them to get up and move! I kicked one man, stuck immobile with fear, with my foot as hard as I could. He jumped up and started for the road, his dog following, oblivious to the noise of explosions and the whining bullets. (Putney 144-46)

Putney and his men and dogs survived their first day and night on Guam, but the next morning sustained their first casualties. Kurt, a Doberman, and his handler, Alan Jacobson, were hit by a mortar blast. Jacobson had 'taken a lot of shrapnel in his back and shoulders, but would be alright'. Kurt on the other hand, 'had a wedge-shaped hole in his back about three inches wide'. Putney, shifting from his role as platoon commander to veterinarian, began to attempt to save his life:

I put a half-grain of morphine into the tube in Kurt's foreleg. He let out a big sigh, closed his eyes, and went to sleep. The explosion had done considerable damage: the top of his spine was blown off in the thoracic area, just behind his shoulders. The spinal cord was plainly visible because there was no hemorrhage at the site. The cord was glistening white and all the lateral nerves, like small white wires, were intact as they left the cord and entered the vertebrae ... It might be possible, however, to burrow under some of the surrounding muscle, stretch it across the cord and then cover the whole wound with skin pulled from each side and sutured together. (162)

Although Putney's operation was successful in repairing the wound, the dog had still sustained a massive injury:

During the night, Kurt began to have convulsions from the pressure of the swollen back muscles forcing themselves against his spinal cord, so I added Nembutal to the IV to

sedate him ... Sixteen-inch shells were still coming in from the battleships offshore and shaking the earth as they hit. To protect Kurt's fragile back from the impact, I gathered him in my arms. At 3am Kurt stopped breathing. Exhausted, I laid Kurt down and fell asleep with my head on his chest.

Major Richard Tonis woke me at daylight and said he was sorry that my dog didn't make it. I shook my head in acknowledgement and said I would have to find a place to bury him. He offered me a jeep and told me to take the dog to the graves registration detail on the beach. The dog was a Marine, by God, and he deserved to be buried in the cemetery with the rest of the Marines. (165)

Alan Jacobsen, meanwhile, had been evacuated to a hospital ship. Kurt's burial was, Putney notes, the beginning of Guam's Marine War Dog Cemetery, resting place of the remains of the twenty-five Marine dogs killed on Guam.

With his officially sanctioned burial in the marine cemetery, Kurt the Doberman had become a Marine. He had achieved this the same way humans became Marines: by obeying orders, by displaying courage, by the sacrifice of his life for his comrades and their cause; as the God of all living things was called upon to witness, Kurt had rightfully earned his place in the cemetery with the other dead Marines. We can understand Kurt's death as an exercise in *becoming-marine*. Deleuze and Guattari developed their somewhat notorious concept of *becoming-animal* to try to destabilise the rigid notions of classification and interpretation that had dominated Western sciences and the humanities since the Classical period. Their aim was instead to create a mode of understanding of life within which an entity was no longer simply defined by 'Species or Genus characteristics' but by its 'affects'. In this sense, it was what an animal did, and what circumstances it did it under, that provided the truly productive form of categorisation: 'A racehorse is more different from a workhorse than a workhorse is from an ox' (Deleuze and Guattari 299). Or, a marine dog is more different from a dog in a suburban backyard than a dog in a suburban backyard is from a cat; or so the argument would go.

In recent theoretical work the productive potential of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming-animal has been questioned. Following Slavoj Žižek, Nicole Shukin in *Animal Capital* asks whether, in the age of *Transformers*, the idea of becoming-anything is in any way still seriously challenging dominant forms of power, given the plethora of 'pseudo- or simulated

becomings spawned through the sorcery of market culture' (32). Yet elements of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of *becoming-animal* are still useful in terms of understanding Kurt's role in the 'machinic assemblage' of American military power and the manner in which he came to be buried in Guam's marine cemetery. Mindful of the fact that concepts are tools rather than descriptions of reality, Deleuze and Guattari were careful to point out that the 'becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not; and the becoming-other of the animal is real, even if that something other it becomes is not' (300). This is an important distinction, and it allows us to negotiate the otherwise incongruous reality of Kurt's becoming-marine. Clearly, Kurt the dog did not magically turn into a human being, but remained very much a dog. Yet Kurt's actions, and the context in which he had performed them, prompted Major Tonis to invoke the will of God so that a dog could actually have the same status as a particular type of human being. Before we examine Kurt's transformation any further though, we need to look at the history of the formation of the world within which he was performing his duty.

## Boot Camp

When Japan attacked the United States in December 1941 the only dogs employed by the US military were 50 sled dogs in Alaska. Initial meetings of a number of civilian organisations, most notably the Professional Handlers Association and the American Kennel Club, resulted in the formation in January 1942 of the civilian organisation Dogs for Defense which then pressured the Quartermaster Corps of the United States Army to recruit and train dogs for military service (Lemish 36). By the end of the year the Army, Navy and Coast Guard were all deploying dogs as sentries and on patrol. Within another six months the Coast Guard had more than 1,800 dogs patrolling beaches across the United States (49).

In 1942 a Swiss ex-army officer and entrepreneur resident in New Mexico, William Pestre, suggested a novel solution to the United States War Department for the conduct of the war against Japan. The Japanese Army and Naval forces had by this point occupied most of the islands of the Western Pacific, and if the United States were to have any hope of defeating Japan, then they would need to re-take these islands in order to be able to strike directly at the Japanese mainland. But an island war, involving countless amphibious invasions, was going to be

extremely costly, particularly in terms of human life. So Pestre proposed instead the creation of an army of 20,000 to 30,000 dogs to be used as a Pacific invasion force. It was expected that after suitable training the dogs would be able to attack and kill Japanese soldiers on sight. They could therefore initially be landed in place of soldiers, and set about decimating the ranks of the Japanese defenders. Humans would then only need to be deployed to mop up after the dogs had torn their way through the bulk of the enemy ranks.

Remarkably, the Pentagon took the concept seriously, and even more remarkably allocated the somewhat perversely named Cat Island in the Mississippi Delta as the training ground for the venture. Pestre was supplied with 400 hundred dogs (of varying breeds) as the basis of his dog army. He then requested 24 soldiers of Japanese-American ethnicity to act as targets for the dogs. Again the War Department acquiesced, sending to Cat Island 12 men of the requisite racial background together with a supply of well-padded overalls. Less remarkably perhaps, the project proved to be a complete failure. Despite the infliction of much cruelty presented as 'training', including whipping and electric shocks, the dogs could not be made to 'hunt in packs' and seemed generally unable to detect a difference in 'scent' between the Japanese-Americans they were supposed to attack and any other humans.<sup>1</sup>

By this point the Marine Corps had also instituted a war dog program, though far smaller and less theatrical than that of its rivals in the Army. In the 1920s a Marine officer serving in Haiti had trained a dog to 'work point', or in civilian language, to lead patrols through the jungle. Following the Marines' first combat experience against the Japanese soldiers in the jungles of Guadalcanal in August 1942, this idea resurfaced in Marine management circles, and a 'training program for dogs' was implemented at the end of the year (57). In February 1943 the Army dog training centre supplied the Marine Corps with forty German Shepherds, who became the first Marine dogs. The Doberman Pinscher Club of America (DPCA) then lobbied the Marine Corps, arguing that it could provide, for free, as many dogs as the Corps would need, and initially supplying the Marine Corps War Dog Training School in North Carolina with 20 Dobermans. Another civilian organisation, 'Dogs for Defense,' followed with a donation of German Shepherds, but the Marines rapidly came to prefer Dobermans because it was felt their short hair would be better suited to the Pacific. Subsequently, all Marine dogs were 'enlisted' this way, donated by civilians, with the DPCA acting as the principal recruiter, the understanding being that the dogs would be discharged to their original owners after the war. At

the same time, the President of the DPCA 'became a powerful influence at Marine Corps Headquarters' (Putney 12). Enlist they did, initially with the rank of private, with promotion occurring on an annual basis: first to corporal, then to sergeant; after five years a Marine dog would find him or herself holding the rank of master gunnery sergeant.

Once donated by their owners and therefore 'recruited', the Marine dogs, all of whom had undergone some form of dog obedience schooling as civilians, were given a 'behavioural test' at the Marine dog training facility at Camp Lejeune. Administered by Lieutenant Wilson Davis, a former produce merchant from Baltimore and amateur dog trainer, the test involved throwing firecrackers at the dogs. 'If the dog did not try to run or hide behind his handler the size of the explosive was increased.' If the dog proved not to be a 'coward', if they 'showed no sign of excessive nervousness', while also not 'lashing out' unduly at a human marine in a padded-suit who 'approached the dogs with a menacing stance', then they passed the test, being seen to embody what to the Marine Corps was the Right Stuff: 'an intelligent dog that never lost its cool under any kind of fire' (16–17).

But while the Marine dog program may have been far less nakedly racist in form than the Army's experiments on Cat Island, it was nonetheless also the product of a striking confluence of race and animal-based orders of knowledge and orientation. The properly trained marine dog would, or so the senior management of the Corps hoped, present the Japanese soldier lurking in the jungle with an agent of spatial infiltration equal to his own sentient abilities. The dog's job may not have been to tear the despised 'yellow' man to pieces like so much meat, but, in co-operation with the equally well-trained handler, the dog was still expected to use its advanced olfactory capacities to smell the presence of the 'other' in advance of the American human. The Japanese race, according to the prevailing American propaganda-fuelled understanding, were inherently 'animal-like' in their very being, an attitude borne out by the persistent use of the term monkey ('filthy yellow monkeys') in relation to the Asian enemy. Flawlessly dug-in and boundlessly courageous, the Japanese soldiers also seemed to possess a sense of terrain, a lightness of movement and an ability to merge with the environment that the Americans found impossible to match. Consequently, the hope was that 'the Japs' would now be confronted by an equally sentient, if not ultimately superior, animal opponent in the form of the Marine Doberman.



Human Marine recruits meanwhile had received their own obedience training at boot camp. Robert Leckie, a young journalist from Philadelphia who enlisted after Pearl Harbor, detailed the experience in his memoir *Helmet for My Pillow*:

Everything but discipline, Marine Corps discipline, was steadfastly mocked and ridiculed, be it holiness or high finance. These drill instructors were dedicated martinets. Like the sensualist who feels that if a thing cannot be eaten, drunken or taken to bed, it does not exist, so were these martinets in their outlook. All was discipline.

Worst in all this process of surrender was the ruthless refusal to permit a man the slightest privacy. Everything was done in the open. Rising, walking, writing letters, receiving mail, making beds, washing, shaving, combing one's hair, emptying one's bowels – all was done in public to the style and stricture of the drill sergeant.

(Leckie 10–13)

'I felt', Leckie goes on to write, 'for the first time in my life, an utter submission to authority' (23). Still, Leckie had voluntarily enlisted and so, in spite of the social pressures of the times, he had actually exercised a degree of agency in choosing to submit himself to this regime of extreme discipline, training and regimentation. Of course no such 'freedom' to choose their fate had been extended to any of the dogs; they were simply subject to the decisions made for them by humans (see also Nocella, Salter and Bentley). Interestingly though, by the time of the invasion of Guam the majority of marines present in the ranks had no longer exercised this right either, as by 1944 conscription had replaced enlistment as the source of Marine Corps manpower.

### **Becoming Dog**

There are plenty of accidents within cultural history, but there are also plenty of affinities, and it is a curious but significant fact that American marines had actually been referring to themselves as dogs since 1918. The United States Marine Corps had originally been formed as the Continental Marines in 1775 in the course of the Revolutionary War. The Corps then played a minor role in American military history for the next century or so, though with the sudden rise of the United States as an imperial power after the victory over Spain in 1898 the importance

and fortunes of the Marines, essentially an imperial enforcement arm operating as a branch of the United States Navy, rose dramatically. Indeed, the Marine Corps' first significant strategic act was the seizure of Guantanamo Bay in Cuba during the American invasion of the Spanish colonial territory. This allowed the creation of the American navy base which the Marine Corps still currently maintains as an offshore military enclave of the United States.

The land-based military enforcement of American colonial power was the major responsibility of the Marine Corps in the years leading up to the First World War: suppressing the so-called Boxer Rebellion in China, countering the Filipino struggle for independence from American rule, and interventions in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Panama and Haiti in order to facilitate the banana growing operations of the United Fruit and the Standard Fruit Companies. Meanwhile, an ongoing imperial role in China was also part of the Marine Corps remit. It was the First World War though that saw the first large-scale deployment of American Marines on a global battlefield. With America's late entry into the war, the combat experience that had been gained by many marine officers and men in the course of their imperial service proved an invaluable asset within the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) sent to Europe in early 1918 (Selby 3–19).

At the Battle of Belleau Wood in June 1918 the Marine Corps definitively developed the identity of toughness, ruthlessness and obedience with which it would be marketed throughout the twentieth century and on into the twenty first: 'Come on you sons of bitches, do you want to live forever?' asked Gunnery Sergeant Dan Daly, veteran of numerous colonial campaigns, of the men of his machine gun company on the first day of the battle. Sadly, most of them demonstrated that they didn't, going on to form a sizeable segment of the more than 1,000 of the day's marine casualties (Henry 1999). Nor did the battle become any easier (assuming there could ever be such a thing as an easy battle), and it subsequently took the Marines of the 5th and 6th Regiments more than ten days to defeat their German adversaries at Belleau Wood. Eventually, it was the marine's sharp-shooting skills (a product of their intensive training) that prevailed, prompting the Army General John Pershing, overall commander of the AEF, to claim that 'the deadliest weapon in the world is a marine and his rifle'.

Sergeant Daly's exercise in profanity – drawing on the popular insult 'son of a mongrel bitch' which had been in circulation since at least Shakespeare's *King Lear* – was not however the

most affective zoomorphism to be associated with Belleau Wood. In fact, it was subsequently claimed that the German soldiers facing the Marines at Belleau Wood were so traumatised by the ruthlessness of their enemy that they began to refer to them as ‘Teufel Hunden’, or Devil Dogs. The Corps immediately turned this alleged enemy speech act into a popular and successful recruiting poster: a cartoon image showing a marine helmeted bulldog in hot pursuit of a worried-looking Pickelhaube-wearing Dachshund. At the same time, Marines increasingly took to referring to themselves as Devil Dogs, and the term became intimately associated with Belleau Wood. Subsequently, in 1922 Marine Corps headquarters in Quantico, Virginia, enlisted an English bulldog, ‘Jiggs’, as the Corps’ official mascot. Within seven months, Jiggs had been promoted to the rank of Sergeant Major.

However, recent research has shown that *Devil Dog* was actually in circulation within the Marine Corps some months prior to Belleau Wood ([www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com)). In addition, the term Teufel Hunden is grammatically incorrect German (correct articulation of the concept would in fact be the compound noun *Teufelshunde*), and anyway, the words would have been unlikely to even be used at all (even ungrammatically) by German speakers given that a German word for the same entity, *Höllenhund* (Hell Hound), already existed. So, more than likely, *Devil Dogs* did not originate with the Marine’s German opponents at all, but was indigenously generated within the Marine Corps itself in the first months of participation in the Great War. Nonetheless, the term, along with *Jarhead* and following on from the more antiquated *Leatherneck*, is still used by Marines in the twenty-first century, while to receive a *devil dogging* is to be *chewed out* in the manner of which only a Marine drill sergeant is capable. Regardless though, the key point is that, more than twenty-five years before Kurt the Doberman was declared to be a marine, there were plenty of marines happily calling themselves dogs.

Why, though, were the marines at Belleau Wood so keen to engage in this form of cynomorphic self-labelling? Was it the product of their training, so focused as it was on turning each of them from an individual citizen-subject of early twentieth century industrial society into a member of a pack who was always expected to show submission to the ‘top dog’? Did the fact that they had fully submitted themselves to a form of domination and physical exploitation, so often understood as the province of the animal within human-centred systems of thought, allow or even coerce them to adopt pride in their apparent animality?

The extensive imbrication of metaphor and animal life that exists in literature, in classical mythology and in philosophy has always drawn attention to the fluid, chimerical boundary between the human and the animal. From the naming of the animals in Genesis to the animal Gods in Greek myths, the use of animals as metaphors has been employed to illustrate the fragility of life and mortality that all living creatures share, while simultaneously serving as an attempt to differentiate the human from this common bond. It is for this reason that John Berger asks, ‘if it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal’ (5). Indeed, the very act of appellation as ‘animal’ confirms that the animal is always already a metaphor, inscribed in language, but also at the same time a living being that is always much more than a tropological figure. If the first metaphor really was animal, as Berger suggests, in excess of yet still embroiled in the metaphorical relations of humanity/animality, ‘it was because the essential relation between man and animal was metaphoric’. For Berger, this primal link between the animal and metaphor, signals ‘the universal use of animal-signs for charting the experience of the world’ (6).

By contrast, it is the *metaphor as animal* that is of concern in the deconstructive project of Derrida. Tropological modes of speech such as metaphor, he argues, not only breathe ‘life’ into language but also unsettle the logocentric transparency – the indisputable world of Being and Time, Life and History – of Western metaphysics. The animal metaphor is then the spectre that haunts the ontological certainty/mastery of the humans that name/create the world, disturbing the self-evident organisation of life and knowledge in dominant ‘carno-phallogocentric’ traditions of thought (Derrida, ‘Eating Well’ 113). Animal alterity is therefore also what undermines the limits of the human and the domain of the ‘proper’ human subject, introducing the disturbing presence of animal life into the ontology of the human and thereby interrupting the priority of being called forth by the name of Man. This establishes a multiplicity within and between the confederation of all mortal creatures, a *différance* that refuses to settle into the singularity of either ‘the human’ or ‘the animal’. As Derrida argues, ‘We have to envisage the existence of “living creatures” whose plurality cannot be assembled within the singular of an animality that is simply opposed to humanity’ (‘The Animal’ 415).

Like the concept of ‘animot’ (Derrida), Lippit’s ‘animetaphor’ seeks to convey the depth of intimate connections between animality and metaphoricity (Lippit 1). For Lippit, however, ‘traces of animality’ proliferate in language, popular culture and technological media

at the very moment when animals disappear from the scene of historical modernity. But here, in the example of the marine-becoming-dog, the spirit of animality is not foregrounded because the animal is vanishing through modern progress and there is consequently a ‘transfer of animals from nature to technology’ (23). In this instance, the ‘animetaphor’ achieves its resonance precisely because of the fusion of human-animal/natural-technological modes of being and the transversality of man and dog worlds. The embrace of the animal appellation ‘Devil Dogs’ by the marines demonstrates an (un)conscious understanding of the primal link between animal and metaphor and an awareness of their own transubstantiation as living creatures who can be trained to fight, hunt and kill and whose traces of animality are never far from their self-same humanity. Although this connection is conveyed by the linguistic metaphor ‘Devil Dogs’, the connection between the Marines and their dogs also operates non-linguistically through the physical intensity of their shared bodily labour, of what their bodies *can* and *have* to do. This is what Lippit calls ‘animal affect’, an affective structure of nonverbal communication that is frequently represented by (indeed often seen to be epitomised by) the knowing gaze of the animal and its uncannily sensitive and compassionate ability to understand and communicate (196).

The material and metaphorical interdependency of man and animal was implicitly reflected in the training methods of the marines and their dogs, which both emphasised their complementarity and recognised the emergent properties that derived from their combination. As with all assemblages, these effects were always greater than the sum of its parts, yet still unable to be seen as a ‘totalizable sum’ (Bennett 24). On deployment to the Marine dog battalion, the dogs and their handlers each received fourteen weeks of specialised training. Both men and dogs trained together in pairs. According to William Putney:

Our methods of training were simple and are no doubt familiar to civilians who have owned and trained dogs themselves. The difference was less in spirit than in degree. In the field, something as straightforward as a Sit command could be a life-or-death matter. For this reason it was essential that the handler know his dog as well as the dog knew the commands. Each dog reacted to stimuli in different ways, and each handler had to recognize his dog’s particular signals. Some dogs lifted their heads to alert to danger, others sniffed or pointed with their noses in the direction of the noise or scent,

and some raised the hackles on their backs when they suspected something ahead.  
(Putney 23)

Obedience training, negotiation of obstacle courses and, a particular favourite of visiting media, the lowering of dogs from the deck of a mock-up ship into landing craft, were all undertaken before dogs and handlers began to specialise in specific tasks, such as jungle patrolling, cave and bunker exploration, mine detection or message delivery. In addition, the humans, who proved more adaptable to longer training sessions than the dogs, were also skilled in the marine rifleman's specialty area of sniping and sharp shooting. As Putney put it: 'it would not be long before the men and the dogs were applying what they had learned' (18). But always, the men and dogs were understood as a form of unity: Pal, a Shepherd, and Ben Dickerson, from Alexandria, Virginia, were 'made for each other', Putney writes. 'Cool, lean and mean, both would soon become any enemy's nightmare' (21).

The affective potential produced by the harnessing of the abilities of both human and dog was then striking, and in his assessment Putney actually transcends General Pershing's Great War maxim as to the marine and his rifle being the most deadly of combinations. Rather, for Putney, it was the marine and his dog's sentient abilities that were crucial:

Most of the young Marines were assigned to the war dog program only by a twist of fate. Some had never owned a dog in their lives and some were even afraid of them. But trained as dog handlers, they were expected to scout far forward of our lines, in treacherous jungle terrain, searching for Japanese soldiers hidden in caves or impenetrable thickets. Under these circumstances, the rifles we carried were often useless; a handler's most reliable weapons were his dog's highly developed senses of smell and hearing ... (x)

Or, as Michael Lemish puts it in *War Dogs: A History of Loyalty and Heroism*: 'the most useful dog required a good, capable, combat Marine handler. The best person was one who could scout and patrol on his own and simply used the dog as an extension of his own talents' (Lemish 61–62).

From a human-centred point-of-view, this understanding of the dog as an 'extension' of the human makes sense, articulating the confidence with which technocratic humans are always

so positive in relation to their mastery of the non-human world. At the same time, it also highlights the manner in which humans perpetually find that they need to enlist other animals in the service of their causes. The human-nonhuman working group of marine and dog exemplifies the way in which bodies extend and enhance their power, agency and efficacy through their collective efforts in or as assemblages – an insight that has been developed from Spinoza to Deleuze and Guattari. This is what Jane Bennett, drawing on the work of the latter, refers to as ‘distributive agency’, within which agency ‘becomes distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field, rather than being a capacity localized in a human body or in a collective produced (only) by human efforts’ (Bennett 23). Rather than a hierarchy of being, then, which views agency only as a human prerogative, this perspective regards agentic capacity as shared and indeed potentially enhanced when bodies form collaborative alliances with other bodies. Importantly, this approach recognises ontology itself as a collaborative process, highlighting the important contributions of an array of non-human forces, including non-human animals, in manifestations of both ontological and technological agency.

## **Shell Shock**

Two months after the conquest of Guam, on 15 September 1944 the 1st Marine Division attacked Peliliu, a coral island in the Palau group, approximately 500 kilometres east of the Philippines. Only 13 square kilometres in landmass, Peliliu was defended by more than 11,000 meticulously dug-in Japanese soldiers. Still, the Marine General in charge of the invasion boasted to the media that the capture of the island would take only three to four days. Instead it took two months, after which only about 300 of the defenders were still alive (Hallas 280). The fighting was of an overwhelming intensity; on the second day after the invasion it even took the life of Australia’s most experienced combat cameraman, Damien Parer, a veteran of the Middle East, Greece, Crete and the battles in Papua New Guinea, who was working with the Marines on Peliliu under contract to Paramount Pictures.

The 4th Marine War Dog Platoon – 36 dogs and 60 men – landed on Peliliu an hour after the first wave of Marine Riflemen. The 5th War Dog Platoon landed the next day, and one of its members, Duke, a German shepherd, quickly distinguished himself in the battle for possession of Peliliu’s airfield, around which the initial fighting revolved. Duke carried 20

pounds of maps, papers and orders across the airfield under heavy mortar fire, successfully delivering them to the intelligence officers waiting on the other side. Meanwhile other dogs, like the Doberman Boy and his handler Harold Flagg, were successfully detecting Japanese ambush positions far in advance of the companies to which they were assigned (216).

In the HBO television series *The Pacific*, the Australian actor Gary Sweet plays a fictionalised version of Gunnery Sergeant (Gunny) Elmo Haney, a 5th Marine Regiment veteran of Belleau Wood, who spent a life devoted to the Marine Corps and took part in the landings on Peliliu. Haney, the literal embodiment of what was known in the Marines as ‘the Old Breed’, was renowned for his displays of physical hardiness, such as demonstratively scouring his genitals with a scrubbing brush. So confident is the television version of Haney of his own physical mastery of any situation that he dismisses the supposed heightened sensory abilities of the marine dogs deployed with his company: ‘Woof woof,’ he mocks, ‘no dog is gonna sniff out a Jap before I do.’ Yet, despite his wealth of experience and fortitude, the ageing Gunny Haney, an early victim of the 115+ degree temperatures, associated dehydration and the general intensity of the combat, is quickly invalidated out of a battle within which conditions are rapidly pushing all participating beings to their experiential limits.

Few of the dogs fared better than Gunny Haney. The broken and fragmented coral exoskeleton that formed the island’s surface, from which the human marines’ feet were at least protected by their rubber-soled boots, made for an intolerable environment for the dogs. Attempts were made to get the dogs to wear combat boots too, but these were apparently unsuccessful. In addition, the constant artillery and mortar fire was an insufferable burden on the dogs’ senses. The day after the landing the 4th Platoon reported ‘Dogs becoming very nervous under heavy mortar fire’. A few days later, on 19 September, Platoon records noted that Rusty 222 attacked his handler and had to be destroyed, while two other dogs, Prince and Major, were killed by mortar fire, and Max 5E07 was badly shell shocked. The next day it was reported that the dogs’ feet were badly ‘bruised and cut from coral’, as well as the fact that Private First Class Dyer had been killed by mortar fire and his dog, Arko, was badly shell shocked. Rex B21 was also shell shocked, became uncontrollable and had to be destroyed, while Max 5E07 had to be destroyed too. On 21 September, the Platoon records noted that ‘Nemo J01 and Bingo 241, who had been shell shocked and wounded, became completely uncontrollable and had to be destroyed’. The 5th Platoon reported a similar experience, also recording on 21 September that



its dogs 'were becoming exhausted and had feet badly cut by coral', while four dogs were presenting with evidence of 'severe shell shock'. Also on the casualty list was Duke Z876 who had heroically crossed the airfield on 17 September: he had died of wounds he sustained in another operation a week later (216). On 26 September the 4th Platoon reported: 'The following dogs were evacuated to the rear as being either wounded or suffering from concussion and deafness: Tuffy 67E1, Prince 217, Mr. Chips 309, Baron 00E5, Duke 221, Buddy A215, King 216, Phi A296 and Major E757' (217). On October 1 the decision was made to withdraw what was left of the 4th Dog Platoon from Peliliu altogether.

Conditions on Peliliu for the humans engaged in battle were also a living nightmare. Eugene Sledge, who would survive the fighting and go on to become an ornithologist and a professor of Biology, wrote a memoir, *With the Old Breed*, of his experience of Peliliu as a twenty-year-old marine. For Sledge, the solid coral surface of the island, into which it was almost impossible to dig, was perhaps the greatest problem the combatants faced. A majority of the dead (more than 10,000 of whom would soon inhabit the small island), could not be buried but simply lay around either in the open or under ponchos or blankets, meaning that the air was increasingly filled with the stench of rotting human flesh. This, combined with the heat, in turn meant that often no more than a few mouthfuls of a tin of rations (generally the processed and preserved meat and fat of pigs and cattle) could be consumed before it was thrown aside by its nauseated consumer to add to the stench of decay. And subsequently, whatever faeces the humans produced couldn't be buried either, but also littered the surface of the island. For Sledge, the resultant 'population explosion' amongst flies was a further challenge:

With human corpses, human excrement, and rotting rations scattered across Peliliu's ridges, those nasty insects were so large, so glutted, and so lazy that some could scarcely fly. They could not be waved away or frightened off a can of rations or a chocolate bar. Frequently they tumbled off the side of my canteen cup into my coffee. We actually had to shake the food to dislodge the flies, and even then they sometimes refused to move ... It was revolting, to say the least, to watch big fat blowflies leave a corpse and swim into our C rations. (Sledge 142)

Sledge's account illustrates the way in which flies played an increasingly influential role in the struggle of the humans to assert control over the island, with their 'population explosion'

working to spread the amoebas that were in turn invading and infecting the bodies of both sets of combatants with chronic dysentery. Yet even more important, in terms of another form of life dictating the parameters within which the human struggle was being played out, were the coral skeletons from which the island was formed. Devoid of the polyps that had once animated them, the hard and jagged lumps of calcium carbonate made conditions, as has been previously noted, often unbearable for the humans and almost impossible for the dogs.

By mid-October, a month after the invasion, it was not just the Marine dogs that had reached the end of their tether, the entire 1st Marine Division had been chewed up, having sustained more than 6,500 casualties. At this point the marines (and what was left of the 5th Dog Platoon) were withdrawn from Peliliu and replaced by an Army division, the 81st Infantry, whose soldiers then spent another month locating and killing what was thought to be the last of Peliliu's defenders. The battle for control of Umbrogogal, in the centre of the island, is generally considered to be the most difficult battle fought by American troops in the course of the Second World War, and the 1st Marine division, which took more than six months to recover, remained out of action until the invasion of Okinawa in April 1945 (Hallas 279–80). Subsequent to its conquest, Peliliu proved to be of almost no strategic value whatsoever in the ongoing allied war against Japan, with the entire operation, and the suffering inflicted on all those involved, proving to have been totally unnecessary (280).

## **Conclusion**

While Gunny Haney of the Old Breed may not have been able to take the heat on Peliliu, the majority of younger marines were able to struggle on until they were either killed or wounded and so removed from the battle. The dogs however suffered badly, as the dog platoon records showed. For the dogs the conditions on Peliliu were quite intolerable. For those other animals though, the humans who had created all the violence and chaos, the horror they had generated and were inflicting on each other still proved in some way or other tolerable. On Peliliu in 1944 the world that the humans had formed (described so vividly as a veritable hell on earth by Eugene Sledge) was a world that the marine dogs, despite all their training and their attachment to their handlers, could not or would not accept. The reality of Peliliu was that it was simply too awful an environment for the dogs' sensibilities to bear, too impossible a circumstance for them

to endure, even if most of the humans around them found that in some way or other they could cope. If Peliliu was an example of a world shaped by humans, then perhaps the dogs were better off that they were relatively poor in this world, much less capable (in Heidegger's terms) of 'forming' such a world than were their human counterparts.

Despite their desire to overturn the dominant intellectual structures of Western thought, Deleuze and Guattari still shared, to an extent, the same human-centred perspective as Heidegger. While they may have argued that there was 'a reality of becoming-animal, even though one does not in reality become an animal', at the same time, they saw this transformation as one that was only available to Man: humans could experience becoming-animal, but the shift could never work in the opposite direction (319). There was a political rationale to this element of their theory: the foundation of the idea of becoming was that it was an exercise in breaking down dominant socio-cultural structures, shifting experience from the position of the majority to that of the minority, or, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, moving from the molar to the molecular: 'There is no becoming-man because man is the molar entity par excellence, whereas becomings are molecular' (341).

Yet, this theory fails when opposed by the reality of the experience of Kurt the Doberman on Guam, who was pronounced, by the voice of human authority within his given situation, to have become a Man. One explanation as to how this was possible might be because the order and structures of the human-centred world within which Kurt was enmeshed had broken down to such an extent that the old rules no longer applied. A favourite aphorism of analytical military theorists is that 'no battle plan survives contact with the enemy' (von Moltke 45–47). But perhaps this could be expanded to argue that actually, no human-centred system of order survives the most extreme forms of adverse pressure. The result was a situation in which the traditional orders of humanity and animality suddenly appeared to have reversed themselves, producing a transformed reality in which, as Giorgio Agamben has put it, the 'total humanization of the animal coincides with a total animalization of man' (77). In the unspeakable chaos, anarchy and general madness of the island battles of the Pacific War, it seems then as if it was in fact possible for dogs to become men, just as men behaved and lived like 'dogs'.

Despite a severe mauling on Peliliu, the Marine dogs went on to invade other islands, most notably Iwo Jima and Okinawa. In the interim, Colonel Lewis 'Chesty' Puller, commander

of the 1st Marine Regiment on Peliliu and the most decorated marine in the Corps' history, was finally assigned a desk job for the first time since his initial deployment to Nicaragua in 1928. Not that he could be kept away from action for long: he was back in charge of the Regiment for its landing at Inchon in Korea in 1950, the operation which turned the course of the war on the Korean peninsula in favour of the United States and the South. Awarded the Navy Cross on five separate occasions, Puller was the Marine archetype *par excellence*, with a jowly visage uncannily reminiscent of a bulldog. Not long after Korea, the Marine Corps' Bulldog mascot at Quantico was renamed Chesty, and has borne the name ever since; Chesty XIII retired in August 2013.

If they survived the war, just like human marines, marine dogs too could look forward to being 'sent home'. Also, just like those other marines, they would go home with a discharge certificate: either an 'honorable discharge', which 'regarded character as outstanding, excellent, or very good', or 'a dishonorable discharge' for 'dogs that posed continual behavior problems' (Lemish 60–61). Indeed, Putney's memoir goes into some detail on the rehabilitation and detrainment process the dogs were put through at the war's end. Of the '559 dogs in the Marine Corps at the end of the war', he writes, '540 were discharged to civilian life' (Putney 216). There are though no figures on what, if any, experience of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder they later suffered (see also Alger and Alger, Hediger).

Back on Peliliu, in early 1947 a Japanese infantry lieutenant and 33 soldiers were detected still barricaded inside a cave at the centre of the island. Attempts to get them to surrender proved futile, so a Japanese Navy Admiral, who was on Guam appearing as a witness at a War Crimes Trial, was taken to Peliliu to convince them to lay down their arms because, yes, the war really was over. A few days later they emerged into daylight for the first time in more than two years. It is worth pointing out that had the Marine dogs still been on Peliliu at the end of the battle, it certainly would not have taken them two years to find a few dozen of their enemies hiding in a cave.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> The project was wound up within a year, while William Pestre was subsequently reclassified by the Army as ‘extremely eccentric’ and ‘potentially dangerous subversively’, and the FBI was instructed to put him under surveillance (Lemish 54–57).

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