



# Sabretache

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## Cats and Dogs



### HMS AMETHYST, The Yangtze Incident and “Simon the Cat”

In the summer of 1949, at the height of the Chinese Civil War, HMS Amethyst came under artillery fire from the People’s Liberation Army on the northern bank of the Yangtze river. The Amethyst had been ordered up the Yangtze River to act as a guard ship for the British Embassy in Nanjing. When the incident took place the ship was still 70 miles from its destination. While attempting to evade the shelling it ran aground in the middle of the river. During the

incident 17 members of the crew were killed and 10 wounded, including the captain, Lieutenant Commander Bernard Skinner, who later died.

With the ship still under fire from Communist forces, First Lieutenant Geoffrey Weston assumed command. He ordered an evacuation of the wounded and those who could be spared to the Nationalist-held southern bank of the river. Over the next few days, the frigate HMS Consort attempted to re-float *Amethyst* but was forced back by intense shellfire causing a number of casualties amongst its crew. Two more vessels, the cruiser HMS London and the frigate HMS Black Swan were sent to assist, but were also forced back. *Amethyst’s* crew eventually managed to re-float the ship and Lieutenant Commander John Kerens, the assistant naval attaché in Beijing, was able to get on board and assume command. He established a truce with the local

Communist forces but conditions worsened for the crew on board the ship in extreme heat and as rations ran short.

**Simon’s story** HMS Amethyst received more than 50 direct hits. Members left on board ended up stranded in mid-river for almost 10 weeks. Hot, humid conditions were the perfect breeding ground for a rat infestation. The already limited food supplies were in danger of being completely destroyed. Despite shrapnel wounds to his legs and burns to his back and face. (Four pieces of shrapnel were removed by the medical officer,) Simon was all that stood between the rats and the crew’s essential supplies.. *Story continued*  
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The rats were big and fierce, and had even attacked crew members, but this didn't stop Simon from hunting them down.



'Mao Tse Tung' There was a particularly large, bold and vicious rat that, together with his band of followers, was causing havoc with the supplies; the crew had named him 'Mao Tse-tung'. Many attempts were made to trap him, as it was felt that Simon, in his weakened state, would not be able to cope with him: but he had evaded the traps. However, one day the animals came face to face: Simon sprang first and killed the rat outright. The delighted crew hailed him as a hero, and he was promoted to Able Seacat Simon — the feline equivalent of Able Seaman.

As the weeks went by, Simon continued protecting supplies and lifting his injured shipmates' morale when accompanying the Maintenance Officer on his daily rounds. The days dragged on, more than two months after the original incident, with fierce heat and humidity, no relief in sight, and dwindling supplies of everything, including fuel. At times the boilers had to be shut down to conserve fuel, so there was no ventilation and no refrigeration. Even Simon started to wilt, although he continued with his duties and his rounds, helping, with the ship's terrier dog Peggy, to keep up the crew's flagging spirits. Then there was a typhoon; Simon was kept shut up to avoid possibly losing him, and slept through it all in the captain's cabin. *Amethyst* survived again — but rations and fuel were becoming desperately scarce. Kerans decided he had to make a dash for it while it was still possible.

So, on the night of 30 July 1949, *Amethyst* left under cover of darkness, and after a further series of adventures and more damage from Communist guns on shore, made it to the open sea, to be met by HMS *Concord*. The ordeal was over, after 101 days. King George VI sent his congratulations and ordered that the mainbrace be spliced. On 1 August a special presentation was made on deck, representing what the whole crew had been through. While both officers and men stood at attention, Simon was held by a boy seaman while a citation was read out by P/O George Griffiths, and Able Seacat Simon was awarded the *Amethyst* campaign ribbon.

Simon received the Amethyst campaign ribbon for '*distinguished and meritorious service... single-handedly and unarmed stalk down and destroy 'Moa Tse-tung' a rat guilty of raiding food supplies which were critically short. Be it further known that from April 22 to August 4, you did rid HMS Amethyst of pestilence and vermin, with unrelenting faithfulness*'

On the way back to the United Kingdom, the ship stopped at many ports and the news of the cat who brought hope and tranquility to the sailors spread across the world. Upon return to Plymouth in November, the cat was presented with the Amethyst campaign medal, a Blue Cross medal for animal bravery and heroism, and the Dickin Medal, the animal version of the Victoria Cross, the highest award of the British honor system. To this day, Simon remains the only cat to have been awarded this particular medal.

Like all animals entering the United Kingdom at the time, Simon had to spend some time in quarantine. Unfortunately, during his second week of quarantine, he developed a severe infection which was a result of the wounds he sustained during the Yangtze Incident. He died several days later, at the age of two. Nearly a thousand people, including the entire crew of HMS *Amethyst*, attended his funeral. The inscription on his gravestone at the PDSA Ilford Animal Cemetery states, among other things, the following: "Throughout the Yangtze Incident his behavior was of the highest order."



Simon's resting place at the PDSA Animal Cemetery in Ilford

## Rip's Story

The air raid on the East End had been particularly fierce that night, and as Air Raid Warden Mr E King made his way across the rubble of what had once been a residential street on the outskirts of Poplar, he paused for a second. By his side stood Rip, a mixed terrier dog who stood stock still for a moment, nose and ears twitching, before heading unerringly towards a pile of still smoking bricks. Scrabbling his way over the broken masonry, Rip began scratching furiously at the shattered ruins and started to bark. The Warden called over some colleagues and they began the delicate task of removing the bricks and mortar. Rip wagged his tail, waiting patiently while the men dug down, before barking excitedly as they carried a dust covered and unconscious child to safety.



Rip, the original search and rescue dog had saved another life

**Rip had been an air raid victim himself.** It was in 1940 that Mr King, seeing the small dog in the debris left by a previous air raid, had thrown him a few scraps of food. Rip gobbled them down, and cautiously walked across to the man in the ARP uniform. Expecting the dog to leave, ARP Warden King began to walk back to his post, ARP Station B132 in Southill Street, Poplar. To his surprise, the little dog tagged along and a mutual friendship sprang up. The remainder of the ARP Station were delighted and adopted Rip as their mascot. It soon became apparent that Rip had a talent for locating people trapped in bomb damaged houses. With no formal training, Rip took to his new role instinctively and he became the ARP Service's first Search and Rescue dog.



Rip with his owner Mr. E. King

**Rip the dog** has been credited in prompting the authorities to train further Search and Rescue dogs as the war progressed. In just twelve months between 1940 and 1941 *Rip, the original rescue dog* located over 100 victims of the Luftwaffe's air raids.

At the end of the war, in 1945, Rip became a recipient of the Dickin Medal (often referred to as 'The Animal's Victoria Cross'). The citation that accompanied the medal read: "For locating many air raid victims during the blitz of 1940"

He wore his medal on his collar until he died in October 1946. Rip is buried in the PDSA Cemetery in Ilford, Essex and his gravestone bears the inscription: "In memory of Rip, D.M., served with Civil Defence London. Awarded PDSA Dickin Medal July 1945. For bravery in locating victims trapped under blitzed buildings."



Rip's Dickin Medal was sold by auction in Bloomsbury, London in 2009. Many commentators, including medal specialists, Spink Auctioneers of London, expected the medal to fetch around £10,000. However, as the auction progressed, it became apparent that Rip's heroics had added much to the value, and by the time the auction closed, the little dog's Dickin Medal had sold for a record £24,250

July 5th, 1944

A Sergeant of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps bandages the wounded ear of a mine-detection Labrador dog named 'Jasper' at Bayeux in Normandy.

“Jasper” would have belonged to the No.1 Dog Platoon, 277th Field Park Company, Royal Engineers.

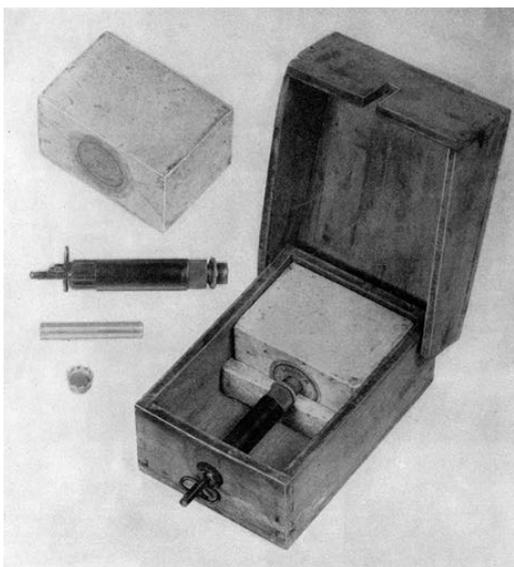
The dogs were used to hunt for mines, especially the all wooden “Shoe Mine” which was almost undetectable.

H.S. Lloyd, the head trainer at a school for war dogs in WW 2 stated; “A front the width of a tank could be ‘swept’ by four dogs working in echelon position for safety purposes. Twenty to thirty minutes maximum period was what a man or dog could concentrate on this type of work. Dogs were also employed for reconnaissance patrols for mine-detecting in a similar manner to that in which a blind man’s dog functions, on a lead of some 2 ft. ahead of his handler clearing a

pathway rapidly to enable the patrol to follow in safety. When the dog, working carefully with his nose suspected the presence of a mine he immediately sat a few inches short of the danger spot. His handler by prodding then confirmed the indication given by the dog, marked the position of the mine clearly so that those who followed him were conversant with the situation, and then rewarded the dog with a piece of meat carried by the handler for this purpose.”

The dogs had to be “battle inoculated,” working with the sound of Bren guns, heavy explosives at close range, and swooping aircraft.

The Schu-mine 42 (Shoe-mine), also known as the Schützenmine 42, was a German anti-personnel mine used during the Second World War. It consisted of a simple wooden box with a hinged lid containing a 200-gram (7.1 oz) block of cast TNT and a ZZ-42 type detonator. A slot in the lid pressed down on the striker retaining pin, sufficient pressure on the lid caused the pin to move, releasing the striker which triggered the detonator.



The mine was cheap to produce and deployed in large numbers. As an early example of a minimum metal mine, it was difficult to detect with early metal detectors - the only metal present was a small amount in the mine's detonator. During the Normandy Campaign the British resorted to using explosive detection dogs to find them. (Source © IWM B 6496 - Sgt. Christie , No 5 Army Film & Photographic Unit)

78 years later  
According to the Marshall Legacy Institute, mine detection dogs (known as MDDs to those in the business) have helped secure 14 million square meters of land, just in the last two years. Nine hundred of these intrepid pooches are spread throughout 24 countries; the human lives they've saved are countless.





Canadian. 1940s. Lithographed cardboard. Artwork signed, "Sampson". Trimmed at upper and lower edges to fit standard railway station frame.



French Expeditionary's wine stocks for the Gallipoli campaign, an unsuccessful attempt by the Allied Powers to control the sea route from Europe to Russia during World War I. The French however, were prepared for hardship.



### Naval EOD and the use of a size LARGE Birmingham screwdriver.

I couldn't understand this photograph until I looked up two things:

1. What does EOD signify? I learned that it stands for (Naval) Explosive Ordnance Disposal.
2. What is a "Birmingham screwdriver?" I looked the term up in Wiktionary and found out that it is U.K. slang "Humorously suggesting that people from Birmingham rely on the use of force to solve problems."

Now I get the joke.

I am only posting this in case someone as clueless as me should view this photo

Another Version; Member of Royal Dutch Navy demonstrates the Belgian version of how to defuse a sea mine.

**Sabretache**

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