

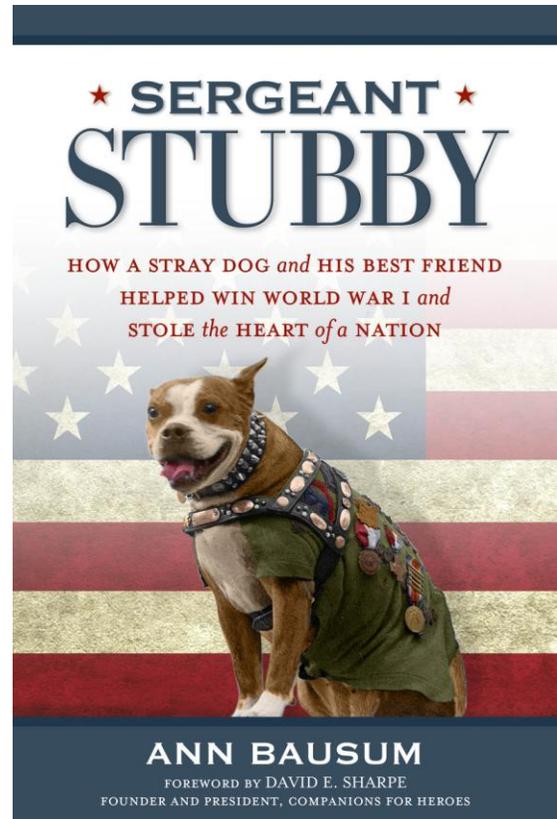
Sergeant Stubby

How a Stray Dog and His Best Friend Helped Win World War I and Stole the Heart of a Nation

By Ann Bausum

Reading Guide

1. Most Americans wanted the United States to stay out of the First World War. What reasons would the average American citizen most likely have given for neutrality?
2. The sinking of the *Lusitania* and other ships bearing American citizens and cargo influenced President Woodrow Wilson to involve the United States in the war. Why would Germany have considered it justifiable for civilians to perish during military attacks at sea?
3. British lieutenant Ralph Kynoch said, “We’ll take anything for a trench companion—but give us a dog first” (page 43). What made dogs ideally suited to be companions to soldiers in the trenches? Were there risks in allowing members of the armed forces to keep dogs on the battlefield?
4. What factors motivated Stubby’s companion, Robert Conroy, to smuggle his friend overseas? To what extent was he naive or insensitive to transport a dog to a war zone? What alternatives could he have considered, in terms of leaving the dog behind?
5. Like the soldiers of the Yankee Division, Stubby must have experienced unimaginable fear and uncertainty on the battlefield, but unlike the soldiers who befriended him, he could have more easily deserted the scene. What options might he have had beyond the battle zone? What factors influenced him to remain on the front lines instead?
6. Stubby seemed to have a knack for knowing when soldiers needed companionship or consolation in wartime (page 67). What cues would the men have given Stubby that allowed him to recognize those needs? Soldiers may have thanked the dog for his



companionship by sharing food with him. How else may he have been rewarded for offering his attention?

7. Robert Conroy wrote that Stubby “seemed to have many lives” (page 79), and there are conflicting reports about the quality of Stubby’s bravery in the face of danger. As with most stories, the truth may have been changed or exaggerated with each telling. What value did these embellishments have to the community of soldiers that adopted Stubby as their mascot? What harm could the unvarnished truth have presented?
8. Communication between commanders and battle units is a critical factor in success on the battlefield. What challenges were presented in a war zone, where trenches restricted one’s vision and communications were carried by fragile wiring or by human or animal messengers?
9. Civilians on the home front were asked to make sacrifices such as observing “meatless Mondays” and “wheatless Wednesdays” (page 99) to be sure there were enough resources to support the troops. Do you think Americans could be called on to make the same sacrifices today? What changes in American culture have influenced our ability or willingness to do these things in the 21st century? What types of home-front support do we provide our troops today?
10. What were the risks of a propaganda campaign that vilified Germany and the German war machine, tainting, by association, German Americans and German culture in the United States? Could the benefits have outweighed the harm to any extent? What long-term damage could this campaign have had on American culture?
11. Was it right for the National Woman’s Party to pursue its goal of woman suffrage during wartime when many voices advocated for the country to stand united against a common foe? How might the timing of its efforts have contributed to the success of the movement and the ratification of the 19th Amendment, granting women the right to vote not even two years after the end of combat?
12. Historian Edward G. Lengel characterizes the Meuse-Argonne campaign as the largest and most costly battle in American history, and he considers it to be America’s most important contribution to the outcome of the First World War (page 125). Why has this campaign largely been forgotten?
13. The military euthanized thousands of service dogs after the war, considering them to be too traumatized by combat for repatriation (page 136). What fears or concerns might have prompted such a decision?

14. If it's easy to understand why soldiers embraced Stubby as a mascot on the battlefield, it may be more difficult to comprehend why civilians were so eager to celebrate him after the war. What would he and his story have represented for everyday Americans? How was he important to the morale, the spirit, and the imagination of postwar America?
15. The press seemed to adore Stubby in the postwar years, and reporters played a significant role in making his story legendary in scope. Why would this narrative be important to the media? Why would they be eager to embellish the facts?
16. How did Stubby's physical characteristics and overall nature help him survive on the battlefields of the First World War? How did they help him in his postwar years?
17. Stubby's fame coincided with the public's increasing love of dogs (page 157). Why did dogs gain in popularity as pets at that time? Which of Stubby's qualities would have been attractive and inspirational to ordinary citizens in search of animal companionship?
18. The honors Stubby received after the war drew sporadic criticism during an era when many veterans faced difficulties transitioning to civilian life (pages 169). How would veterans who knew Stubby have responded to this criticism? Why did Stubby continue to be an important symbol of their service even after the war had ended?
19. Robert Conroy may have missed his calling as a publicist. He established exceptional political connections and had a knack for managing the news media. What tactics did he employ to keep Stubby in the public eye throughout their postwar lives? Did he use any strategies that might be considered inappropriate by today's standards?
20. A *New Britain Herald* writer said, "Stubby was the concentration of all we like in human beings and lacked everything we dislike in them" (page 187). Which of Stubby's qualities would have made him, as the *Herald* writer goes on to say, "the visible incarnation of the great spirit that hovered over the 26th"? If Stubby represented the best in human beings, what were some of the traits he lacked that can be seen as unlikable in humans (or animals)?
21. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, one of the warning signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is when an individual exhibits symptoms that make it difficult to negotiate the challenges of daily life, including going to school or work, being with friends and family, and taking care of important tasks. Does Robert Conroy seem to have experienced PTSD?

22. The National Center for PTSD warns against certain coping behaviors that may do more harm than good for those with symptoms of the disorder. The list of *negative coping* behaviors includes such things as avoiding others, avoiding memories of the traumatic event, and working too much. How could a pet like Stubby help veterans avoid negative coping?
23. What would the reasons be for adding a memorial to military service dogs to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C.? What would the arguments be against the addition? Who would benefit from such a memorial and why?
24. Although World War I serves as a backdrop for most of the book, the text conveys a love story along with the war story. In what ways is this book about love? Does this theme extend beyond the relationship between Stubby and Robert Conroy?
25. What is it about the history of Robert Conroy and Stubby that continues to resonate today? Why are we inspired by stories about the bonds between humans and animals? What qualities do dogs offer, uniquely from other animals, to their human companions?

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