

the training. Over the next few weeks Rob completed more than a dozen practice jumps, and on several occasions appeared to be so enthusiastic that he had to be prevented from being the first one to jump out of the plane.

Back in Shropshire the family received a note from the army telling them Rob was fit and well, and doing 'a splendid job of work'. Because he was with the Special Air Service, which often carries out top secret work in dangerous areas, the note said nothing about where he was or what he was actually doing. In fact by this time Rob is thought to have been rounding up enemy parachutists who had been sent to reinforce German and Italian troops in Tunisia. As humans their night vision was nowhere near as good as a dog's; by helping to capture them Rob assisted in the Allied invasion of that country, which eventually led to the enemy's surrender.

During this period Rob made at least two more parachute jumps himself, possibly three, on each occasion risking his life to help the men he served alongside. This wasn't just due to the obvious risks of bailing out of an aircraft. Infuriated by British successes in the desert war, the Nazi leader Adolf Hitler had also ordered that from now on parachutists were to be shot on sight rather than taken prisoner.

Because the SAS doesn't discuss its missions there are still plenty of secrets surrounding Rob's time with them. It is known that one of his jumps was part of an operation to rescue some airmen and soldiers who had been taken prisoner in Italy. There are also official government documents confirming that Rob's presence on raiding parties behind enemy lines 'saved many of them from being discovered,

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and thereby from being captured and killed'. In this his keen eyesight and hearing would have been invaluable because a good dog will often detect something or find someone a human would miss.

Rob eventually received no fewer than seven medals and awards, but even now much of his time with the army remains shrouded in mystery. When the war finally ended in 1945 he was returned to his family in Shropshire, and after so long they were very happy to have him back. Unfortunately Rob's training meant that for a while he was better at rounding the children up than the farm animals, but gradually he learned to relax and was soon back to being an ordinary family pet.