

Squadron Leader Ted  
sold at Special Auction  
Services in June 2017



# WAR BEARS

## BY KIRSTY JOHNSTONE

The bear has had a long association with man. His bones were found in Perigord, France, mixed with human skeletons dating back 80,000 years, both species co-existing to survive the harsh conditions, indeed he was hunted by early man for food. Paintings from 32,000 years ago have been found on the walls of Chauvet Cave in France, illustrating the fact bears were revered enough to im-

mortalize in art. Bears began to be worshipped by man, they had a similar look to man, exhibited great strength and bravery and possessed healing properties, indeed Shaman in some tribes dressed themselves in bearskins to dance themselves into an altered state of consciousness for divination and medicinal purposes. In the Medieval period the Church felt intimidated by this

cult and its popularity with the people so started to vilify bears, which eventually led to their fall from grace and humiliation with subsequent appearances as dancing bears and as baiting animals in towns and villages, thankfully these practices died out in the C19th. More recently bears appeared in zoos and circuses so they became familiar animals again. The bear



has now ingratiated himself into nearly every home as one of our favourite toys, one which we often keep all our lives, the teddy bear. In the major conflicts of the C20th what better an object to carry for “protection” than the teddy bear, one’s childhood friend and reminder of less troubled times.

I love history and am lucky enough to have in my Hug a number of bears who were used as mascots in WW1 and WW2, some with incredible stories which I will share with you.

“Squadron Leader Ted” is a 1908 Steiff, who belonged to Albert Moy, known as Bert. Bert lived in Coventry, Ted came from Weston-super-Mare at a cost of 3s 6d. Bert worked in a bank until he joined the Royal Warwickshire Regiment

in January 1918, when he turned eighteen, but he quickly transferred to the RFC. Bert was based at Waddington in Lincolnshire in the 6th Squadron and was a ferry pilot flying replacement aeroplanes to France, Squadron Leader Ted would accompany him, strapped to the front of the aircraft, no doubt giving Bert advice during the flight. Ted used to get covered in oil and soot, so had to be cleaned after every flight by Bert’s Flight Sergeant in a bucket of

aviation fuel, Ted’s reaction is not recorded but he is in reasonable condition so it obviously worked! During the Second World War Bert was a Captain in the Home Guard, he was in a reserved occupation as a senior manager in a company producing parts for military vehicles and equipment, he must have served through the infamous Coventry Blitz of November 1940.

After I purchased the Squadron Leader I was contacted by the RAF at Lossiemouth where Bert’s old squadron is now based, offering Ted a final flight in a modern jet, who knows maybe he will take to the skies again but definitely not strapped to the front! When looking at Squadron Leader Ted it is almost impossible to imagine his dramatic early lifestyle and the history he witnessed. I have a photograph of another bear mascot in the RFC strapped to the front of an aircraft at the Royal Aircraft Factory, however I can find nothing to link this bear with





Ted so he must be another flying bear! Two bears that accompanied their owners to the trenches of WW1 are Edwin and the unnamed bear of Gunner Thomas McCarthy. Edwin was in the pocket of his owner, 2nd Lt. Percy Kinnersley-Baddeley, Royal Field Artillery, when he was killed on the 29th June 1916, in the days leading up to the Battle of the Somme, he was twenty three years old. Percy is buried at The New Military Cemetery in Fricourt, which I have visited. Percy came from Sidcup in Kent, and seems to have had a varied career in the years leading up to WW1, including a spell in an agricultural college and in the family

stationary business. Shortly before he left for France, unbeknown to his parents, he married a ballerina, Verna Edwiss Bane, on 29th April 1916 at Wandsworth Registry Office. The Adeline Genee Company of which she was a member, were performing in London at the time, perhaps Percy saw her at a performance? Edwin, who has a stain on his face and missing left eye, which has been replaced with stitches, was returned to England in Percy's effects. Edwin spent his life with Verna sitting on a handkerchief embroidered with the letter "E" and sporting a blue neckscarf. I did some research on Percy and was able to acquire his Army records

which make interesting reading especially when his parents were just about to be awarded his Army pension when it was discovered he was married!

Gunner Thomas McCarthy's bear came to me via a house clearance and a Christies' auction! I had no contact with his previous owner but a large amount of photos, medals, family greetings cards and toys came with him so I have managed to piece together a little of Thomas' family history, I was lucky to have his WW1 Army number which gave me a starting point. Thomas was an Irish Catholic living in London with a number of siblings, he was born in 1890 and first en-



**Gunner Thomas McCarthy's 'soldier' teddy bear and related provenance**



**Petsy and Ted, Hannelore Schoknecht's teddy bears.**



listed in the Army in 1905 serving for three years before being honourably discharged in 1908. He became a "Lampman" on the Great Northern Railway, presumably out of Kings Cross as he lived around the Holloway and Holborn areas of London. Thomas married Kitty in 1911, they had a son Robin. Thomas re-enlisted in December 1915, although presumably being a Lampman he would have been in a reserved occupation. I have several letters and embroidered cards sent between Kitty and Thomas when he was in France. Thomas survived the war with a couple of periods of injury. Robin served in the Army in WW2, I have a number of photos of him in what appears to be North Africa and also his medals and dog tags. As I am not a relative I am unable to obtain his Army records. There is a photo of Robin in his Army uniform with Thomas in what appears to be a

Home Guard uniform. I think the bear must have been looked after by Robin as it was his estate that the bear was sold from, perhaps passed from father to son? Along the way the bear has acquired a tin hat with a chin strap and a leather belt with sword complete with padded handle, all beautifully handmade, maybe Thomas made it for Robin when he went to France? Thomas died in the 1960s. The bear was obviously treasured. Two bears who illustrate the Post World War 2 political situation and Cold War are Petsy and Ted. Petsy was given to Hannelore Schoknecht on her birth, 22nd September 1928 and her brother Joachim was given Teddy on his birth 21st October 1932, the bears are both by Steiff. The siblings were from a very well to do family who lived in Schwerin, with the rise of the Nationalist Socialist Party they spent most of their time in their house in Davos,

Switzerland. At the onset of war they had to return to Germany when their father was called up. Hannelore was sent to boarding school in the Harz Mountains. By April 1945, despite the radio propaganda to the contrary she realized that Germany was losing the war so she decided to cycle home to join her family. The atlas which accompanies the bears was used as a hard base for her cycle basket, Hannelore took some food and water, Petsy and the clothes she stood up in. The journey of several hundred miles took a month, she had to travel by night and sleep rough, using the world atlas for navigation! All this in a war zone at a vulnerable age just shows what strength of character she must have had. The atlas is marked in pencil with the route she took, including several long detours. Eventually Hannelore was reunited with her family and became an interpreter in



a refugee camp as her English was excellent. She met and married a British officer and moved to Liverpool. Her family were split by the building of the Berlin Wall, so were the bears, Petsy in England and Teddy in East Germany, where the rest of her family were now living in poverty. When Hannelore's daughter, Geraldine was born in 1950 the family in East Germany had nothing to send except Teddy, who arrived safely by post and the bears were reunited. Joachim escaped to the West in 1962, strapped to the underside of a train, another unimaginable event. Hannelore's husband died very young of TB caught in Germany. I acquired Petsy and Ted when Geraldine sold them to raise money for a member of her family who wanted to go to University and whose father had died in his twenties from anaphylactic shock. I was lucky enough to also acquire many family photos and the atlas as well as the bears and most precious of all photos of the bears and

the family. I have several other bears with wartime stories to tell, including Winston, Lucky and Jo, who were some of the very few possessions a little girl and her family took with them when they fled the London Blitz and Blenheim who was flown home wrapped in a parachute having been found in the burnt out ruins of Hamburg by an airmen for his new baby in Haverstock Hill, London. I have in my collection several photos of bear mascots, which I do not own. There is one of a Lancaster crew and their teddy being briefed and getting ready for a mission in 1943 and there is a bear in the gunner's position of a Boulton Paul Defiant Mk1, indeed his crew were decorated aces and always took the bear with

them on missions. Interestingly in what we think of as a bleak period of Communist role in East Germany, I have a photo of a well looked after teddy, in a totally accurate representation of an East German uniform being held aloft by soldiers dressed in the same uniform in what could be Berlin. These poignant bears really do tell a fascinating story; this close up photograph below of Edwin's stained and worn face makes you wish that he could speak!

Kirsty Johnstone is a private collector of teddy bears and is well known in the bear world, always first in the queue for every teddy bear fair she attends.

