

MEDALS AND MEMORIES MINUTES



The Nine Lives of Simon the Cat

Simon was a stray cat on Hong Kong's Stonecutter's Island until he was taken on as a mascot for the British Naval frigate HMS Amethyst. Simon's playfulness amused the ship's crew—especially when he fished ice-cubes out of a jug of water. Things became serious for Simon in 1949 when The Amethyst headed up the Yangtze River was bombarded by artillery fire killing 17 men including the captain. Simon was sleeping in the Captain's cabin when it took a direct hit from a shell. With whiskers and eyebrows burnt off, fur singed, gashes in his back and legs and punctured lungs, the little cat was not expected to survive. Simon's amazing survival and recovery revived the spirits of the demoralized crew, especially as the grounded ship was soon invaded by hordes of rats. During the three months the ship was stranded, Simon took on the task of protecting the ship's dwindling food supplies. He waged intense war on the rats and hunted down as many as he could. When Simon wasn't on rat-catcher duty, he and the ship's terrier dog played with and comforted their weary shipmates. Commander Kerans in his recommendation for the PDSA Dickin Medal wrote, "... Throughout the incident Simon's behaviour was of the highest order. One would not have expected him to survive the shell that had made a hole over a foot wide in diameter in a steel plate. Yet, he did and after a few days, Simon was as friendly as ever. His presence on the ship was a decided factor in maintaining the morale of the ship's company."