

The Indian War Elephant: Fascinating Tales from its Historical Past

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ABSTRACT

One of the most interesting and unusual uses of animals in history was the engagement of war elephants. Working with animals on the battlefield had both advantages and disadvantages and this was particularly true of the war elephant, whose usage through time had varying results.

The elephant was the only animal that humankind used as a significant combatant, systematically and on a large scale, India being one of the first countries to utilize it. Horses were never actual fighters, rather vehicles for carrying soldiers in the battle.

The elephants were military units with elephant-mounted troops; they were first employed in India, the practice subsequently spread across south-east Asia and even westwards towards the Mediterranean.

Through a good part of Indian history, the elephant has been a famous participant as a highly valued war machine in military actions.

In India, elephants were not only fighters but also siege weapons. From the fighting tower, to the howdah, to the armour to the tusk swords, all made the elephant rather formidable.

This paper intends to look at the necessity of the increased employability of the war elephants in Indian history; their functions, advantages and disadvantages as well as the countermeasures used against them.

This paper narrates tales of battles from the Indian past where the war elephant was an integral part of the outcome of the combat. Moreover, the elephant when not in war was also used as a medium of imparting punishment, where the perpetrator would publically be crushed to death under the foot of an elephant.

Keywords: War elephants, Tales, Battles, Employability, India.

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