

The use of homing pigeons is one of the oldest methods employed for transmitting messages, especially in warfare. Well-known in Ancient Greece, Rome, Phoenicia, China, and India, wild rock doves may have been originally domesticated for meat sources but were soon found to have others uses. Most all varieties of pigeons, to a more or less extent, possess an instinctive desire to return to their homes when taken away and given their liberty. Through centuries of breeding, the homing pigeon was produced that would have a greater range of flight and that would have increased speed and endurance.



As documented in the University of Minnesota's Media History Project, the first known use of pigeons as postal messengers was in ancient Egypt. In 2900 B.C.E. in Egypt, incoming ships released pigeons as an announcement of important visitors. Around the time of Moses, the Egyptian army used homing pigeons to deliver messages. In 2350 B.C.E. King Sargon of Akkadia—the present Iraq—ordered each messenger to carry a homing pigeon. If the messenger was about to be captured, he released the pigeon, which flew back to the palace. Its arrival meant another messenger should be sent. Pigeons also bore messages in ancient China, Persia, India, and Greece, where the names of Olympic victors were carried back to their cities.

During the Dark Ages, the Arabs established regular airmail pigeon courier services. According to one tale, a caliph in North Africa satisfied his taste for Lebanese cherries by having pigeons fly them in. Each carried one cherry inside a silk bag. It was the first parcel post. Reportedly, a prize pair of pigeons in the Arab empire could fetch one thousand gold pieces.

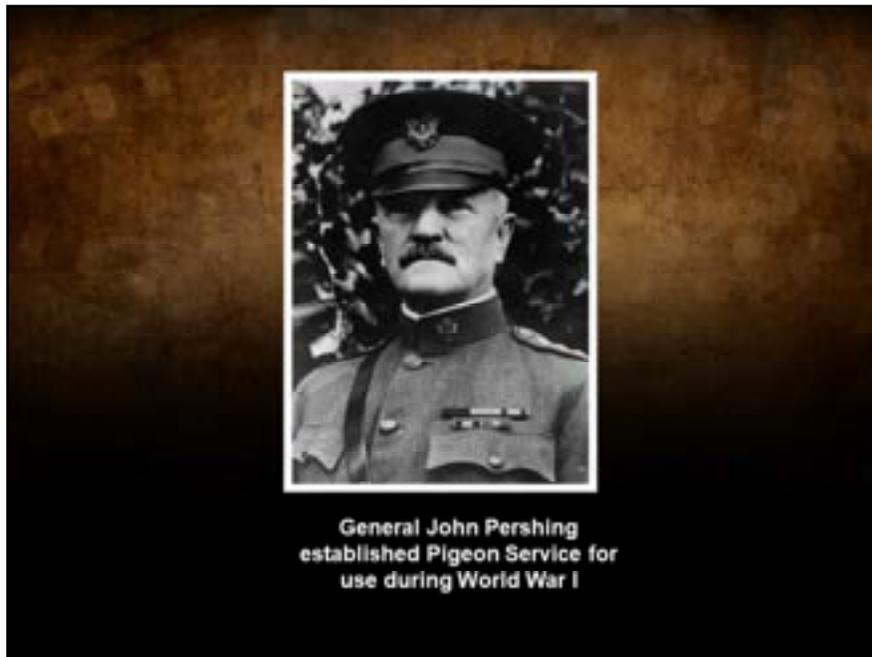
During the Crusades, Richard the Lion Heart's men captured a pigeon that carried a message reporting that a Moslem army would arrive in three days to break the Christian siege of Ptolemais. A forged message was substituted, saying that no help would be coming. The besieged town surrendered. The Moslem relief army arrived to

find the Christians solidly entrenched.

Pigeon post was the world's fastest communication system for all the centuries of the Dark and Middle Ages, and remained so until Samuel Morse's invention of the telegraph in 1844 and Marconi's invention of radio in 1895.



The U.S. Army Signal Corps was established on 21 June 1860. After the Civil War, the Signal Corps languished somewhat and spent most of its time in the Southwest engaged in Indian campaigns where visual signaling was still effective. Trying to learn from the more advanced European armies, the Signal Corps investigated the use of pigeons for communicating. These winged messengers had become popular in Europe after their successful employment during the siege of Paris in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War. In 1878, the Army unsuccessfully experimented with pigeons when some were sent to General Miles in Dakota Territory. In many cases, hawks attacked the birds before they could return to their lofts. Four years later, First Lt. William Birkhimer made a detailed report on pigeons in which he concluded that the birds were unreliable and the Army need not develop a comprehensive plan for their use. The Signal Corps did, however, open a pigeon station at Key West, Florida, in 1888, but discontinued the experiment after four years. Although the Army found no need for the birds (it transferred them to the Naval Academy), they proved reliable for carrying messages across long stretches of water. Flying from Key West to Havana, Cuba, they could be used to communicate between ships and their home stations. The Army did not find a use for pigeons until WWI though there is some mention that they may have been briefly used during BG Pershing's Punitive Expedition to Mexico after the raid by Pancho Villa in 1916.



General Pershing set sail for Europe on 28 May 1917 and arrived in France on 13 June and set up the headquarters for the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) in Paris. In July 1917, impressed with the French and British pigeon services, Pershing requested that pigeon specialists be commissioned into the U.S. Army. In November 1917, the Signal Corps Pigeon Service received official authorization, and a table of organization for a pigeon company to serve at Army level was published the following June. The company comprised 9 officers and 324 Soldiers and provided a pigeon group to each corps and division. By the end of the war, the Signal Corps had sent more than 15,000 trained pigeons to the AEF.



Members of the 5<sup>th</sup> Field Signal Battalion string wires while the town of Montfaucon is under shell fire. October 1918



Motorcycle dispatch rider starting under heavy shell fire to deliver pigeons to outmost advanced position, France. 2 May 1918

So why did the U.S. Army decide it needed pigeons to help fight what was recognized as the first “modern” war, to be won or lost on the success of technological advancements? Despite advances in speed, electrical communications could not always be relied upon to get the message through. Wire communications, in particular, were extremely vulnerable to artillery fire and the ravages of wheeled and tracked vehicles, not to mention enemy wire cutters.



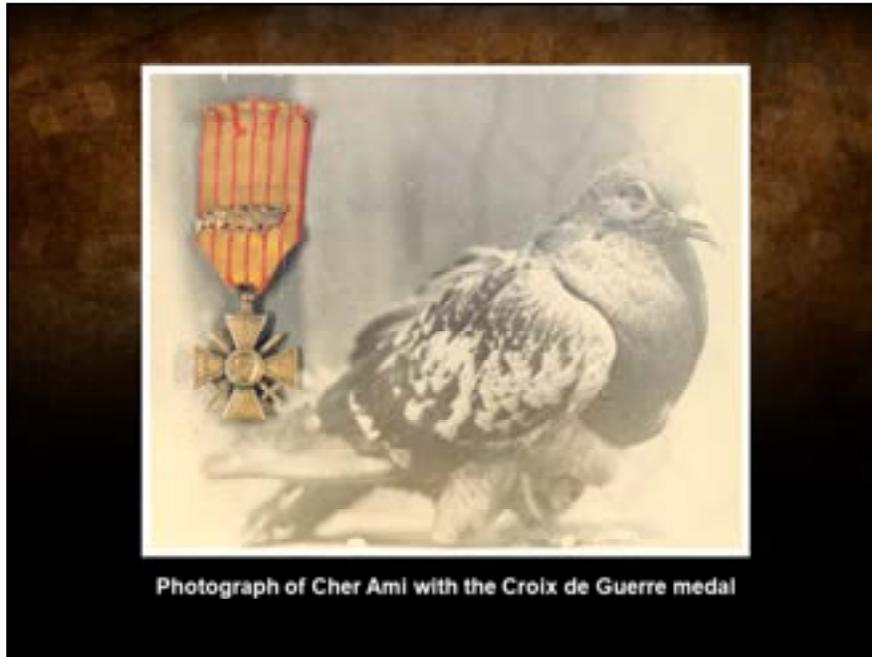
The close fighting that was the feature of trench warfare meant that radio messages could be easily intercepted on the open frequencies. Thus, the Signal Corps built a measure of redundancy into its communications systems as insurance. Traditional communication methods, such as runners and mounted messengers, continued to perform their duties, with the use of motorcycle dispatch riders constituting a modern variation. Homing pigeons contributed another “low-tech” but effective means of communication.



Germany had a very efficient and well-established pigeon service which was used by all arms throughout WWI. They had established lofts throughout England, which were used for inter-communication purposes. Birds that were used to fly from England to Germany had been trained over that course before the war, being held in detention for release after hostilities had commenced. This was discovered when a passenger on one of the suburban trains was seen to release a pigeon out of the window, the bird having been concealed in his coat. The man was trailed, and many lofts were found to be established throughout the country.



Probably the most famous use of pigeons occurred during the fighting in the Argonne Forest in October 1918 when elements of the 77<sup>th</sup> Division, commanded by MAJ Charles W. Whittlesey, became separated and trapped behind the German lines. These units became known as the "Lost Battalion." The Lost Battalion had been pinned down on all sides by the Germans who had surrounded them with barbed wire and machine guns. For five nights they were shelled. Four messengers were sent out, and they all disappeared. When runners could no longer get through, Whittlesey employed pigeons to carry messages back to division headquarters requesting supplies and support. Seven pigeons were sent out, and they were all shot down. After several days without relief, with hope for survival fading and friendly artillery fire raining down, the men pinned their lives on their last bird, Cher Ami (dear friend), to get word back to silence the guns. Cher Ami had already delivered almost one dozen important messages from the Verdun front to the loft at Rampont. MAJ Whittlesey had received a written proposition from the Germans to surrender. But he had been instructed not to give up any ground without written instructions. They had one day of rations left, and the men had been reduced to eating leaves and shoots. Fifty percent of the battalion had been killed or wounded. Cher Ami flew 25 miles in 25 minutes and arrived with her breastbone shattered, and a leg missing, her message hanging by a tendon.



Photograph of Cher Ami with the Croix de Guerre medal

Cher Ami completed her mission. The barrage stopped, and a detachment from the 77<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division was soon on its way to rescue the surrounded men. In recognition of this remarkable accomplishment, Cher Ami was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Croix de Guerre and became one of the first widely recognized “Hero Pigeons” celebrated throughout the country. General Pershing personally saw Cher Ami off on her trip back to America and gave strict instructions that she was to be kept in the Captain’s quarters and provided with unlimited rations. She died at Camp Alfred Vail in 1919 and is mounted in the Smithsonian.



There were other pigeons who earned the title of “Hero Pigeon” in World War I while serving alongside the Soldiers in the trenches and across France. Some of them include:



Born in France, his initial assignment was to the U.S. Army's newly formed Tank Corps. He first saw action delivering messages for the 326th and 327th Tank Battalions commanded by Colonel George S. Patton in the Battle of Saint Mihiel. Assigned to the forward most squad in the advance, he was released from the turret of a tank to fly back with the locations of enemy machine gun nests. Artillery could then be brought to bear before the infantry advanced.

Following this action, he was in support of an infantry unit, most likely the 78th Division, who were conducting operations in the vicinity of Grandpré during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. On the morning of 5 October, 1918, his unit came under attack and was heavily engaged in a firefight with the enemy. President Wilson was released to deliver a request for artillery support, flying back to his loft at Rampont some 40 kilometers away; he drew the attention of the German soldiers who fired a nearly impenetrable wall of lead blocking his path. Despite this, President Wilson managed to deliver the lifesaving message within 25 minutes—a record for speed—unmatched in the American Expeditionary Forces. When he landed, his left leg had been shot away, and he had a gaping wound in his breast.

Surviving his wounds, President Wilson retired to the U.S. Army Signal Corps Breeding and Training Center where he led a quiet life until his death on 8 June, 1929. Like many

of his avian wartime companions, he was taxidermied and presented to the Smithsonian Institution. In 2008, he was returned to the U.S. Army and is now in an exhibit in the Pentagon, just outside the office of the Chief of Staff of the Army.



**The Mocker** – The last of the WWI hero pigeons to die. (14 June 1937). Mocker was a red check pied cock banded AU-17-4084, with breeding unknown. With his eye destroyed by a shell splinter and his head a welter of clotted blood, this pigeon homed in splendid time from the vicinity of Beaumont early in the morning of 12 September 1918, bearing a message of great importance, which gave the location of certain enemy heavy batteries. This information enabled the American artillery to silence the enemy's guns within 20 minutes.

**Spike** – A Grizzly cock, was bred in France early in 1918. He was a strong, aggressive fast-flying bird of great vitality and capacity for endurance. Although not a handsome bird in appearance, he was an ideal type for Signal communication service. He is reported to have delivered 52 messages in action during WWI without injury for the 77<sup>th</sup> Division in the Argonne. Spike was returned to the U.S. with other distinguished pigeons on the transport "Ohioan" on 16 April 1919 and placed in the lofts at Camp Alfred Vail. He died at Fort Monmouth on 11 April 1924 at the age of 17.



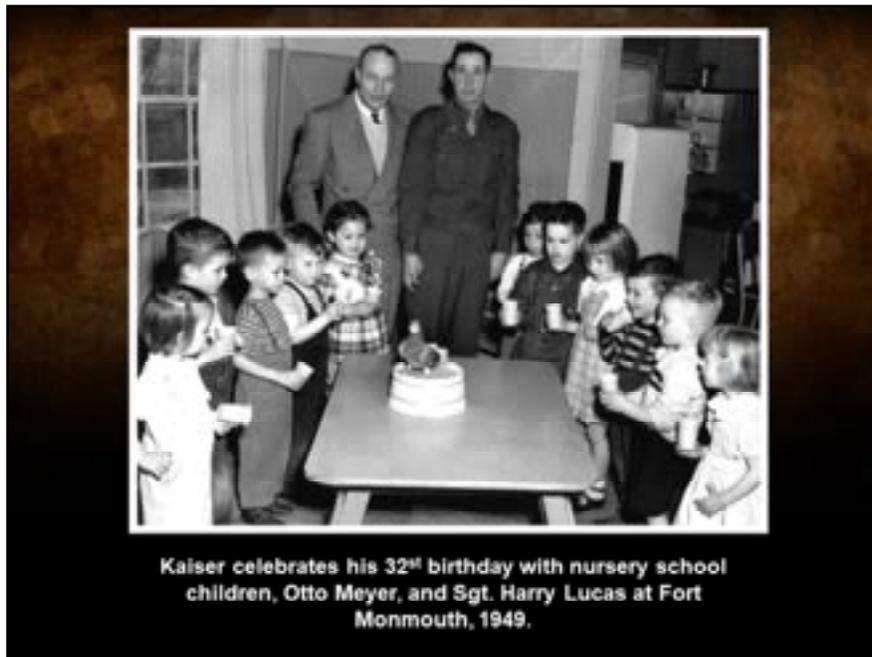
### **Long John Silver**

"LONG JOHN SILVER," 1918-1936  
BRED BY U.S. ARMY SIGNAL CORPS  
HATCHED JANUARY 1918 IN A FRONT LINE DUGOUT, FRANCE  
SERVED IN THE MEUSE ARGONNE OFFENSIVE  
WOUNDED SEVERELY IN BATTLE ON OCTOBER 21, 1918  
FLEW 25 MILES IN 25 MINUTES WITH A SHOT OFF LEG  
AWARDED DISTINGUISHED SERVICE MEDAL  
RETIRED FROM ACTIVE SERVICE IN 1921  
REASSIGNED TO 11TH SIGNAL COMPANY, SCHOFIELD BARRACKS, HAWAII  
HANDLED BY COL. CLIFFORD A. POUTRE FROM 1929-1936  
SPECIALTY - DELIVERING MESSAGES UNDER INTENSE ENEMY ARTILLERY FIRE

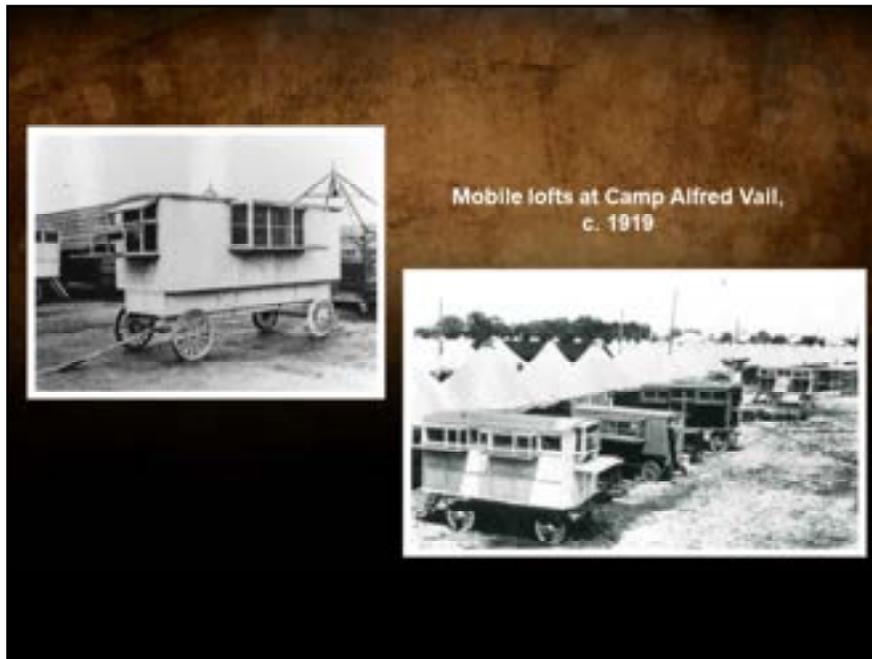


**Big Tom** – Blue Check Hen, one leg shot away and bullet through breast bone. Delivered message in that condition (SC36216)

**Kaja Boy** – Red Check Cock, wounded on head by shrapnel at Metz Front. (SC36223)



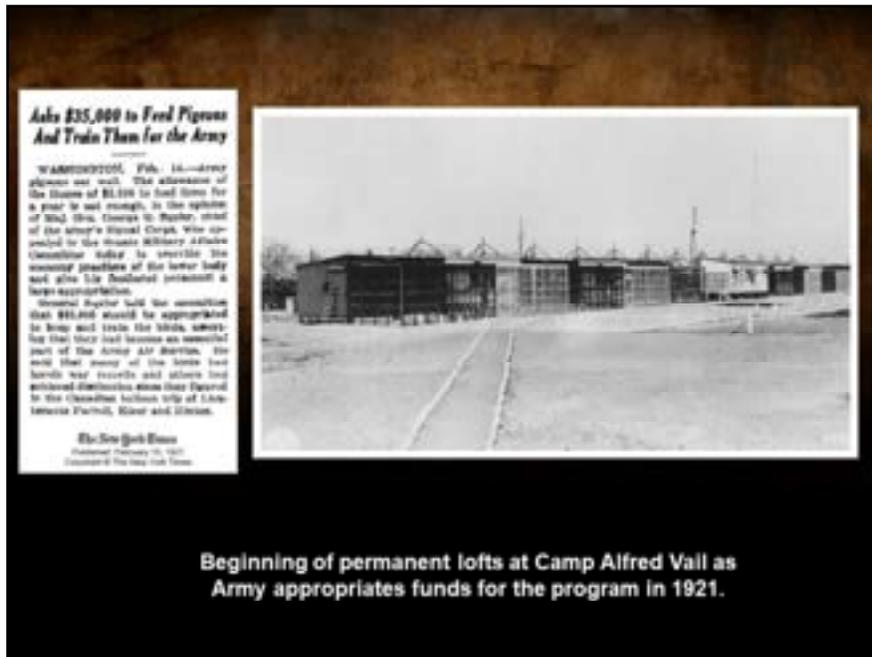
**Kaiser** – Not one of the “hero pigeons” of WWI, Kaiser gained recognition as the oldest known homing pigeon, living to age 32, three times the normal life span of a pigeon. He was hatched in Cologne, Germany in February 1917 and was trained as a homing pigeon for Kaiser Wilhelm’s troops. During front-line trench fighting in the Muse offensive, American troops captured the bird, and he was turned over to the Signal Corps. He was used for breeding purposes. Kaiser wore his identification band bearing the seal of the German Imperial Crown on his left leg for his entire life. The only method of removal would have been amputation of the leg. Kaiser served as an ambassador of the Pigeon Program until his death on 31 October 1949.



The success of the homing pigeons in war prompted the Army to perpetuate the service after the Armistice. The Chief Signal Officer established the Signal Corps Pigeon Breeding and Training Section at Camp Alfred Vail, NJ, which would later be renamed as Fort Monmouth. The officer in charge of the British Service supplied 150 pairs of breeders to the U.S. Army. They arrived at Camp Vail, without loss, in October 1919, and resided together with some of the retired hero pigeons of the World War in one fixed and 14 mobile lofts. At Monmouth, the pigeon experts devoted efforts to improving training, breeding, and equipment for the Pigeon Service. A World War I-era joke suggested that the Corps was breeding pigeons with parrots so that messages could be transmitted by speaking!



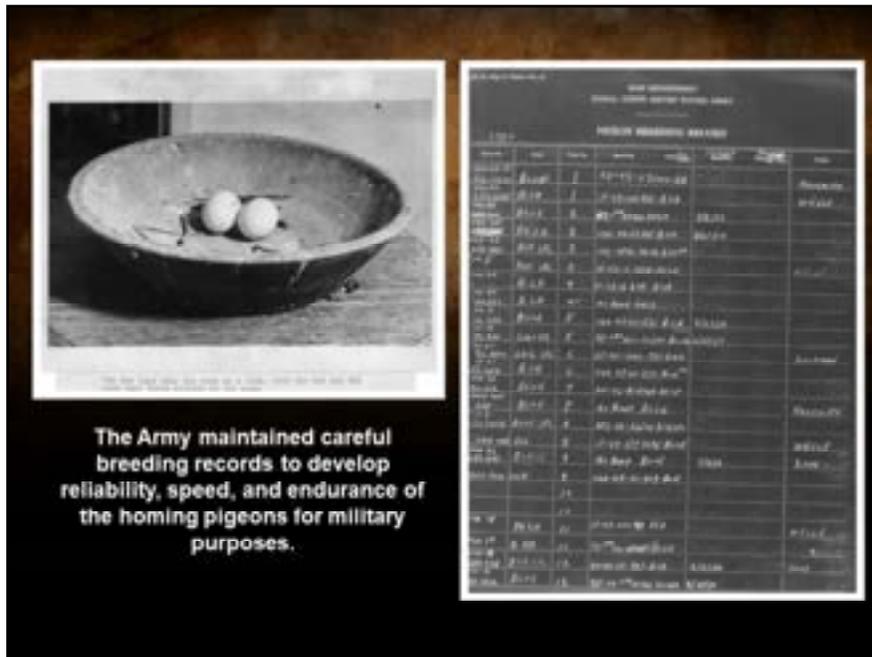
While the heroes toured the country, discussions regarding the use of Army pigeons in peacetime were taking place in the Army Appropriation Bill for 1921. A part of the bill contains a document titled "Use of Carrier (Homer) Pigeons in our Peace Army and Mexican Border Patrol."



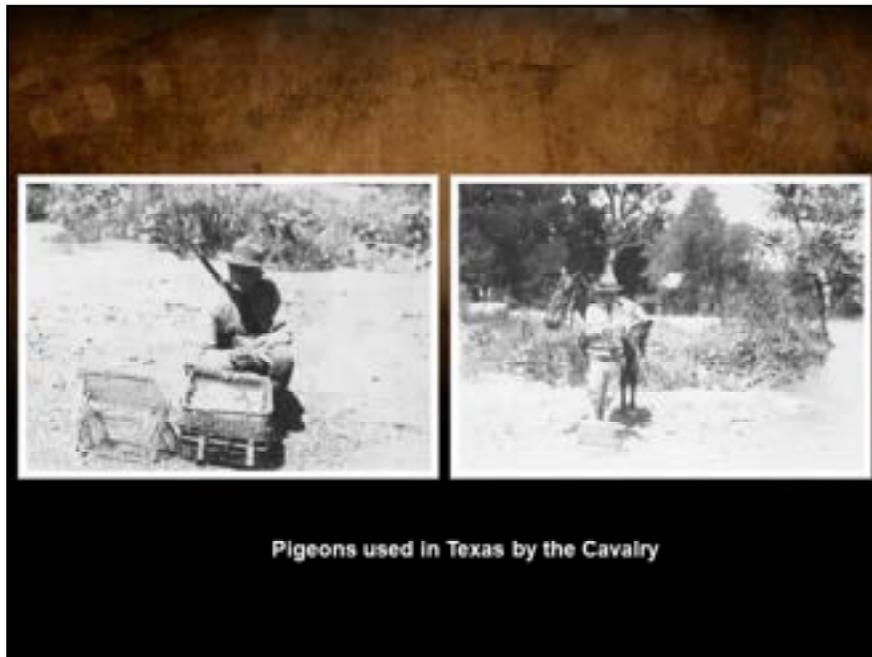
Beginning of permanent lofts at Camp Alfred Vail as Army appropriates funds for the program in 1921.

It was submitted on behalf of the Chief Signal Officer, GEN George Owen Squier, by COL F. R. Curtis of the Signal Corps.

As described, after the Armistice, about 30 of the 100 pigeon lofts that were in use in the States for training were closed. It was the Army's intent to maintain at least 30 lofts, including lofts at the Military Academy at West Point, and in the territory of Hawaii, Panama, and possibly the Philippine Islands.



Breeding lofts and a pigeon school would be maintained at Camp Alfred Vail, NJ. Additional lofts were also maintained at Fort Sam Houston, TX, for breeding and training (including mobile lofts for the same purpose for use of birds on the Mexican border where the birds were used for outpost duty by the Cavalry and air patrol). The continued use of pigeons was justified, despite the existing sophisticated means of communications, because those communications systems, especially wireless, could be lost due to atmospheric conditions; it might not be practical to build communications lines or existing lines had been destroyed.



Pigeons used in Texas by the Cavalry

Pigeons stationed at the southern outpost, as described in 1921, had been used in “storm-wrecked areas” close to Corpus Christi, TX. The pigeons were released from the storm-damaged area and carried the first news of conditions and of the progress of reestablishing communications back to Corpus Christi. The pigeons were also the sole source of communication from this area for two days, even after radio was set up, because radio was rendered useless by atmospheric conditions. These birds proved capable of flying 150 miles in 5 to 7 hours through the storm, a flight that under normal conditions would take 2.5 to 3 hours.

Another peacetime activity for the Pigeon Service was to support to the balloon school, Brooks Field, in Texas. At Brooks, the pigeons were the only means of communication for “free balloons in flight,” where a balloon could land even up to 200 miles away, sometimes in mesquite brush, far from any communications capability. The pigeons were released every 30 to 60 minutes, with a final bird being released giving their location at landing so they could be found and picked up quickly, saving the balloonist from walking many miles; they could also be used for emergencies.



The Air Service also used pigeons in peacetime. If a pilot was forced to make an emergency landing, the pilot could release a bird to deliver a message. Relief would be dispatched, and the plane could be repaired and back on its way. The Motor Transport Corps also used pigeons in the same way. The Army had also released some birds to the forest patrol for use where there was no telephone communication. Carrying that even further, the report states “civilians could use them in many practical ways on hunting trips or where they take long automobile trips in sparsely settled parts of the country.”

“These birds are quite dependable up to 500 miles. However, the best results are obtained from 20 to 250 miles. Birds must be disciplined and as carefully trained as any Soldier of the line. Birds returning to their loft from short flights, unless properly handled, are very apt to loiter on the outside, when it is absolutely necessary, to successfully work them, that they trap immediately.”

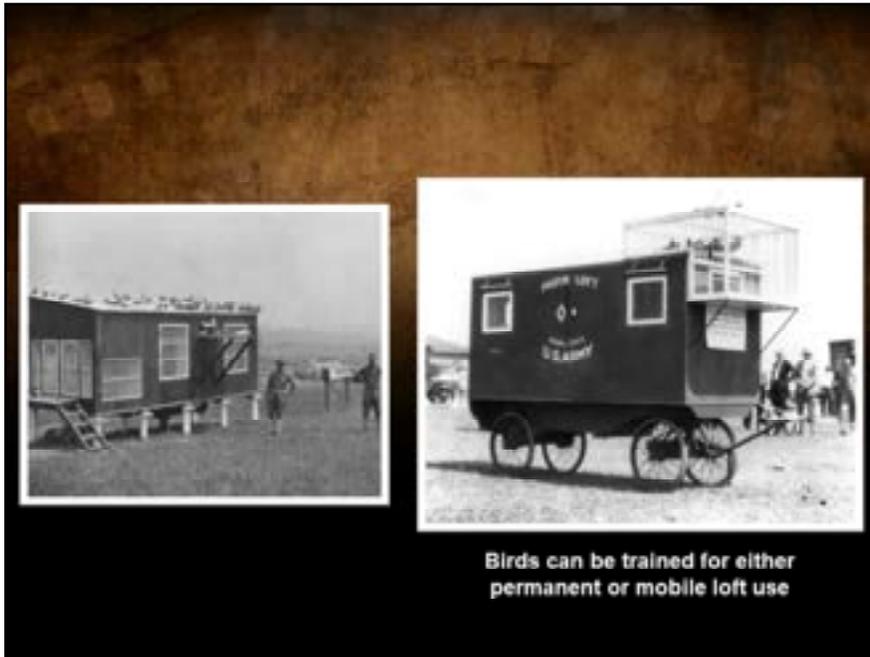


By 1925, the service had a breeding base of 75 pairs and lofts for a variety of uses. It boasted 30 long-distance flyers and was breeding 300 birds per season to fill requisitions from 18 lofts scattered throughout the U.S. and its possessions. Pigeon training, a 12-hour course, had also been incorporated into ROTC training and in Signal School maneuvers. Birds were also trained in flights from Wilmington, DE, to the Fort (89.74 miles away).

Within the Army, birds were bred for reliability, speed, and endurance. Within 10 days after mating, the birds will begin to build a nest, and two eggs will be laid. The hen covers the eggs at night, and the male relieves the hen during the day.



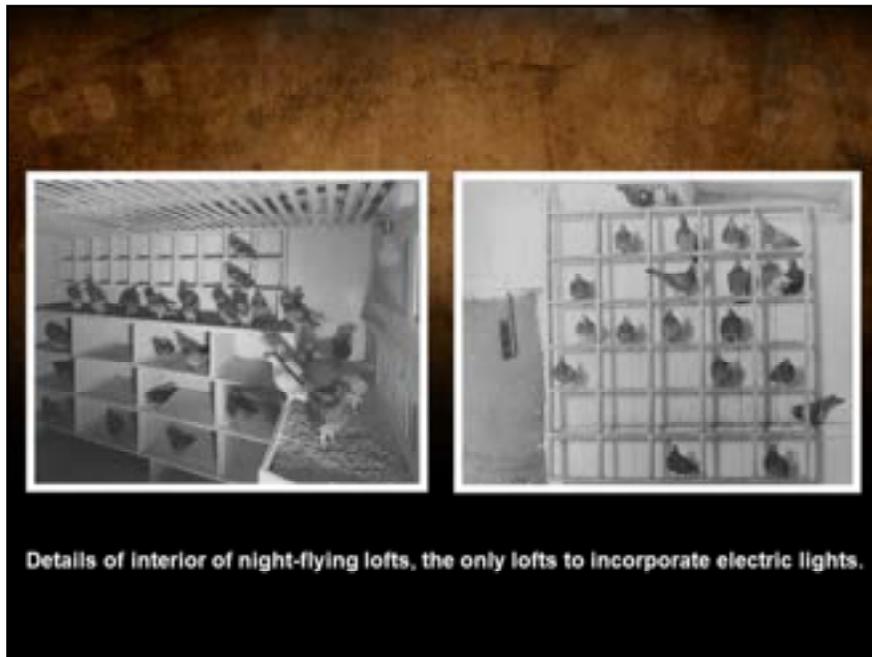
Within 17 days after the second egg, the youngsters, called "squeakers," are hatched, and both parents feed the young with a milk secreted in their crops, which is later supplemented with grain. The pigeons are banded at 1 week, and training begins around 1 month of age. They have exercise hops only until they are 2 months old, and then go on flights up to 20 miles. The distance is gradually increased up to 60 miles when they are ready for diplomas and 300- and 600-mile missions. Breeding may begin at 6 months. Parent birds are fed at 1-2 hours interval; each time the parent birds are fed, a can is rattled—thus begins the training.



When the birds are first removed for training, the young birds are placed on the landing board, and the attendant rattles the can and throws a few grains of feed on the floor. Soon they associate “trapping,” returning to the loft, with being fed.



To maintain a fit pigeon service, yearly entries were made in pigeon association races and shows. Monmouth birds always performed well in competition, winning prizes in races and exhibitions. In the Army Championship in Washington in April 1926, the pigeon "General Pershing" won the championship by covering the distance to Fort Monmouth in 5 hours and 20 minutes. During that year, Monmouth birds took three silver cups, eight special ribbons, 24 first prizes, 15 seconds, 10 thirds, 7 fourths, and 8 fifth prizes.



One specialized area of training was night flight, which had proven difficult. In 1928, the Pigeon Section conducted experiments using four birds taken at night five miles out and liberated; two of the birds homed and trapped in 10 minutes, and the others remained out until sunrise. In December 1928, intensive night training was started. Twenty birds were liberated each evening at increased distances; by February 1929, some of the birds flew three miles without lights, and by March were able to cover four miles in 11 minutes. Segregated at birth, birds bred from these “night flyers” were taken at 18 days old to a landing board at dusk to survey the surrounding countryside, and were in time taught to fly. With three weeks of this training, the birds would start homing at 200 yards and in full sight of the lofts. The distance was increased nightly until the adults were consistently able to orient themselves and fly home from five miles away.

The referenced history stated the “pigeon breeding and training had transcended the novelty stage” by 1930. New and revolutionary techniques were establishing the Monmouth birds as probably the outstanding stud in America.”



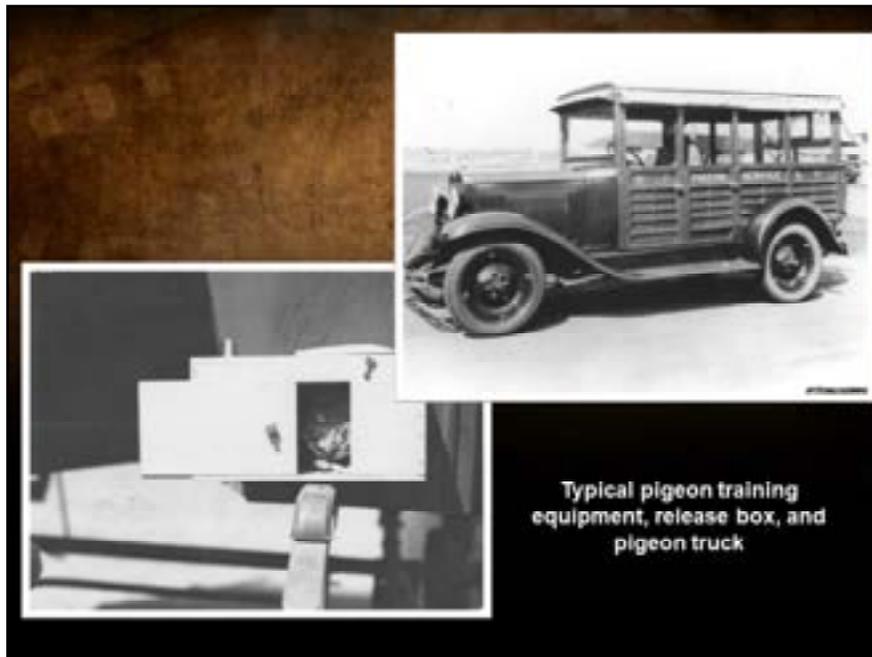
By the outset of WWII, the Fort Monmouth pigeoneers had perfected techniques for training two-way pigeons. The first test was conducted in May 1941. Twenty birds completed the approximately 28-mile roundtrip from Fort Monmouth to Freehold in half an hour.

In 1943, an experiment to evaluate pigeons flying over water took place. This experiment is described in the 1944 Signal Corps Technical Information Letter.

The experiment took place at Fort Meade, in Maryland, and on the Chesapeake Bay, with the birds finally being released in an area where the bay was 14 miles wide. The generally accepted fact was that homing pigeons were adverse to crossing large bodies of water; this exercise was also an effort to acquaint the birds with flying over water.

The Company Commander, Captain Joseph F. Spears, supervised the exercise; he was assisted by Lieutenant Michael J. Mrakava, pigeon officer. The U.S. Naval Academy also assisted by furnishing boats, a former Coast Guard Cutter for use in rough weather, and two converted pleasure yachts for use in milder weather. Weather encountered during

the experiments included high winds, fog, and rain. All testing was in daylight.



The birds were transported to Annapolis, MD, by truck, where they were transferred to a boat. A pigeon officer and four enlisted Pigeoneers accompanied the birds. The first “liberation” was made one mile offshore with subsequent liberations from one to two miles. This took place until the end of January, when a 14-mile separation was reached.

The report indicates that when first tossed over water, the pigeons showed a marked nervousness that was not seen when liberated over land. By the time liberations were being made from the greater distances from the opposite side of the bay, the nervousness had almost disappeared, and the birds homed promptly.

In the final parts of this exercise, over an aerial distance of 30 miles, 14 miles of which was over water, the birds averaged 50 to 55 miles per hour to their home lofts at Fort Meade.

The results of the experiments yielded valuable information to use in training Army pigeons for flying over water.



In 1944, an experiment using pigeons and “war dogs” as a means of military communication took place. This experiment is described in the January 1944 Signal Corps Technical Information Letter.

The experiment involving the 828<sup>th</sup> Signal Pigeon Replacement Company took place at Cat Island (Mississippi) at the “War Dog Training Center,” which resembled the South Pacific. When the 828<sup>th</sup> arrived, dogs were being trained for scouting to detect the adversary by smell, casualty aid to find wounded and bring help, and for messenger service. Messenger dogs carried communications in a leather collar pouch in areas where man could not travel easily.

Mobile lofts were established, and the birds were conditioned to work in the heat of the day. In seven days, a line of pigeon communication was established. Though there were difficulties settling the birds due to glaring sand and water surrounding the center confusing the birds, shortly the birds provided communication on the island.

The pigeons were incorporated into the dog training program in seven days and were

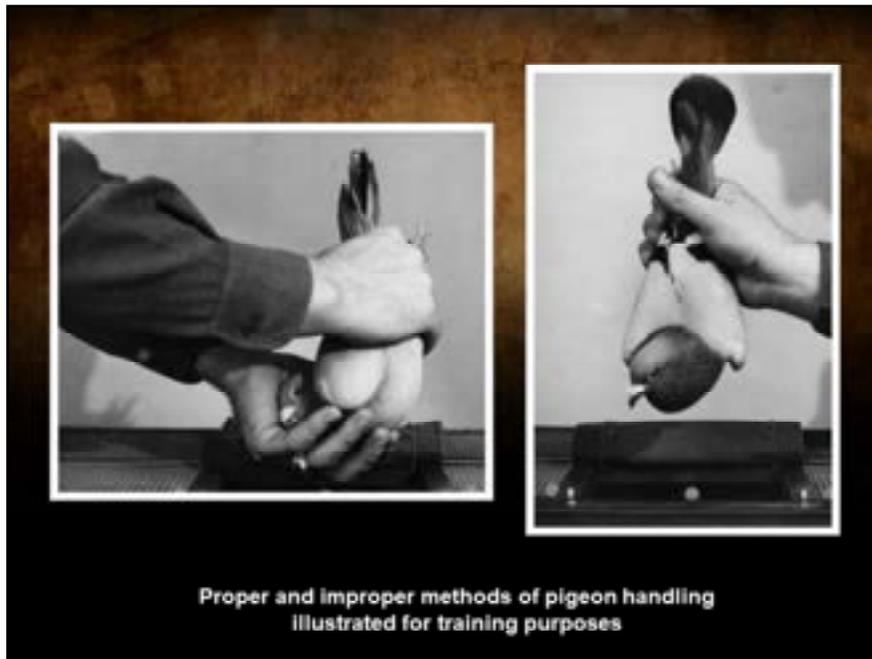
soon training under simulated battlefield conditions. Experiments included dogs carrying a pigeon to an isolated outpost inaccessible by vehicle or man and the simultaneous release of a dog and pigeon on a 1-1/4 mile course; the dog finished in 8 minutes, the pigeon in 1-1/4 minutes.

Dogs carried pigeons in a harness-mounted wicker carrier that was cylindrical at the mouth and roughly contoured to the pigeon's body; the pigeon was unable to balance itself and rough handling as the dog ran damaged the pigeon's plumage. Redesign was called for. An emergency pigeon carrier, fashioned from cylindrical cardboard canisters from shell casings from the artillery, proved to be an excellent carrier.

The experiment was deemed a success, and the experiences were incorporated into a training film. The conclusions: dogs carrying pigeons to forward positions was both practical and feasible; dogs and pigeons combined providing communication short distances in the "jungle" was tactically sound; the wicker carrier was impractical, and a new design was prepared by the "War Dog Pigeon Detachment Commander."



In addition to “jungle” training, the use of pigeons in arctic conditions was also experimented with. The only information our archive has on that subject is a series of photographs.



Part of training involved training the handlers, “Pigoneers,” as well as the pigeons. In addition to training materials,



a series of “do and don’t” photographs were produced to help new recruits.



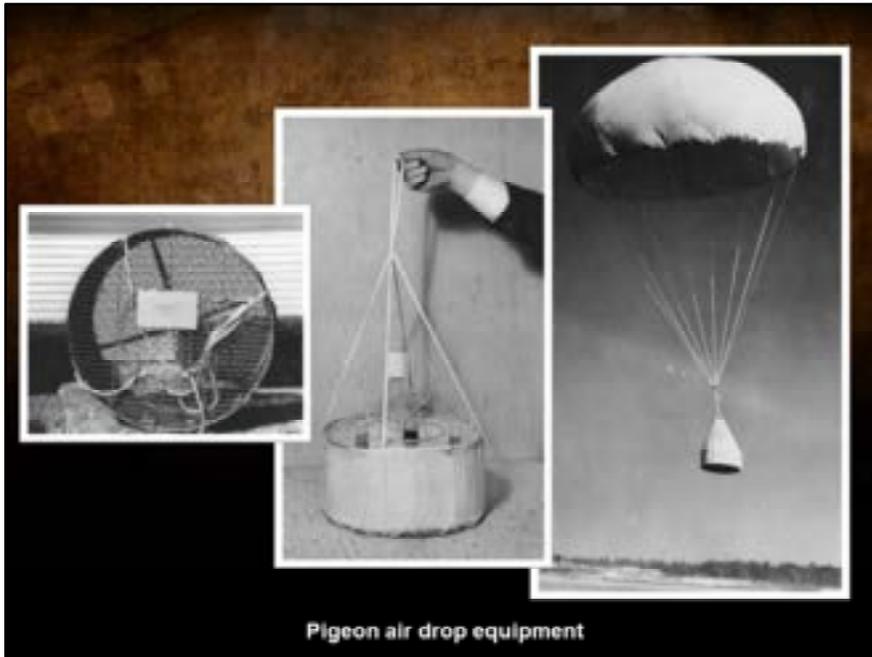
In addition to new training techniques to expand the capabilities of pigeons, the Pioneers of Fort Monmouth and the Signal Corps experimented with equipment, trying to improve methods of getting pigeons to the front.



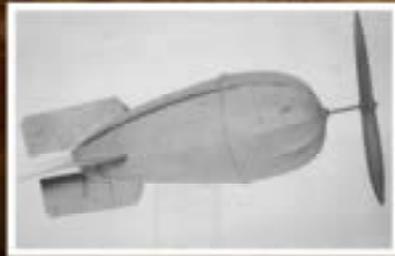
For such a basic “technology,” it’s amazing how much effort and time went into perfecting lofts, mobile lofts, carrying baskets and cages, protective gear, and “pigeon parachutes.”



Pigeon vests used for paratroopers to carry pigeons into battle



Pigeon air drop equipment



Blimp or zeppelin type one-bird container designed for use in releasing pigeons from high-speed planes. The propeller operates on a threaded swivel that opens the container to free the bird after being cleared from the wash of the plane.

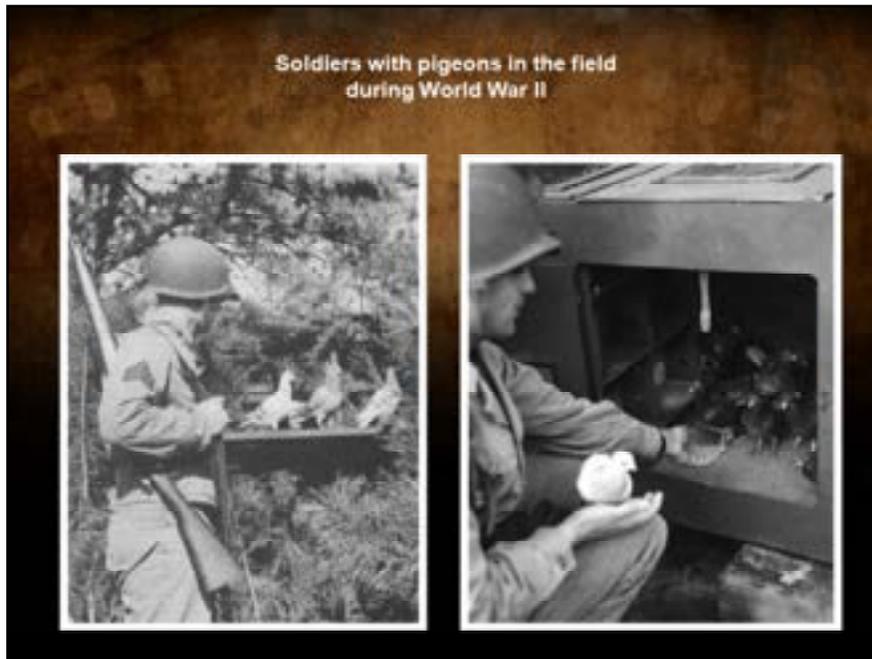




Fort Monmouth Pigeon  
Breeding and Training Center

Mr. Otto Meyer with pigeon

These efforts paid off during WWII. The Pigeon Center at Fort Monmouth had an emergency breeding capacity of 1,000 birds a month. This represented about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the Army's anticipated requirement. American pigeon fanciers supplied approximately 40,000 racing pigeons voluntarily to the Signal Corps without compensation. These made up the bulk of the 54,000 birds that the Signal Corps furnished to the armed services during WWII. The Signal Corps used its authority under the Affiliated Plan of 1940 to recruit civilian specialists into the Army to fulfil specialized requirements such as pigeon experts. Otto Meyer was one such person, who ended up in charge of the Fort's program.



During WWII, the birds were used on at least 20 different occasions during fighting in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations when they were the only means of communications. They proved valuable in sending information gathered in action behind enemy lines.

While the use of pigeons in the invasion of France was limited to English birds only, 134 U.S. pigeons were employed during the Roer River crossing; 25 messages and 67 map overlays were transmitted via pigeon.



In the Southwest Pacific area, pigeon communication proved effective with small ships as well as in jungle and mountainous terrain. In Burma, a loft was established behind enemy lines, and pigeons were put to use by agents as well as forward troops.

There were many hero pigeons that emerged from WWII. Some of the most famous include:



**G.I. Joe**, credited with saving the lives of 1,000 allied troops at Covi Vecchia, Italy. The pigeon flew 20 miles in as many minutes carrying an order to cancel the scheduled bombing of the city. The action saved a British brigade, which had entered the city ahead of schedule. For this action, G.I. Joe was awarded the Dickin Medal by the Lord Mayor of London in 1946. The Dickin Medal was awarded to animals and was awarded to dogs, horses, 1 cat, as well as pigeons. *Presented to Detroit Zoo.*



**C.O.D.** – Flew 20 combat missions in the Mediterranean theater. *Presented to Detroit Zoo.*

**Blackie Halligan** – During the height of the campaign on Guadalcanal, Blackie returned from a mission badly wounded by Japanese flak but carrying a message from a 164<sup>th</sup> Infantry Patrol that resulted in the death of 300 enemy troops. He had a long list of other successful mission in the Southwest Pacific and was cited by General Alexander Patch, American division commander, and later decorated with the Purple Heart. Died 1949.



**Yank** was renowned not only for carrying a message on the fall of Gafsa in Tunisia but also for carrying an urgent message for General Patton 90 miles in 100 minutes. *Presented to Baltimore Zoo.*

**Apex.** Flew more than 20 missions in the India-Burma Theater. *Presented to Baltimore Zoo.*



**Caeser**, who was credited with carrying 44 combat messages in North Africa during WWII. He delivered an important message 300 miles, crossing the Mediterranean to his loft in Tunisia. He was given his name because he was the first pigeon in Italy in WWII. *Presented to the Oak Park Zoo, Montgomery, AL.*

**Flipper**, was on record as having carried more than 20 combat messages in the European Theater. Several of her missions followed parachute landings with troops. She defied shellfire, high winds, even snow to get urgent messages through to headquarters from remote positions in the field. *Presented to Oak Park Zoo, Montgomery, AL.*



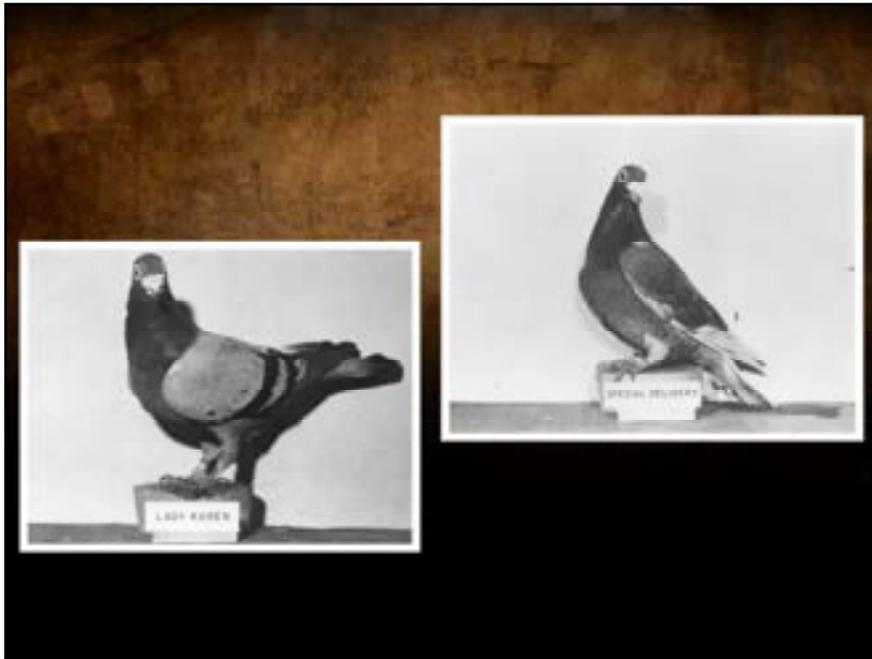
**Anzio Boy** was credited with completing 38 wartime missions in Italy during WWII. His heroic flights contributed materially in the accomplishments of the 209<sup>th</sup> Signal Pigeon Company in Italy. Many of the flights of Anzio Boy were with messages during the initial stages of the assault on the Anzio Beach. *Given to National Zoo, 17 April 1957.*

**Global Girl** had an impressive war record that included the completion of 23 wartime missions. She derived her name from the far-flung areas over which she flew to deliver messages, many from intelligence agents operating behind enemy lines. Her flights in the Mediterranean Theater, marked by speed despite the hazardous terrain, soon won her recognition from both American and Allied military leaders. *Given to National Zoo, 17 April 1957.*



**Jungle Joe** – In 1944, Jungle Joe was parachuted with agents behind Japanese lines in Burma and was the only means of communications with Army headquarters. He flew an urgent message 225 miles over highest mountains of Burma when only 4 months of age. Died March 1954.

**Scoop** – (Presented to Riverside Zoo, Scottsbluff, Nebraska, March 1957). He is credited with the successful completion of over 20 combat missions for the American Troops in Algiers. Under hazardous conditions, he displayed courage and unusual speed in delivering many of the 72 messages sent by Army pigeons during 16 days of battle on the Materu-Bizerte front. Housed at Churchill Loft after the war.



**Lady Karen** flew 31 combat messages in Italy. Pigeons were widely used in the Mediterranean Theater and on at least 20 different occasions were the only means of communications available to ground forces. Lady Karen frequently flew high over sectors where whole towns were being pulverized by shellfire. She also miraculously escaped heavy anti-aircraft fires while accomplishing her mission of getting the message through. It was her unusual grace and poise that won her the title “Lady.”  
*Presented to Dayton Museum of Natural History.*

**Special Delivery** – Flew more than 20 missions. *Presented to Dayton Museum of Natural History.*



**Pro Patria** – 35 combat flights in European Theater. *Cleveland Zoological Gardens.*

**Crossed Flags** – 20 flights in European Theater. *Cleveland Zoological Gardens.*



**Geronimo** – 30 missions in European Theater. *Woodland Park Zoological Garden in Seattle.*

**Eureka** – 20 missions in European Theater. *Woodland Park Zoological Garden in Seattle.*

More than two dozen hero and heroine pigeons of WWII returned to the famed “Churchill Lofts” at Fort Monmouth at the conclusion of the war.



Pigeons visit Rockefeller Center

Messages sent via pigeon during Armed Forces Week, 1953

After the war, the pigeons were used for publicity by the Army, including a kick-off for the March of Dimes fundraiser at Rockefeller Center in 1947 to raise funds for the fight against polio. During Armed Forces Week held in 1953, participants were invited to “send a message” by pigeon.



"The bird on top looks like he's reading the map. That's my assistant." Korea, 1952

SGT Lucas examines pigeons returned from Korea, 1954

Fort Monmouth pigeons also served during the Korean War where they proved particularly useful to covert operatives in enemy-controlled territory. Hundreds of pigeons were attached to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army and were sent with agents from 75 to 200 miles behind enemy lines. No messages were ever lost.



During the Cold War era, a German pigeon, Leaping Lena, made a fantastic flight through the Iron Curtain from Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, in 1954. Attached to her leg was an anti-communist message addressed to Radio Free Europe Headquarters in Munich. The message read:

We plead with you not to slow down in the fight against communism because communism must be destroyed. We beg for speedy liberation from the power of the Kremlin and the establishment of a United States of Europe. We listen to your broadcasts. They present a completely true picture of life behind the Iron Curtain. We would like you to tell us how we can combat bolshevism and the tyrannical dictatorship existing here. We are taking every opportunity to work against the regime and do everything in our power to sabotage it. Signed, Unbowed Pilsen

Leaping Lena was brought to the United States where she was greeted by four hero pigeons from Fort Monmouth. Pigeons released in her honor carried a copy of message to President Dwight Eisenhower and Henry Ford II, President of the Crusade for Freedom, which financed Radio Free Europe.



Despite significant fame and success, it was determined that the widespread use of radio in conjunction with the airplane to contact and supply isolated parties had rendered the use of pigeon communication nearly obsolete. Chief Signal Officer MG James D. O'Connell ordered the disbanding of the Pigeon Service at the end of 1956, and the service was finally discontinued in 1957 after 40 years.

When news of the end of the pigeon program reached the public, protests filtered in from all over the country and made their way to the Pentagon. Many people cited the unreliability of radios in combat and the pigeons' exemplary combat records. Despite such protests, the deactivation went forward. The 15 remaining living hero pigeons were donated to zoos across the country. Two local zoos received pairs of birds, including the Baltimore Zoo, which received Yank and Apex, and the National Zoo in D.C. which received Anzio Boy and Global Girl.

The remaining birds, about 1,000, were sold to the public on a first-come, first-served basis for \$5 a pair. The Public Information Office at Fort Monmouth received 1,500 requests for information on the pigeon sale, and people came from all over the country, and from as far away as Canada and Mexico, and stood in line for over 6 hours to purchase the birds.



As a final tribute to the program and its heroic pigeons, a monument in the form of a birdbath was placed on Fort Monmouth in 1960, the Signal Corp's centennial year. It was a fitting tribute to the animals who had displayed courage, loyalty, and endurance over 40 years of service to the Army.

# QUESTIONS?



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