

Homing Pigeons Play Important Role With War Communications

MIAMI, Fla.—Dusty, the homing pigeon at the Army Air Transport Command's 36th St. base here, is no longer a "gourmet's specialty"—squab on toast—but rather a feathered soldier in the United States Army.

Dusty is an army messenger who hails out at 35,000 feet to fly through flak and natural phenomena over hundred miles of ocean and land to bring to his home base the message upon which may depend the lives of his crewmates.

The pigeon is represented in all branches of the armed services. Combat units carry their pigeons along—they are parachuted down to men in isolated areas—to substitute for warlike-talkie radios when dense jungles make the short range radio ineffective.

The pigeons chief role is to substitute for other forms of communication.

When the Army Air Forces decided to adapt the bird for use in aircraft, they ran into some difficulty. Releasing the pigeons from ground cages, to pick their own altitude for flying, was one thing; tossing them out into the slipstream of a four-motored bomber roaring along at 300 miles an hour at altitudes up to 35,000 feet, where sub-zero temperatures will freeze a man's hands or face and where an oxygen mask must be worn was something else. The blast from the propellers threatened to shear their wings off.

The Army solved the problem by placing the bird in a paper bag, slit down one side, before dropping him out. The second it takes him to fight free is enough to sweep him clear of plane and propeller wash.

Flight surgeons were puzzled over the pigeon's complete immunity to freezing temperatures and lack of oxygen. During flight the pigeon is oblivious to altitude while the crew men work in oxygen masks. The hysteria was for a time second only to the question, how does a pigeon pick a straight course home from a distance of several hundred miles?

The answer, however, was soon found by flight surgeons. They discovered that the pigeon's basal metabolic rate was so low that even the oxygen present at 35,000 or 40,000 feet is sufficient to keep the bird alive. His oxygen intake is low and he is able to withstand the cold because of a slightly higher body heat, the medicos explained. In addition his body insulation can be doubled by fluffing out his feathers to catch warm particles of air.

The Air Transport Command's 36th St. base began using pigeons five months ago. It now has 1,800 birds with other thousands scattered at stations throughout the Caribbean and South American bases.

Tactical ships leaving the Miami base and combat planes ferried to overseas theatres carry a crate of four pigeons—two to fly home to the Miami base and two who will fly to the next base on the route.

If the plane lands at sea, all birds are set free with messages, which gives the location, time, identity of ship and any other information which might be necessary.

The pigeons are put through a regular "basic training" at ATC's bases at 36th St. Homestead and Morrison Field, Fla., under the direction of Lt. John Regan, a former Boston College football star.

He said "as soon as they are able to fly, we start them out just like we would a bunch of G. I.'s—short trips at the beginning and longer trips toward the end. They start at six weeks, and at 12 weeks we've had them flying 300 miles over water—with nothing to rest on during the trip."

"Pigeons will go AWOL just like G.I.'s," he explained. "We bring them in here from southern states to their port of embarkation and

with their movable homes, they're relocated overseas. But just let them get loose here, and they're gone. We've had them go AWOL back to North Carolina, Mississippi and other places."

Pigeons sometimes break loose from their cote. One recently flew from St. Lucia Island in the lower Caribbean and turned up five days later at Morrison Field—a flight of 1,750 miles.

An experienced pigeon can fly from 12 to 15 hours steadily but he won't fly during a heavy rain due to the weight of the water on his wings.

A pigeon will not fly after dark even though he may be over the ocean. He will settle down into the water and drown.

Flying the Caribbean and Central and South American jungles, a pigeon will encounter sudden thunderstorms and large birds of prey. He will fly over, under, or around a storm or even fly to the nearest island to sit it out.

A pigeon can carry up to one-third of its own weight packed on

LAFF-A-DAY



"This fish I caught hardly seems worth a picture!"

Civic League Has Initial Meeting Of Club Year

The Waynesville Civic League held the first meeting of the current club year on Wednesday evening at the home of the president, Mrs. Rufus L. Allen. Officers gave their reports for the summer activities.

Mrs. R. R. Campbell, league representative on the Community Council, gave an account of the progress of the program under the direction of Mr. Tenney.

Mrs. Homer West was appointed chairman of the program committee to decide on the year's study. She was given the privilege of naming her own committee members.

The annual collection of articles of clothing for the inmates of the county home was made during the evening.

The members went on record as pledging their support to the movement to enforce the law regarding the sale of intoxicants to minors. Announcement was made of the containers placed in the cemetery for holding trash, the gift of the president.

Announcement was made of the placing of "She Heard with her Heart," by Mary Avery Johnston, in the county library by the league.

The next meeting of the group was announced for November 15th with Mrs. R. R. Campbell as hostess.

A candidate for the police force was being verbally examined:

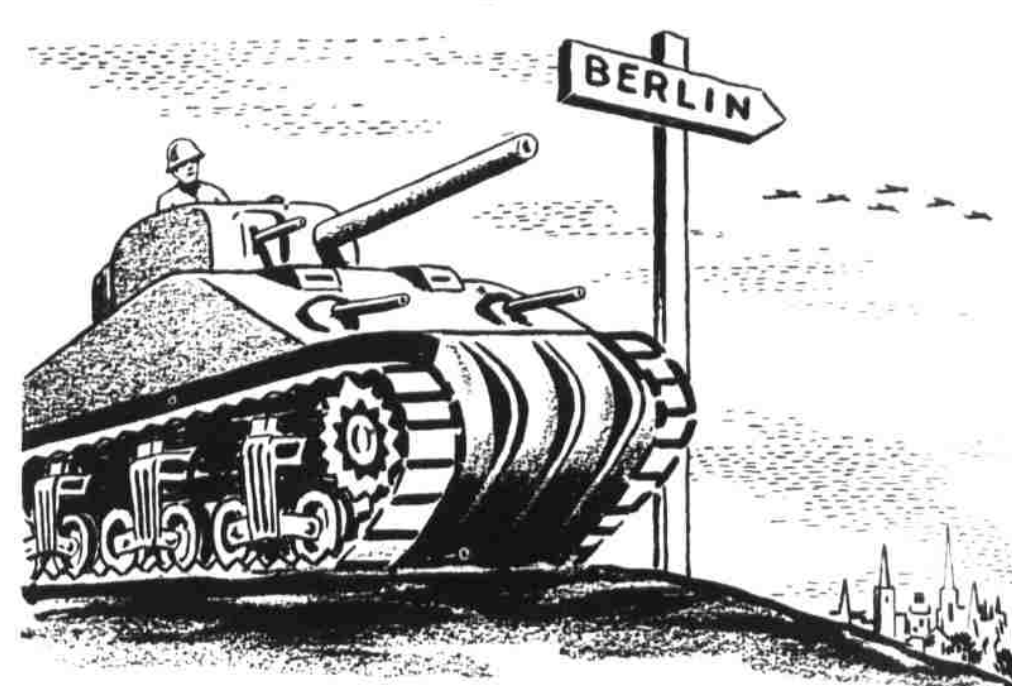
Examiner—If you were alone in a police car and were pursued by a desperate gang of criminals in another car doing 60 miles an hour along a lonely road, what would you do?

Candidate (looking puzzled for a moment)—Eighty!

A husband away from home got this message: "Jack, come home, children and myself are starving. If you can't come, mail the ration books."

his back. Photographic negatives are sometimes dispatched in a cylinder tied to a pigeon's back.

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