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FORT MONMOUTH, N. J. — Pigeons trained by the Army Signal Corps, grounded by rapid advances in an electronic age, were offered for sale and the pigeon training activity here at Fort Monmouth was closed in March, 1957.

Progress in electronic communications has virtually ended any peacetime need of the Army for over 1,000 pigeons, the last in the Army which were at this Post. These birds were sold on March 23, 1957, to pigeon fanciers from the midwest, south, New England, and the Middle Atlantic States at a retail public sale.

Use of these war birds, who have carved out their own small chapter in U.S. Army history, was started by the Army in 1878 in the Dakota territory. Since that time they have played a colorful role in carrying messages, map overlays and photographic film when normal wire and radio communications were not available during combat, or when it was impractical to send human couriers. Pigeons were used as recently as the fighting in Korea.

The Army Signal Corps has asked the Pigeon Fanciers' Association to be ready for any future emergency which may again require use of these birds.

Pigeon fanciers throughout the country were given advance notice of the sale of the 1,000-plus pigeons at Fort Monmouth. The birds were sold in lots of five pairs, with a minimum purchase of one lot, and a maximum purchase of two lots.

Special provisions were made for 15 pigeons at the Post whose actions saved American lives during combat. The Army placed these World War II hero pigeons in public zoos or institutions throughout the country.

(M O R E)

High on the list of pigeon heroes whom the Signal Corps gave special placement is "GI Joe", credited with saving the lives of hundreds of troops at Colvi Vecchia, Italy, during World War II. This 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. "GI Joe" was awarded the Dicken Medal by the Lord Mayor of London in 1946.

Other famous pigeons include:

"Yank", renowned not only for carrying a message on the fall of Gafsa in Tunisia but also for carrying an urgent message for the late General George Patton 90 miles at 100 minutes.

"Caesar", ~~300 messages~~ 44 combat messages in North Africa during World War II. He delivered an important message 300 miles, crossing the Mediterranean to our own loft in Tunisia.

The Army first experimented with pigeons for military use as early as 1878 when it bought some birds and sent them to the 5th Infantry Regiment, then on duty in the Dakota territory. Large numbers of Hawks in the area preyed on the birds, however, and use of them was dropped for a time. Ten years later the Army established a loft at Key West, Florida, and resumed experiments in this field.

Some pigeons were sent with General Pershing's troops on the Punitive Expedition to Mexico. By the time the United States had entered World War I, pigeons had proved their worth and the Army had acquired 20,000 of them. Only about 5,000 birds were in France, however.

World War I saw the emergence of "Cher Ami" as one of the early pigeon heroes when he saved survivors of the "Lost Battalion" on October 4, 1918.

(M O R E)

On the third day of isolation, surrounded by the enemy and raked by fire from their own Army, men of the "Lost Battalion" released their seventh and last pigeon, "Cher Ami", with a message pleading for lifting of the fire and a statement of their location. Thirty minutes after takeoff the pigeon landed at Rampont, 25 miles away. One leg had been shattered by a bullet and one wing was injured. The message was there, however. The barrage was stopped and a detachment from the 77th Infantry Division was soon on its way to rescue the surrounded men.

"Cher Ami" received the Croix de Guerre from the French and General Pershing saw the bird off for home. When the pigeon died, the body was mounted and placed in the National Museum, Washington, D. C.

During World War II, approximately 40,000 racing pigeons were voluntarily supplied to the Army Signal Corps without compensation by civilian racing fanciers. 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 United States birds were employed during the Roer River crossing. Twenty-five messages and 67 map overlays were carried by them.

In the Southwest Pacific Area, pigeon communications 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.

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