

## “Homing Pigeons Get a Career”

The Army’s Signal Corps used pigeons for communications from WWI, and into the Korean War; to this end, the Pigeon Service was active at Fort Monmouth until its discontinuance in 1957. The Pigeon program was coming about in the World War I era. Instituting a pigeon program required insuring there were birds available and ensuring the safety of the birds in training. These needs were illustrated in two era publications, the *American Poultry Advocate* (Syracuse, NY, July 1918) and *The National Humane Review* (Albany NY, April 1918).

Examples of efforts to ensure the safety of these working birds are included in both publications. *The National Humane Review* article was a public information announcement titled “Do Not Shoot at Pigeons.” It describes complaints by the Signal Corps that “carrier pigeons of the racing homer type” being trained all over the country were being shot by people on hunting expeditions, despite state law prohibiting shooting pigeons, interfering seriously with pigeon training being undertaken by the Army.

This article goes on to say “Homing pigeons constitute one of the most effective means of communication in the Army, and are especially valuable as a sure method of replacing other means of communication.” Hunters are urged to not shoot pigeons and to discourage other hunters from shooting pigeons. It states, anyone in possession of pigeons labeled “U.S.A.-18” should contact the Signal Corps.

The *American Poultry Advocate* warned that the Department of Agriculture urged hunters not shoot pigeons because they might be message carrying birds being trained by the Army “to carry messages across battlefields.”

*American Poultry Advocate* also included an article titled “Flying Homers Are War Message Carriers.” It stated the Army was in great demand of “homing or racing pigeons, known as flying homers.” The birds were to be used as “carriers of messages.” Breeders were encouraged to “give more attention to this breed.” As noted, the Signal Corps purchased mature homers with satisfactory pedigree for breeders, and then trained the young offspring as messengers. Why? The article stated that the homing instinct in older birds was already established, and that only the young birds could be trained for military communication. “They are one of the surest means of conveying word across the battlefields.”