

## Pigeons over Water

Pigeons have been vital to communications during war and in peacetime. The Signal Corps used pigeons from WWI, and into the Korean War. The Pigeon Service active at Fort Monmouth until its discontinuance in 1957. In 1943, an experiment to evaluate pigeons flying over water took place. This experiment is described in the 1944 Signal Corps Technical Information Letter (SCTIL).

The experiment took place at Fort Meade, in Maryland, 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 in the SCTIL 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.