

## Pigeons Message Saves Fliers, 1944

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. In 1944, an article subtitled "Bird Flies for Aid as Plane Crashes in Atlantic Hop" appeared in the Signal Corps Message.

The article states that MAJ J.F. Spears, the CO for the 828<sup>th</sup> Signal Pigeon Replacement, a part of the Eastern Signal Corps training facility (located at Fort Monmouth's "Camp Wood" area), had seen the importance of Signal Corps trained pigeons especially in copies of news articles that come across his desk.

As reported by the Signal Corps Message, Royal Canadian Air Force Flying Officer F.B. Clark and Flying Officer J.G. Doherty owe their lives to the heroism of Captain Gene Hamilton, and to the stamina and unerring flight of a carrier pigeon they released from their disabled bomber. The SCM states that this "clearly emphasizes the value of the pigeon in 'getting the message through'" when other means of communication have failed.

The Canadian pilots were delivering a twin-engine medium bomber to the Mediterranean theater, and at the time were flying in the South Atlantic. Ninety miles north of an ocean ferry base in Brazil, one engine failed completely and the other was running only irregularly. The Captain passed a note to his companion ordering a jump.

An SOS call was sent out, and Doherty released a carrier pigeon with a message about the planes location. After parachuting clear at 1,000 feet the other engine failed and the plane dropped rapidly. However, the Captain had stayed put to ensure the plane cleared the evacuee, he then evacuated but was too late for his parachute to open, and as well he was struck by the tail of the spinning plane.

The SOS was received and the Pigeon arrived shortly afterwards with the message on rice paper disclosing the planes location. American and RAF aircraft began a day and night search and located the wreck and its two survivors.

Who was this hero pigeon? The article does not name the bird. However, the importance of the Pigeon Service and the heroism on the part of those gallant birds that served is reinforced by stories such as this.