Carrier Pigeons an Aid to Preparedness

Europe’s War Has Shown That Homing Birds Often Beat Aeroplanes and the Wireless in Carrying Military Dispatches

By Cyril F. Welch.

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Europe’s War Has Shown That Homing Birds Often Beat Aeroplanes and the Wireless in Carrying Military Dispatches

Homing pigeons have joined the preparedness movement because you do not exactly know how many birds can be of value. Perhaps you have never heard of them, or of the plan to go to Flushing, or to the gale training camp at Flushing, Long Island, Long Island, Long Island, Long Island, Long Island. The American Homing Pigeon Association, which is preparing to take part in the event. This is the time to tell how you can also prepare at home, and the New York Times has something to say about what the United States Intelligence Service is doing in this connection.

The world war, which rages upon every continent, has naturally and most assuredly developed the neglected wiremen. Many can be cut, wireless destructed; but it is in Europe that the greatest amount of wire is in use. The war has increased the use of wire, and so has the efficiency of the wire. It is a case of putting the cart before the horse. The wire has been improved, but the method of using it has not been improved. It is a case of putting the horse before the cart.

Unfortunately, most Americans think of carrier pigeons in the past tense; but that in Europe the present tense is simply the future tense. As more and more pigeons are placed in the hands of the military authorities, the need for them increases. In the military, the familiar road is seen and then to go straight for it. That fits the performance quite like the instant class and places it on the border line of intelligence. When wireless fails these are allies worth having.

At this moment, according to letters received from a French Captain in the Expeditionary Force, there are approximately 10,000 carrier pigeons employed by the allied armies in France alone, of which 1,500 are reserved for use with the French army. Special soldiers are detailed to look after them and a new branch for both the army and navy, the carrier pigeons service, has been created. Carrier pigeons are employed to a greater or lesser extent by every nation engaged in the struggle, except possibly the Japanese, and from what little can be learned through the wireless messages sent between the two points. Then the training camp at Flushing can be kept in touch with the United States military posts at Fort Ethan Allen, in Burlington, without the use of telephones, telegraph, or wireless, just as might be the case under actual war conditions. It is a form of preparedness.

Burlington is forty miles from the Canadian border, and the Champlain Valley has frequent wireless traffic over the invasion route to the United States. New York, and in fact, according to a recent report, a message from the city that in one hour and forty minutes, Belgium, and in fact, according to a recent report, a message from the city that in one hour and forty minutes, Belgium, and in fact, according to a recent report, a message from the city that in one hour and forty minutes, Belgium, and in fact, according to a recent report, a message from the city that in one hour and forty minutes, Belgium, and in fact, according to a recent report, a message from the city that in one hour and forty minutes, Belgium, and in fact, according to a recent report, a message from the city that in one hour and forty minutes, Belgium.

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must then ride the same twenty miles or more to reach the village. Forty miles and the trail lost, as the informant does not know for certain which way the raiders have gone.

If he had merely sent a pigeon and, following at a safe distance, another and another, headquarters would have known within the half hour and could, in turn, have kept in touch with the flying column sent in pursuit, as each new message was received, by means of birds kept prisoners in camp, but bred in a van accompanying the troops. The birds when released would pick up the van with the latest information, furnishing a doubly efficient service; not only information as to the position of the raiders, but also orders sent to the pursuers.

It seems impossible, but it is really very simple. It is the only service available in a broken and desolated country, where wires do not exist, where hills render the telegraph impossible, and where wireless is cumbersome, useless by day, and uncertain. Added even to our aeroplane service it would immeasurably have increased its efficiency, for an aeroplane that can send a dozen messages without returning to report is more effective than one that needs to return, land, and present its operator at headquarters with each new important item of information.

Some aviators ran out of gasoline and were lost for days in the desert with no possibility of communicating either their information or their plight to headquarters except to walk there. Pigeons, carried in a pannier so light as to be almost negligible, would have saved hours, days, almost weeks, of uncertainty.

In time of peace the military and civil service of homing pigeons would be of great value. Scouting parties seeking topographical information usually consist of one officer and four or five men. These are sent back at intervals to report, and when the last man has returned the officer comes back, and the expedition is over. Because of this necessity for communication, the radius of action is limited and food and water for all five men must be carried. Individuals of such a party cannot carry a wireless set, yet one man with pigeons could divide the labor by five and permit of a correspondingly increased field of operation. And yet army publications on the carrier pigeon ceased twenty years ago with the brief statement that while much development had been promised along these lines, the introduction of wireless rendered the employment of pigeons useless.

And you, the reader, may take part in such a nation-wide scheme of preparedness by raising and training your own homing pigeons and holding them ready for the service of the military authorities in time of war or of your community in time of peace. On every motor trip you can take a few pigeons and fly them back home from various distances, or any friend in a distant town will delight in flying them to you and telegraphing the moment of release. Express companies on all railroads carry crates at low cost, and I have uniformly found their agents courteous and willing to release the birds on arrival and to ship back the empty crates.

It is not difficult. Prepare your loft, get a few pairs of good birds from any reputable fancier and breed your own youngsters, registering them with one of the racing pigeon unions and banding them when four days old with the Union band, an aluminium ring bearing the number and year. This is slipped over the foot, to insure subsequent identification. If you have not the time, purchase youngsters already banded, which are able to fly and have not yet learned their flight. It takes eighteen days for the eggs to hatch, and four weeks later your pigeons are ready for the road and that personal training which makes the racing pigeon what he is and carries on his fine traditions. Perhaps not this year or the next, but some time your pigeons are going to be useful to your country or community, and, meanwhile, by introducing an intelligent and living wireless into your own home, you are busy preparing.

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