

WAR DIARY

FEATHERED HEROES

Carrier Pigeons

Among the many offers made to the New Zealand Government as soon as war broke out, was one from the Homing Pigeon Clubs of the use of their birds for war service.

To many people this may seem an insignificant patriotic gesture, but it cannot be dismissed so easily. During the 1914-18 war carrier pigeons did marvellous service and saved many lives. The stuffed body of one carrier, known as "Crisp, V.C.," has a place of honour for all-time in the United Services Museum in Whitehall, London. Stories of the service rendered by the birds have been collected and their exploits are as amazing, almost, as those of the soldiers themselves.

Altogether over 100,000 birds passed through the hands of A. H. Osman, who was given the task of building up a special service for Great Britain. New Zealand's contribution was about 500 birds.

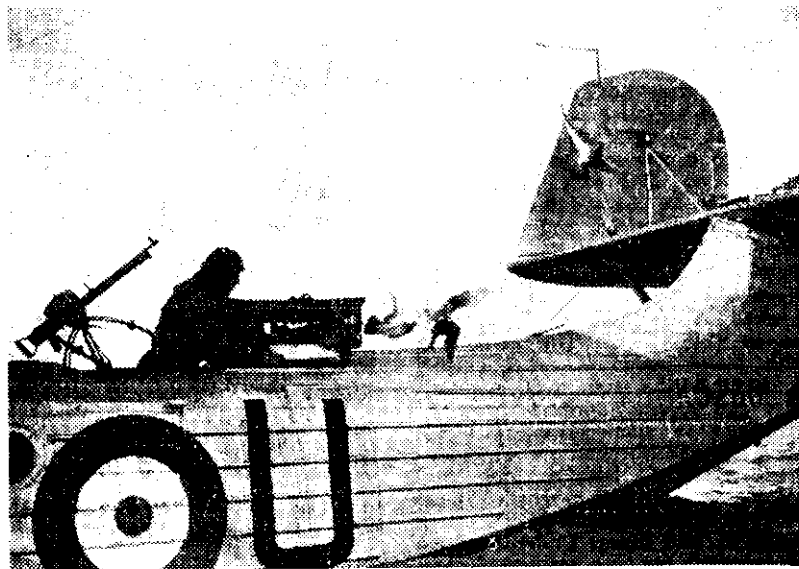
The carrier pigeon's speed in the air is astonishing, and this bird's ability to find its way home through any kind of weather is infallible. It is recorded that one bird, flying against the wind, covered 38 miles in 20 minutes—a speed equivalent to 114 miles an hour. Pigeons have been known to "home" from a distance of over 1,000 miles, flying continuously for 15 hours or more. Even when wounded, the birds have found their way to the lofts, many of them dying immediately afterwards. During the war they were dropped from high-flying planes, from tremendous heights, to fall like weights until they instinctively found their own flying level.

Despite the use of radio, the telegraph, and the telephone, the carrier pigeon still holds its own. But for these wonderful birds and their uncanny sense of direction many valuable messages would never have reached their destinations.

Instead of Radio

Britain had neglected the use of carrier pigeons up to the outbreak of last war, but early in the struggle the Admiralty organised a special service for use on mine-sweeping trawlers not equipped with wireless. Later, all sea-planes were equipped with the birds and many thrilling stories have been told of the rescues they effected.

For example, there is the story of how a pigeon saved the lives of six men in the North Sea. An airplane, with pilot and observer, crashed far from land. A passing seaplane, with a crew of four, landed on the water to rescue them, but during the change-over engine trouble developed and the machine failed to rise. Worse still, the wireless apparatus refused to function. The seaplane carried four pigeons. First one and then another of the birds was released, but by the



HOMING PIGEONS are once more being "called up" for war service with the Allied forces, particularly in air defence for which a national register of breeders has already been compiled. This photograph of an observer releasing pigeons was taken at the Calshot R.A.F. base, where pigeon training is being carried out.

third day no help had arrived. At the end of the third day the last bird was released, carrying its desperate S O S message. A biting wind had chilled the men and driven the seaplane far out to sea; the men were weak from lack of food and water. For hours they waited, fearing that all the pigeons had failed them. But they were wrong. Through the gathering gloom the six men saw a destroyer coming to their rescue. Struggling against wind and rain the last bird had reached the coast and dropped dead from exhaustion near a coastal station.

"Pilot's Luck"

Another famous war pigeon was known as "Pilot's Luck." On one occasion it flew 200 miles in five hours and delivered a message from a stranded seaplane which had been attacked by three enemy machines.

Of all the naval pigeons, a bird called Red Cock, now known as "Crisp, V.C.," is the most famous. When the trawler *Nelson*, commanded by Skipper Crisp, was attacked by a German submarine Red Cock was despatched for help, after Crisp himself had been mortally wounded. The bird safely delivered the message to a ship in the vicinity and the *Nelson's* crew was rescued. Crisp himself was awarded a posthumous V.C. and to this day Red Cock is known as "Crisp V.C."

Close to Red Cock's remains in the Whitehall Museum is another gallant little bird, an Army pigeon known as No. 2709 Early one afternoon, in October, 1917, it was released by soldiers fighting desperately on the Menin Road. An enemy bullet broke the bird's leg and drove the message container into its

body. After lying all night in the rain the pigeon managed to struggle to its loft at Headquarters, nine miles away, where it collapsed on the floor and died.

They Saved Verdun

One of the most gallant of all animal war stories concerns a dog, Satan, and two pigeons, and it is on record that they saved Verdun in the early days of the war. Their full story can be told only briefly here. A tiny French garrison in the town had held up the German attack, but all communications had been cut off and the men were desperate. All their dogs and pigeons had been killed. Satan belonged to one of the French garrison, a soldier named Duvalle, but he had been left behind with the main French forces, two or three miles away. One desperate day, when all seemed lost, Duvalle saw Satan speeding towards the garrison. The dog wore goggles and a

gas mask and carried two small baskets, each containing a pigeon. With one leg smashed by a bullet, the dog picked his way across country swept by bullets and shells, found the garrison and his dead master, who had been riddled by bullets when he leaped to the parapet in his excitement. One pigeon was killed soon after it was released, but the second got through with its message containing directions of the enemy's disposition and gun placements which were soon destroyed by the French artillery.

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How the War has Affected You:

Postage has been increased by 1d.

Correspondence with enemy countries and countries occupied by the enemy is forbidden.

Air mail services will continue so long as the Mediterranean Sea is not menaced, but the postage rate is 1/6 a 1/2oz.

Cable communication with enemy countries is forbidden, and all cables must be in either English or French. Special codes may be allowed later.

All amateur radio transmitting stations have been dismantled by order.

Petrol is rationed, 10 gallons to each private car for October.

Special permits must be obtained for those wishing to travel overseas.

Farmers are asked to increase primary production.

Gardeners are asked to grow more vegetables.

Income tax has been increased by 15 per cent.

All trade with the enemy is forbidden.

Photographers can no longer take pictures of naval, military or air dispositions without special permission.

The publication of movements of all overseas vessels is forbidden.

You are not permitted to hoard food.

Telegrams have been increased from a minimum of 6d to a minimum of 8d.

All aliens are required to register, and if they move they must report to the police within seven days.

TIMETABLE FOR TRENTHAM

Full preparation is being made by the Railway Department, both train and bus services, to meet the requirements of soldiers going on leave from the various camps, and for visitors who wish to see friends there. These, of course, will not operate until the camps are running to their full schedules and the work of organisation is complete in every detail. In all probability extra trains and buses will be put on as required, but the present services will probably do all that is necessary in the way of transport. Sunday will be an important day. Here is the Wellington-Trentham timetable for that day:

SUNDAY			
Leave Wellington	Arrive Trentham	Leave Trentham	Arrive Wellington
a.m.	a.m.	a.m.	a.m.
8.25	9. 5	9.26	10. 8
10.30	11.10	1.33	2.14
p.m.	p.m.	p.m.	p.m.
12.30	1.10	3.33	4.14
2.30	3.10	5.33	6.14
4.32	5.12	7.41	8.22
6.25	7.5		