

MEN who yesterday flew racing pigeons for pleasure to-day serve their country in the latest section of the Army to be introduced into the Dominion — the carrier pigeon post. It is their duty to breed, feed, train and fly the birds who wing their way unerringly homeward over stretches of sea from isolated coast watching stations, or over rugged country, maintaining contact with units carrying out tactical operations in isolated areas.

Pigeon post has a long history, for there are records showing that it was used by the Greeks and Romans, but it is strange to reflect that in this scientific age the birds still fulfil a useful role in the nation's total war effort.

A rigid age limit is enforced on recruits for the pigeon service of Army Signals, for only birds less than three months old are accepted. A hundred or more young birds will be housed in a loft of standard pattern, and then the pigeon man begins their training. After they have become accustomed to their new home, and after the pigeon man, glorying that his army career follows so closely his peace-time hobby, has become familiar with all his numerous flock, the birds are released each day.

At first the youngsters do not want to leave home, and prefer to roost along the ridge of the loft, but vigorous shooing on the part of their mentor starts them on their first solo flight. The whole hundred take the air and swoop and circle for a short while. Rarely does a bird stray, for Nature's call for food ultimately brings even the truants home. Daily this routine continues until the birds are thoroughly familiar with the landscape surrounding their loft.

Now Or Later

By WHIM-WHAM

"People are thinking too much of post-war matters at a time when victory is far from won," said the Canadian Prime Minister (Mr. W. L. Mackenzie King).
—Cable message from Ottawa.]

OH, Some of our Leaders contend
That it's never too soon to begin
To think of a Plan for the End
Of the War we are going to win.
When Slaughter and Wrecking are over,
They say, it is vain to suppose
That the World can go rolling in Clover,
For ever relieved of its Woes.

WHILE Others, it not misreported,
Keep looking for Chances to say
That certain Disaster is courted
By turning our Eyes from the Fray
For even a Moment; so zealous
To keep us prepared for the Worst,
'Less Planning and Dreaming!' they
tell us.

"The Foe must be finished with first!"

[CAN'T say I have a Solution,
Or know which may profit us
more—
A Plan for remote Execution
In Peace, or an Effort in War.
It ought to be needless to mention
That Whatever our ultimate Goal,
If Both receive proper Attention
We shall do pretty well, on the
Whole!]

WINGS OF THE ARMY

Pigeons in Modern Warfare

(Written for "The Listener" by R. A. McINTOSH)



One day the pigeon man, normally to be found in the vicinity of the loft gazing skywards, is seen no more in his favourite haunt. Early in the day he has moved off with some of his more advanced pupils securely crated in an army lorry, to allow the birds to develop their homing instinct over a short course of five miles or so. Later in the day he returns, his face wreathed in smiles, and in the mess that evening it is difficult to keep him off the subject of his birds.

"They didn't know what to do at first," he observes. "They circled around for quite a while after they were released, and then the blue cock—there's a good bird for you!—set off for

home, and the others soon followed. Five minutes they took for the three miles, not so bad for their first flight, was it?"

Rapidly thereafter the distances of the flights are increased, and the birds, having learned what is required of them, always return home. The best training involves each bird in having a training flight at least once a week, so the pigeon man is one of the busiest men about the headquarters. After the birds have worked slowly up to flights of one hundred miles, the succeeding distances can be doubled, and eventually flights of a thousand miles or so are not unknown.

Special War Rations

The birds are on rations, just as is every soldier, and in this country they consume an ounce and a-half of feed a day. Where they are intended for short flights the feed is partridge peas, and for long flights maize is the basic diet. Strangely enough, maize cannot be fed to short-flight birds, because it tends to wind them.

The messages carried by the pigeons are written on fine, light sheets of paper, usually about four inches by two, and quite lengthy code messages—sometimes as many as 13,000 words—can be carried. In any case, longer messages are not impossible, for several birds can each carry an instalment. The message forms are rolled and placed in tiny aluminium cylinders attached to the bird's leg.

The pigeons seem to be imbued with the old Signal's tradition: "The message must get through." In the Great War, it was not uncommon for seriously wounded birds to bring home their important messages before dying, and to-day their stuffed skins, together with the decorations their services won, have proud place in the world's foremost museums.

Like every other weapon of warfare there is a counter for the carrier pigeon in its natural enemy the hawk. The art of camouflage is therefore another of the pigeon man's many tasks — not in the actual disguising of the birds by paint or garnishing, but in the breeding and selection of dark-plumaged birds for military purposes.



"THE PIGEON MAN becomes familiar with all his numerous flock": homing pigeons bred of the best racing stock have been enlisted in the Signal Corps for message carrying. They can fly at anything up to 80 miles an hour

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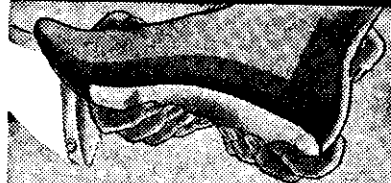
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