

Pigeon Enthusiasts Point To Bird's Importance In National Defense Picture

(Editor's Note — The following story is reprinted by permission of the author, and was suggested for use in the Herald and News by members of the local racing pigeon club. Spring training races are being readied by members and a picture-story of local activities will be carried in this paper shortly.)

By DAVE BUSCALL
Silver Springs, Md.

In the columns of the Bulletin of February, 25, 1952 appears an eulogy written by Harry C. Burke of Washington, D.C., on the achievements of my friend and confidant, the late Billy Dismar.

In the article Mr. Burke says "Billy Dismar, in my estimation, was one of the finest assets the sport ever had."

No truer words could have been written and I can say that in all sincerity, because they are the very sentiments I expressed when Billy was alive.

But further on in the same article, Mr. Burke says in substance that Billy Dismar was responsible for starting the Pigeon Service in the United States Army. This, however, is so far from the facts that were Billy alive today he would be one of the first to indignantly deny it.

Billy Dismar's work for the sport needs no overstatement, no padding, nor any variation from the truth. What he did is good enough and could well be used as an example to others to strive and copy after. But even his work for the fancy, great as it was, was overshadowed by the sunlight of his character, for in all his dealings he was the soul of honor and the apostle of fairplay.

How "pigeons" became an instrument of National Defense will be found in the columns of the pigeon journals at the time this event occurred. However, time clouds issues and sometimes historical facts are twisted by careless writers.

Pigeons, as an instrument of national defense are a mighty important angle in the sport today. So much in the way of benefits stem from this event, in fact it has been the means of saving our sport in several instances.

The information of how pigeons became a part of the American Army should be kept straight and that can best be done by those having first hand information on the subject. Otherwise, as time goes on the truth would be lost by uninformed writers whose mistakes might even change the history in the minds of some who did not know the facts. I propose, therefore to review the incidents which led to the adoption of pigeons by the American Army.

More than a year before the United States became embroiled in war with Germany, namely in 1916, the writer accompanied by Cyrus S. Wicker of our State Department, visited General Scriven, who was Chief Signal Officer of the Army at that time. We urged that the Signal Corps adopt pigeons as an auxiliary means of communication to warfare.

General Scriven thought so well of the plan he issued orders for an experimental loft to be established at Columbus, New Mexico and designated me to aid in carrying out these orders.

The loft was established at Columbus and the birds were used by General Pershing's Punitive Expeditionary Force then operating on the Mexican border. The full account of this undertaking, together with official photograph of loft appeared in the columns of the A.R.F. News in 1916.

Should there be any doubt regarding priority in anybody's mind, let me quote an excerpt from Mr. Dismar's own column in the "News" which can be found on page 9 of the February, 1917 issue. Here it is:

"Another jewel has been added figuratively speaking to the crown of our worthy AU Fin, Secretary, D. C. Buscall. A report from New Mexico military loft, which was originated by him, for which he drew plans, wrote out instructions, solicited birds, and which he shipped to the border, shows that the birds did more than was expected."

PERSEHING REQUEST
In August, 1917 after we had entered World War I, General Pershing sent from France a request that an American Pigeon Service be organized immediately and the General's request, supplemented by an order from the General Staff, was sent to the Personnel Section of the Signal Corps for compliance.

It so happened that a Major Black, who a year before was the commanding officer at Columbus when I furnished the pigeons, was on duty in the Personnel Office and the order to secure a competent officer to organize the new service was dumped in his lap. He, of course, remembered the incident at Columbus but had forgotten my name. He did however know that I was secretary of the Union at the time and so easily established contact. Less than six weeks later I was on my way to France as commanding officer of the new service.

Later, along the battle fronts in France, lofts manned by American pigeoners and stocked with American homing pigeons, did more than was required of them. When telephone lines and radio could not be used our birds carried on under heart-breaking conditions. Although many were wounded by bursting shrapnel, they lived up to the Signal Corps slogan and got the message through.

After the Armistice, I was ordered to prepare a history of the service and detailed Captain John L. Carney to do this work. No man in the American Army was better fitted for this duty than Carney. Not only was he an accredited newspaper man, but a free lance writer of national repute. In addition he had served as my front line officer with the birds under varied conditions.

ARMY APPROVAL
When the story was completed I took the manuscript over to General Headquarters for approval of the Army Censor. On my way I stopped to see General Gibbs, assistant Chief Signal Officer and my immediate boss. He was very busy and grouchy, asking me, some-



PIGEONS AT WAR have proven to be an almost invaluable asset to our armed forces in the carrying of messages. Here (1) an army pigeon is shown being rigged with the capsule used in carrying messages, maps, photos and other information. This heavy rig is used only on short flights. (2) One of the heroes of the last war was "Yank," the bird that carried

the first message of retaking of Casba by American troops. He flew from Casba to Tebessa, 98 miles, in an hour and fifty two minutes. (3) Even the tank corps use pigeons in their work. This picture shows a tank commander releasing a bird during maneuvers at the army's desert training station. —U.S. Army Photos

what abruptly, what I wanted. When I told him I had the pigeon data for censorship, he said "Let me see it." Then I waited and I waited, while the General read word for word of the 18,000 word story without once looking up. As he handed back the manuscript he said, "Fine, Buscall, your Carney is some writer." Boys, that was "Our Jack," gone but never forgotten. Let's turn back the pages of history and listen again to one of Jack's thrilling paragraphs covering the Argonne holocaust:

"When lines of metal, taut and durable as man could fashion them and the scientific achievements of a lifetime withered to nothingness in the rain of steel and rending force of high explosives, then did the racing pigeon come into his own. Furrowed, bloodclotted lines often streaked the feathered bodies; at times a leg gone and not infrequently a sharpshooter's steel jacketed bullet found its mark, yet stout of heart, the little couriers sped on—to their goal—and relief."

WORLD WAR II USE
During the Second World War, which covered so many parts of the globe, pigeons were used extensively and according to the Sig-

nal Corps, effectively on all fronts. I can however speak with some authority on the brilliant record they achieved in Italy from the 18th of November 1943 to the 7th of May, 1944. It so happened that my son, Captain David C. Buscall Jr., was in command of the 6681st Signal Pigeon Company which furnished the service.

If there have been at any time a doubt as to the value of pigeons in wartime, the record established in Italy in World War II between the periods shown above, it would be dispelled by the record of achievements in the Italian theater of operations.

Unfortunately, the complete report of this particular phase of our birds' work, sent in at the time war was on, never reached headquarters and it was not until a long time afterwards that this was discovered. Fortunately, however, my son, like his old man, carefully preserved his records and at the request of General Lawton, prepared a most comprehensive report now a part of the War Department records.

MESSAGES
The great number of messages carried by birds of this unit over 5,000 in a period less than 4 1/2 months, with no record of any having been lost, testify to the value of pigeons.

A monograph prepared by the Signal Corps detailing the work of pigeons, their value to the Government as a guide for local officials when ordinance troubles threaten a pigeon flyer, is most revealing as well as a tribute to the race bird. Here it is:

"The Signal Corps is proud of the miracles of communications and electronics that rise from the test tubes and drafting boards of its laboratories, but there are times when radio silence is required so

that the enemy does not know of the presence of American troops, there are times when machines fail, there are times when wires cannot be strung, when radios cannot be installed as quickly as troops move forward. Then Signal Corps falls back on the faithful pigeon and asks him to serve in a role he has held for thousands of years."

I have written at some length on this subject of Army pigeons, because I realize its importance to the sport and for further reason I am able to give so much first hand information. I hope pigeon flyers may derive some good from the information.

New Radio Show Described As Best Yet For Realism

HOLLYWOOD (AP)—The new Night Watch radio show tops Dragnet for realism in the cops-and-criminal department. It's the genuine thing.

Listeners to Night Watch on CBS Monday nights will hear the actual nabbing of a criminal. The recording was made during an arrest by the Culver City, Calif., police.

Columbia's answer to Jack Webb is an enterprising young man named Donn Reed. A radio veteran, he dreamed up Night Watch in an effort to find something new in radio.

"I remember one day I came out of a radio conference feeling very depressed," he told me. "I said to another fellow that I was tired of rehearsing the same old things in radio. If only there was something new."

"That day I went over to the place where I play handball. Another person who plays there is Ron Perkins, a sergeant with the Culver City police. He had his uniform on, and I asked him what he had been doing lately. He told me about some of his cases, and they sounded fascinating. He invited me to come along with him some night."

Reed went in the prowl car one night and found a wealth of material. Perkins talked to Chief W. N. Hildebrande of the Culver City police about allowing Reed to record some cases. Permission was granted, and the project got under way.

"Our first problem was the recording equipment," reported Reed. "To get really professional quality meant using about 1,000 pounds of gear. Obviously that was impractical, since much of the time I had to race after police to get my recordings."

"We finally worked it down to a

self-inclusive unit that weighs only 10 pounds. That makes me much more maneuverable. We carry an engineer with us, but he stays in the car. It wouldn't be right to ask him to accompany us."

Reed referred to the danger. It can be considerable. Once he was in close proximity when a holdup man was apprehended. The hood reached for his gun, and Reed hit the deck. He saved himself from danger, but he still was angry. The fall damaged the recording equipment and ruined his report on the crime.

On another occasion, the police picked up a dope addict who confessed the source of supply. This led to the undercover interview with a dope pusher whose devious method of selling the stuff was recorded on tape.

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