

Bob

An Interview With the Best Carrier Pigeon in Japan

'HE morning of our arrival at Yokohoma harbor we were boarded by representatives of the press. Each reporter brought with him a crate of carrier pigeons which were released at intervals bearing photograph films in gutta-percha tubes and closely written manuscripts in aluminum containers fastened to the left leg.

A total of 16 birds took the air for Tokyo, among them carrier No. 158, on the staff of the Nichi Nichi, with a net daily circulation of 1,-259,000. In accordance with his habit he beat the bunch home, a distance of about 19 miles, reaching headquarters with text and illustrations nine minutes ahead of all flyers. A scoop, if ever there was one.

Later I called at the office of the Nichi Nichi and sent my card to the pigeon loft. No. 158 was in and would talk for publication.

"Glad to meet you," he said, throwing out a full blue chest. "You are an old bird in the newspaper business. Come into my coop where we can have a chinchin."

"How long have you been in the game?'

"Eight years, Took it up two months after I left the egg. Catch 'em young; pick 'em for speed."

Brings Home the Bacon.

"How fast are you?"

"Oh, about 60 kilometers an hour up to 300, carrying a maximum of three films and three tissue sheets of manuscript, or enough to fill a column. The total weight of the receptacles, loaded, is about seven grams, although a full-grown bird flying 20 to 30 kilometers can come through with a load of one ounce.

"More than that over greater distances would tire a pigeon to the point of inefficiency, rendering the bird easy prey for eagles and hawks, everywhere more plentiful than we feathered representatives of the press. Also, we run the risk of being brought down by hunters equally indifferent to our professional status. In such cases the tragedy is hushed by the author of it. We just vanish, that's all." Carrier No. 158, acknowledged to be the Nurmi of the air, and by the most direct route, allowed that his fame rested upon a fundamental principle.:

"Whatever has come to me," he said, "is due to the fact that by nature I am a beeline bird. To be explicit, when trusted with messages or film, I rise as rapidly as possible to the height of four or five hundred feet, determine my homing direction and take straight flight for the coop, wasting no time whatever in circling or changing my elevation. Once home I settle on the landing platform and immediately enter the reception cage, where I am relieved of whatever has been intrusted to me.

Setting Up Exercises, "How do you keep in condition? What about emergencies?"

"When not on the job handling news I do three hours a day exercising aloft over Tokyo. All of us are jumping out of the coop mornings and afternoons to take the setting-up work. Carriers are trained to regard one spot as home, and travel in wicker baskets, no matter in what direction we are transported to whatever points the staff reporters expect news to break.

"During the naval maneuvers off Yokohama in Japanese waters eight ears ago, December 5, a press ship deck overloaded with reporters and guests collapsed, injuring people. Under regulations all radio connections with the shore had been cut off. Half of the available pigeons on board were released and relayed the accident to the newspapers. We saved the situation.

Aided During Earthquake.

"During the earthquake we were the sole means of communication from outside points with the city of Tokyo, as all lines were down and the system completely paralyzed. It's all in the day's work with us. For reward we are fed on a diet of corn, peas and mullet. Our tenure of service is from 20 to 25 years; our market value is 10 yen-abut \$3 in your money-the pair. No strikes, no arguments, no unions in our lives."

No. 158 threw out his chest, cooed in staccato and shook his plumage. Outside from the blue sky a sudden rush of exercising birds swooped over the penthouse and swung aloft in mad haste, as though pursued. A hawk plunged from aloft like a plummet, missed his prev. a single carrier lagging behind, and hurried away in the haze. "That occurs every day," said the cham-pion, "but seldom is any damage Hawks are afraid of birds in flocked formation. Safety in numbers, but he flies fastest who flies alone."

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With respect to any final aim or end, the greater part of mankind live at hazard,-Archbishop Leighton,



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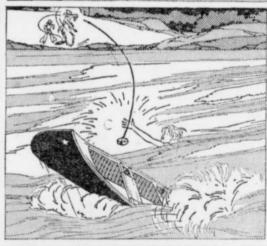


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