



Al-Asad au Natural



Special Edition I

2 February, 2009

Special Edition:

Pigeons at War!

Our recent racing pigeon visitor (see Issue 12!) reminded several people of Cher Ami, the homing pigeon that saved WWI's Lost Battalion (full story in this issue!), but there were tens of thousands of pigeons used by the U.S. Army in WWI and perhaps over 1/2 million used by all Allied forces, and many of them were recognized as heroes. This special edition shares some of their stories, gleaned from the U.S. Army Communications and Electronics Museum at Ft. Monmouth, NJ, and various other web resources. These birds (and other famous military animals) were simple beasts, but their endurance, fidelity to their training and their caretakers, and their sacrifices cannot be denied.

"We are along the road parallel to 276.4. Our own artillery is dropping a barrage directly on us. For heaven's sake, stop it!"

- message carried
by Cher Ami

Cher Ami

The best remembered war pigeon in America is Cher Ami. After being donated by British pigeon clubs, Cher Ami flew 12 missions for the 77th Division at Verdun during WWI, for which he was later awarded a special *Croix de Guerre* by the French Army. On his last mission, he was with nine units of the 77th that became isolated and surrounded in the Argonne Offensive on October 3rd, 1918. These units became known as "the Lost Battalion". After holding their position for 6 days and suffering a 60% casualty rate, the unit was being shelled by friendly artillery and had only a single carrier pigeon, Cher Ami, left to send for relief. Two other pigeons had been shot down before they could even leave the perimeter, and immediately after take off Cher Ami was also spotted and shot by the German infantry. In spite of losing an eye, taking a bullet in the chest, and having his message leg severed by all but a single tendon, Cher Ami continued his mission and flew 25 miles to headquarters with the unit's location. The shell-

ing was shifted and eventually the remaining 194 (of over 500) men were relieved. Medics went all out to save the hero bird, even fitting him with a wooden peg leg! General Pershing personally saw Cher Ami off for his return to the U.S., where he was met with great acclaim. Cher Ami became the mascot of the Department of Service before he died of the effects of his wounds in 1919, but has since been remembered in

2 movies and numerous books. He was also inducted into the Racing Pigeons Hall of Fame, and is now preserved at the Smithsonian.

While the most famous war pigeon in America, Cher Ami is only one story among many. 32 British pigeons were decorated in WWI.



G.I. Joe

G.I. Joe saved at least 1,000 lives of the British 56th Brigade during WWII. He was hatched in Algiers on March 24th, 1943, and served on the Tunisian front before being shipped to Italy. On October 18th, 1943, the Brigade's mission was to attack the Italian city of Colvi Vecchia after it was to be bombed by the U.S. Air Support Command. When the Germans retreated, the Brigade captured the city with little resistance well ahead of schedule. Attempts to cancel the bombers by radio and other means of communication failed, and G.I. Joe was released as the 56th's last hope to avoid friendly fire. The bird flew the 20 miles to the airbase in 20 minutes, arriving as the planes were warming up on the runway. General Matt Clark, commander of the 5th Army, estimated that had he arrived only minutes later it would have cost 1,000 or more Allied lives. After the war, G.I. Joe visited London, where he became the only American bird to be decorated with the Dickin Medal for Gallantry by the Lord High Mayor of London. This award is the animal version of the Victoria Cross or Medal of Honor. He was then returned to Ft. Monmouth, where he was housed in Churchill Loft with 24 other pigeon heroes. When these birds were relocated to aviaries around the country in 1957, G.I. Joe became a resident of the Detroit Zoological Gardens, where he died at age 18 on June 3rd, 1961. He is now on display at Ft. Monmouth.



Jungle Joe

Jungle Joe was hatched in 1944, trained at Ft. Monmouth, and lived until 1954. At only 4 months old, this pigeon was dropped into Burma, behind enemy lines, where he was the only method of communication for his unit. He delivered his message after flying 225 miles over some of the regions highest mountains.

Over 1 million messages were carried out of Paris by pigeons during a 4 month siege in the Franco-Prussian War! (1870-71)

Mocker

On September 12th, 1918, a heavy German artillery barrage had stopped the American advance into the Alsace-Lorraine sector of France. In spite of losing his left eye and sustaining a gash to the top of his head, Mocker successfully delivered a message that allowed American artillery to locate the German guns and silence them. This allowed the Americans to advance, paving the way to victory and saving many lives. Mocker was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and French *Croix de Guerre*.

Editor's Note: One of the American units stalled by the artillery was Ohio's all black 2nd Battalion, 372nd Infantry Regiment, then serving with the French 157th Division. Two weeks later, the "Trey-Lucky-Deuce" would move forward and fight with distinction, again restoring forward motion to the Allied effort.

Homing, carrier, or racer pigeons are all generic names for domesticated pigeons. They can be of various breeds or species. They should not be confused with Passenger pigeons, a distinct North American species that was hunted to extinction early in the 20th century.



Spike

Like Cher Ami, Spike served with New York's 77th Division. Spike was born in January of 1918 and trained at Ft. Monmouth. He is credited with carrying 52 messages in WW1—more than any other known pigeon! Amazingly, he was never injured.

Pigeons have been used to deliver messages in war for over 5,000 years!

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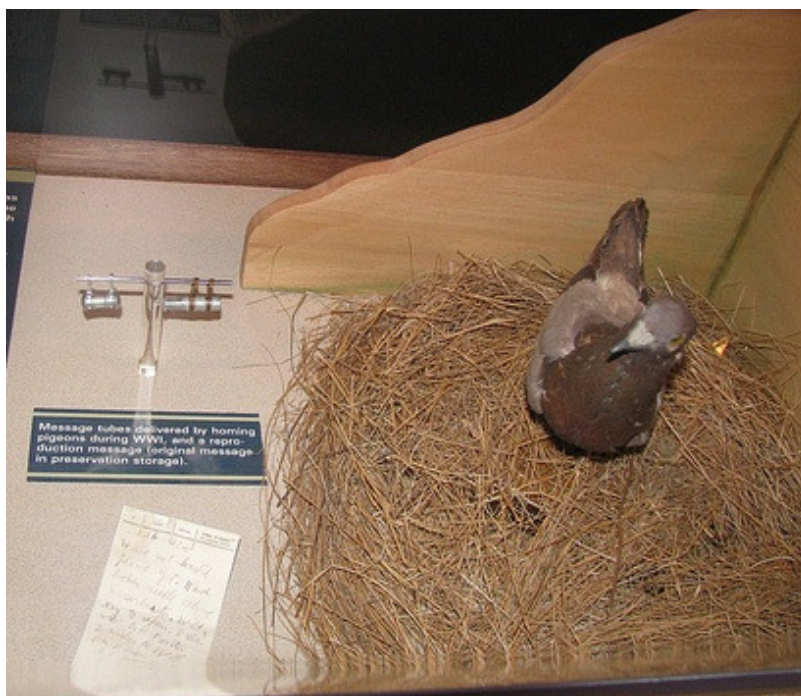
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Always Right, Sustain the Fight!

371st SB

Stumpy Joe



To learn why this grievously wounded pigeon was decorated, visit his display at the National Museum of the United States Air Force at Wright Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio!



Above: Plaque commemorating war pigeons at Ft. Monmouth. Several of the birds in this issue are on display there at the U.S. Army Communications and Electronics Museum.

*War pigeons are estimated to have completed their mission
over 90% of the time!*

Right: A veteran pigeon is awarded the Purple Heart during WWII.

