



Feathers of Honor

Author(s): Frank A. Blazich Jr.

Source: *Army History*, Fall 2020, No. 117 (Fall 2020), pp. 32-51

Published by: U.S. Army Center of Military History

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26939907>

REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26939907?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



U.S. Army Center of Military History is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Army History*

JSTOR

FEATHERS OF HONOR

U.S. ARMY SIGNAL CORPS PIGEON SERVICE
IN WORLD WAR I, 1917–1918

Frank A. Blazich Jr.



National Archives

A pigeon with a message tube attached at Fort Lucy, France

In October 1918, an American infantry division found its flank threatened by a German counterattack. The division commander wished to coordinate his movements with the corps commander, but the telephone lines were down. Annoyed, without his phone, and disinclined to use the functional radio, the division commander instead called for a homing pigeon. Lacking any birds, the general's aide located a nearby signalman and requested a pigeon. The young enlisted man, a recruit telephone lineman, had no idea why the general wanted a pigeon.

Not wishing to disappoint his commander, the young man went to a sergeant who had a pet pigeon, borrowed the bird, and presented it to the aide. Pigeon in hand, the aide raced back to the division headquarters. A message was prepared and secured to the pigeon's leg. The bird was released into the air, but it landed immediately and proceeded to peck at the message tube.

"What is the matter with the damned pigeon?" asked the chief of staff.

"Where is the signal officer?" demanded the general.

At this point, the pigeon's owner happened upon the scene and asked for his pet back.

"Take him, he is no good to me," grumbled the general, but word that the corps commander was on the telephone soon smoothed his ruffled feathers.

After this incident, the division headquarters received a steady supply of trained homing pigeons.¹

By contrast, Col. George C. Marshall, an operational planner in the headquarters of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF), had first-hand knowledge of the value of

the pigeon messengers. Earlier in 1918 during the Battle of Cantigny, German artillery shredded the American wired communications. Pigeon messages, however, managed to reach 1st Division headquarters and provided clarity on the battlefield situation. While preparing for the grand assault on Sedan in late October, Colonel Marshall called several young officers into his office. He ordered each of them over to the chief signal officer to receive training in the handling and use of homing pigeons. Upon their return, Marshall issued the men instructions to accompany the assault troops of the attacking divisions. Equipped with six pigeons apiece, the officers would release four messages on 1 November and two on 2 November at designated hours, providing the exact point which the lead troops of each division had reached.² Through this technique, recalled Marshall, “we thus had an accurate statement of the location of the most advanced troops of the Seventy-seventh, Eightieth, Second, Eighty-ninth, and Fifth divisions at the same hour.”³

These markedly different anecdotes show that the familiarity of the U.S. Army with the use of homing pigeons as an auxiliary method of communication was not widespread in World War I, even though homing pigeons proved reliable messengers on the battlefield. For the U.S. Army, the Signal Corps’ Pigeon Service experience offers a unique case study in civil-military relations and the rapid adoption of coalition knowledge and technology.

OLD “TECHNOLOGY” FOR A NEW ERA OF WARFARE

After the United States entered the war in April 1917, senior military leaders confronted unfamiliar weapons, technologies, and stratagems. The years of fighting since 1914 had already demonstrated to European combatants that scientific and technological development combined with new means of industrial output proved exceptionally lethal. These new technologies, however, remained foreign to American military members. Despite the threat of German submarines to safe passage at sea since 1914—as demonstrated by the sinking of civilian vessels, such as the RMS *Lusitania*, by German U boats—the U.S. Navy had limited knowledge of recent advances in submarine warfare. Almost no American sailor had ever seen or heard of a depth charge, a recent but widely employed innovation, until May 1917. On land, the



Edgar A. Russel (*left*), shown here as a brigadier general, being decorated by Field Marshal Douglas Haig

defensive advantages of trench warfare forced combatants to seek new technologies to either better protect or dislodge soldiers. Introduction of poison gas resulted in the extensive production and use of gas masks. Concentrated use of shrapnel and canister shellfire reintroduced widespread use of combat helmets to protect against lethal head wounds.⁴ When the first members of the AEF arrived in

France in late June 1917, however, they marched ashore sporting felt campaign hats reminiscent of cavalry actions in the American West. American doughboys soon adopted steel combat helmets, copied from a British design.⁵ As it entered the trenches, the AEF faced a steep tactical learning





curve that would force officers and enlisted men alike to draw heavily on their allies' experiences in this new world war.

In spite of its relative inexperience with contemporary military innovations, the U.S. Army entered the war with notable advantages in communications technology. The Signal Corps led the world in military telephony and expertise, but this wire-reliant equipment proved vulnerable to outages or interception in a war with frequent massed artillery fires.⁶ Col. Edgar A. Russel, General John J. Pershing's chief signal officer for the AEF, spent his first weeks in Europe meeting with British and French signal officers. He soon learned about the use of a relatively simple communications method: homing pigeons. French officials championed the value of homing pigeons after their performance at Verdun. In a report provided to Colonel Russel and the AEF, the French experience demonstrated that:

Pigeons only, can work regularly, and in spite of bombardments, dust, smoke or fog, can bring accurate details concerning the situation of the troops in action within a relatively short space of time. Liaison by pigeons has rendered inestimable services ever since the beginning of the battle of Verdun. It has won the approbation of the high command and line officers, and its general adoption is advisable.⁷

For the British Expeditionary Force, "the necessity and possibility of maintaining liaison by means of pigeons, has been demonstrated during the Battle of Verdun and confirmed during the offensive on the Somme. This method of liaison has always been able to operate regularly. In many cases it was the only one which was able to resist the weather and the means of destruction of the enemy."⁸

The weight of evidence proved sufficient for Russel to act. On 16 July 1917, he wrote to Maj. Gen. George O. Squier, Chief Signal Officer of the U.S. Army, about his staff's investigations into French and British pigeon usage. Russel concluded that "[t] here is no longer any doubt of the immense importance of this service, and the necessity of the immediate action of the United States to provide similar service for our armies." The following day, General Pershing wired Squier requesting the swift commissioning of two pigeon specialists as first lieutenants



General Squier

to accompany twelve enlisted pigeon experts for service in France.⁹

PIGEONS IN THE PREWAR U.S. ARMY

For millennia, both in times of war and peace, humans have recognized and used the homing ability of pigeons for the transportation of messages.¹⁰ The U.S. Army began working with homing pigeons in the Dakota Territory approximately forty years before World War I. In 1878, the Signal Corps purchased a dozen pigeons from Thomas Gist of Philadelphia and shipped the birds out west to Col. Nelson A. Miles commanding the 5th Infantry at Fort Keogh in Montana. These birds bred and increased to number around fifty. Hawks killed some of the pigeons in the course of Miles' experiments, but he still managed flights of about one hundred miles from the mouth of Big Horn River back to the fort. Despite limited time and undertrained birds, Miles deemed his pigeon experiments successful, having demonstrated "the fact that they can be made useful for military service." Four years after Miles' experiment, Signal Corps 1st Lt. William E. Birkhimer questioned the present utility of homing pigeons and the need to develop a detail plan for a military pigeon service. In 1888, the Signal Corps established a small pigeon loft at Key West, Florida, but closed the operation four years later, transferring the birds to the U.S. Naval Academy.¹¹ In the 1890s, the Navy saw value in using homing

pigeons for ship-to-shore communication and managed to attract congressional attention to the birds' potential uses. A legislative proposal introduced in Congress in 1898 by Senator Jacob H. Gallinger (R-NH) sought to establish a homing pigeon service in the Treasury Department for commercial, military, and naval purposes. The bill died in committee.¹²

Despite the Army's initial disinterest in the concept, civilian homing pigeon enthusiasts promoted uses of pigeons for military purposes in the ensuing years. Pigeon racing itself came to the United States in the 1860s, and the first organized pigeon racing efforts began in the early 1880s. In 1910, the pigeon racing community reached consensus on racing rules and standards, and the American Racing Pigeon Union (AU) launched in Washington, D.C. on 15 August 1910.¹³ Under the AU, pigeon racing clubs from across the nation could compete on equal terms in races of varying distances and for ever-increasing prizes.¹⁴ On the eve of America's entry into World War I, the Signal Corps experimented with homing pigeons in Mexico as part of Pershing's Punitive Expedition of 1916, but the trials were unsuccessful. They found fault with inexperienced personnel and pigeons that had not acclimated sufficiently to the environment.¹⁵

FINDING THE RIGHT PIGEONEERS

By late summer 1917, the War Department had located two men who shared the essential qualifications for the new pigeon



Captain Carney



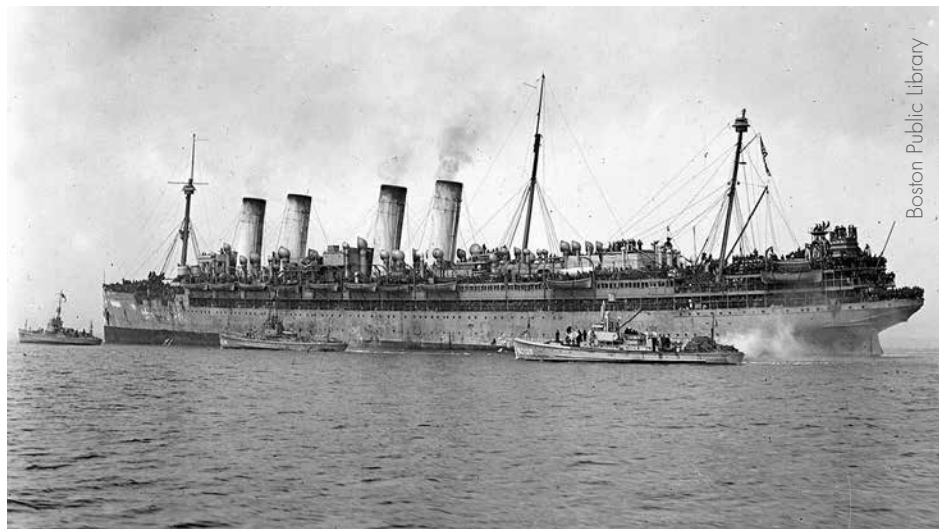
Captain Buscall in front of a pigeon loft at Langres, France

service: prior military service and pigeon-racing experience. The man destined to lead the AEF pigeon effort worked at the Marine Barracks in Washington, D.C. English-born David C. Buscall arrived in the United States in 1890 and settled with his family in Springfield, Massachusetts. He developed a fondness for pigeons as a child in London, and frequently built his bird lofts on the roof of his father's or neighbors' houses. Enlisting in the U.S. Marine Corps on 2 September 1905, Buscall was serving as a quartermaster sergeant by June 1917.¹⁶ Discharged from the Marine Corps on 23 August, he commissioned the next day as a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army Signal Corps.¹⁷ John L. Carney of Pittsburgh joined Buscall on 4 September. A native of Salem, New Jersey, Carney was a veteran Signal Corps telegrapher, having seen service in the Spanish-American War, the Philippine-American War, the Boxer Rebellion, and at the Mexican border during the Punitive Expedition. Like Buscall, he had bred and worked with pigeons all his life.¹⁸ Both men were founding members and officers of the AU,

with Carney having served as its second president from 1913 to 1914.¹⁹

Together, the men began assembling a pigeon service for the U.S. Army. Throughout September 1917, they used their connections in the racing pigeon community to purchase birds and feed, and to locate additional personnel to fill out the enlisted ranks of

men—to be known as “pigeoneers”—for the U.S. Pigeon Intelligence Service.²⁰ Buscall arranged with the carriage-building firm of Sechler and Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, for the purchase of twelve mobile pigeon lofts of his own design to be shipped along with the birds.²¹ By October, a blend of purchases and patriotic donations fielded a feathered



USS Agamemnon



A mobile loft, displaying captured German pigeons, is used as a recruiting station.

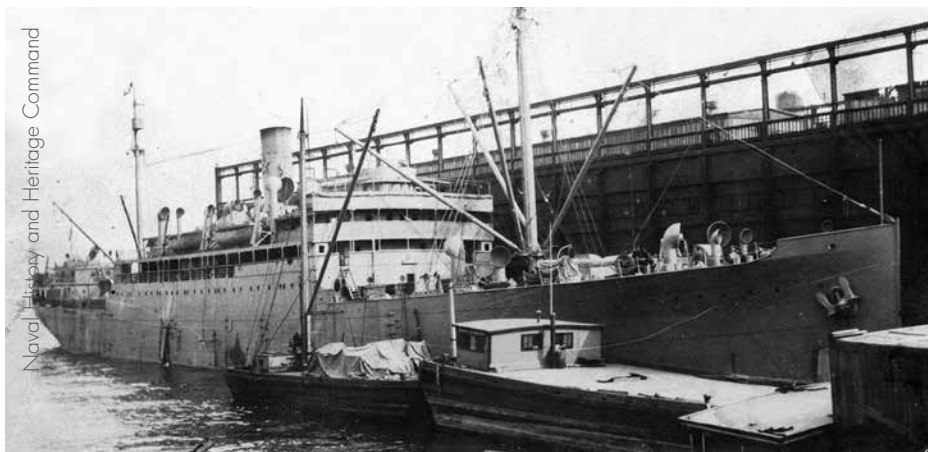
Army force of approximately 2,350 young and breeding pigeons.²² The birds were shipped to holding lofts at Fort Wood, New Jersey.²³ By 13 October, the Signal Corps requested overseas orders for half of the initial personnel requested by AEF General Headquarters.²⁴ On 29 October, Buscall, along with 6 noncommissioned officers, 800 pigeons, 12 mobile lofts, and a supply of feed,

boarded the transport USS *Agamemnon* bound for France. Arriving in Brest on 12 November, the small detachment moved to Paris and quartered at the French Pigeon Lofts at Vaugirard.²⁵

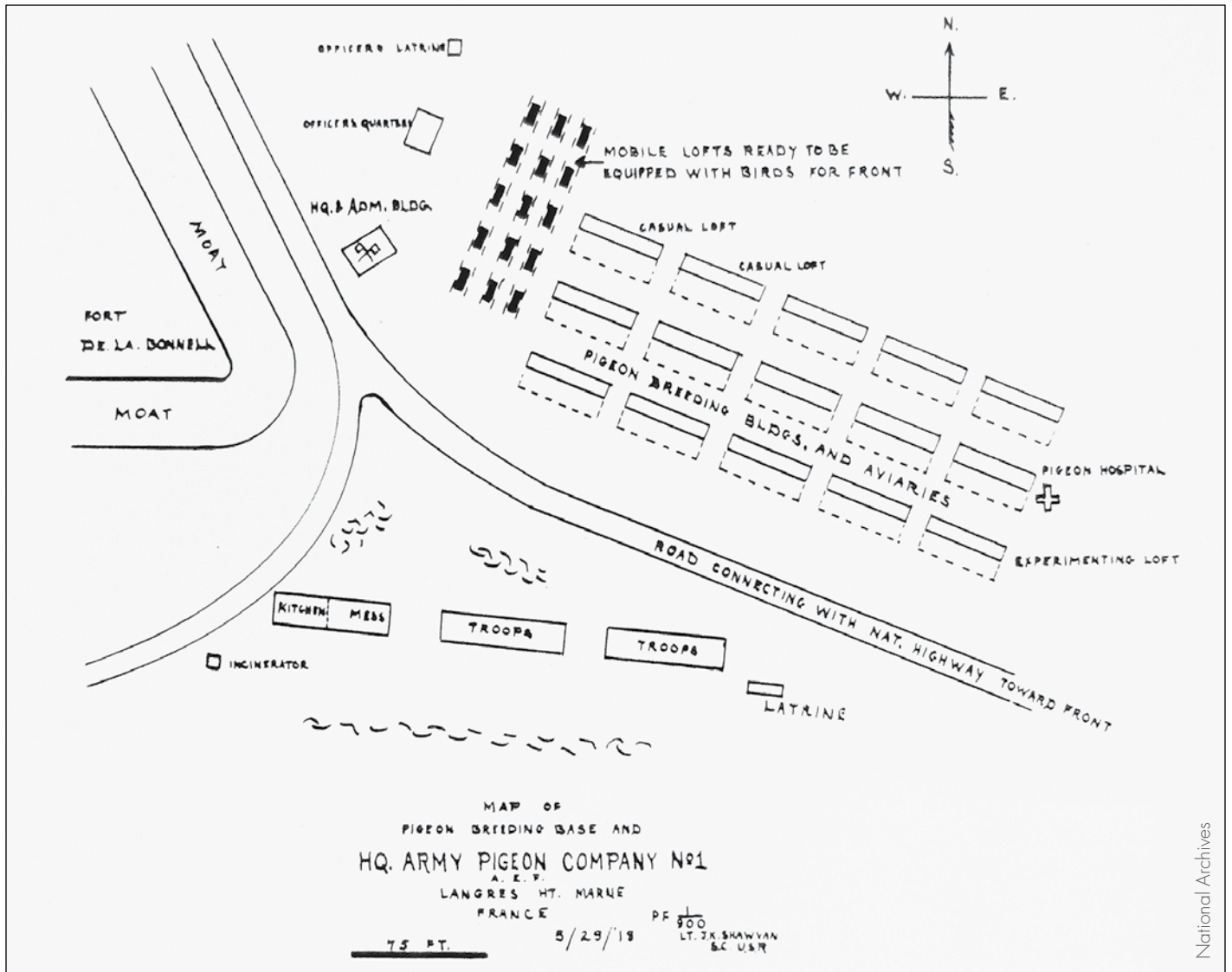
The unit was now officially authorized and designated as the Signal Corps Pigeon Service, and the AEF General Headquarters tapped Buscall as its officer in charge.²⁶

He got right to work on two fronts: first, to secure permanent lofts for the AEF's birds; second, to learn everything about the military training and fielding of homing pigeons. Buscall and Russel met and reached an agreement on 20 November to construct a central breeding base to supply the AEF with young birds, selecting a location near the entrance to Fort de la Bonnelle, Langres, in northeastern France for this purpose.²⁷ On 5 December, Buscall and four of his men left Paris and headed first to Amiens and then to the headquarters of the 13th Corps of the British Expeditionary Force near Arras. For two days, the Americans studied the British mobile lofts and at the advance trench posts that provided pigeon service in the sector immediately in front of Vimy Ridge. The American pigeoneers also visited stationary lofts at Arras and the British breeding base at Albert.²⁸

On 10 December, Carney arrived at St. Nazaire aboard the USS *Henry R. Mallory*, along with 6 noncommissioned officers and 1,800 birds.²⁹ For the voyage over, the Army had stored the crates of pigeons on



USS *Henry R. Mallory*



Sketch 1. Layout of the breeding base at Langres, France

the hurricane deck, covered with tarpaulins. When the transport hit rough, pitching seas, sailors worked the decks to secure the birds and keep the crates from washing overboard. After joining Buscall and his half of the pigeon detachment in Paris on 14 December, the two officers traveled to Toul to meet with the pigeon officer of the French Eighth Army. Carney and Buscall inspected the French mobile lofts and stationary lofts as well as French pigeon operations in combat. Subsequently, Buscall saw to it that two samples of every article of French mobile loft equipment was collected for shipment to the United States to be reproduced for training use.³⁰

By late December, the officers had completed their initial observations, and the Pigeon Service began to take flight. The rigors of the initial overseas voyage discouraged the importation of younger birds, so the Pigeon Service would have to either

breed its own birds or purchase French and British pigeons to serve the AEF's needs. In the meantime, the American pigeons that Buscall and Carney had brought over, the majority of which would serve as breeding birds, would have to acclimate to France. On 31 December, Buscall received clearance to acquire the materials for construction of a central breeding base of his own design. His plans consisted of fifteen buildings, measuring 20 by 50 feet, subdivided into four compartments, with each building housing ninety-six breeding pairs. Delay after delay hampered the work; not until 15 March 1918, one month after initially promised, did the American birds move from the French lofts in Paris to the new quarters at Langres. The birds undoubtedly were relieved to enter their new lofts, having spent a week in shipping baskets

awaiting completion of the "barracks." Although the finished lofts differed from Buscall's original plans, they proved successful for the AEF. On 20 March, Carney took command of all breeding operations, and under his care approximately 900 breeding pairs would supply Pershing's forces with 4,422 young birds by November 1918.³¹

Allied generosity provided additional young birds to supplement those raised by the American breeding lofts. In mid-May 1918, Maj. Alfred H. Osman, commanding the British Home Forces Pigeon Service, arranged to donate 600 young British pigeons to the AEF. On 20 May, Sgt. Frederic J. Herrmann arrived at the British Pigeon Depot at Kings Cross, London, to assist in





A view of the breeding base at Langres, France

the selection and packing of the 600 young birds donated by British pigeon fanciers. A pigeon racer before the war, Herrmann was one of the first Signal Corps pigeoneers sent to France in early November 1917 to establish the AEF's pigeon service; he was well qualified to select top fliers.³² By 23 May, Herrmann and the birds, together with a supply of feed and transport baskets, arrived in Langres.³³ There, the Pigeon Service divided up the English birds, sending 245 to the front in mobile lofts, shipping 30 to the stationary loft at Châtillon-sur-Seine, and leaving the remainder at Fort de la Bonnelle.³⁴ In ensuing months, the majority of the English birds would be moved into American mobile lofts as the AEF's operations increased at the front.³⁵

The raising and preparing of the Pigeon Service's new recruits seemed akin to basic training for the infantry. At approximately three weeks, attendants would remove the squeakers from their parents and move them to a weaning loft where the birds learned to feed themselves. At five weeks of age, these birds were transferred to either mobile lofts or a detaining loft. More often than not, the birds moved from the weaning loft to mobile lofts held at a reserve field at the aviation field at Vaucouleurs for training as message carriers. At ten weeks, the birds were ready for use in the trenches, able to execute short flights of ten or so miles to their designated lofts.³⁶

THE ARMY'S PIGEON SERVICE TAKES FLIGHT

Homing pigeons are the genetic relatives of the rock dove, *Columba livia*, which frequently conduct seize and hold opera-

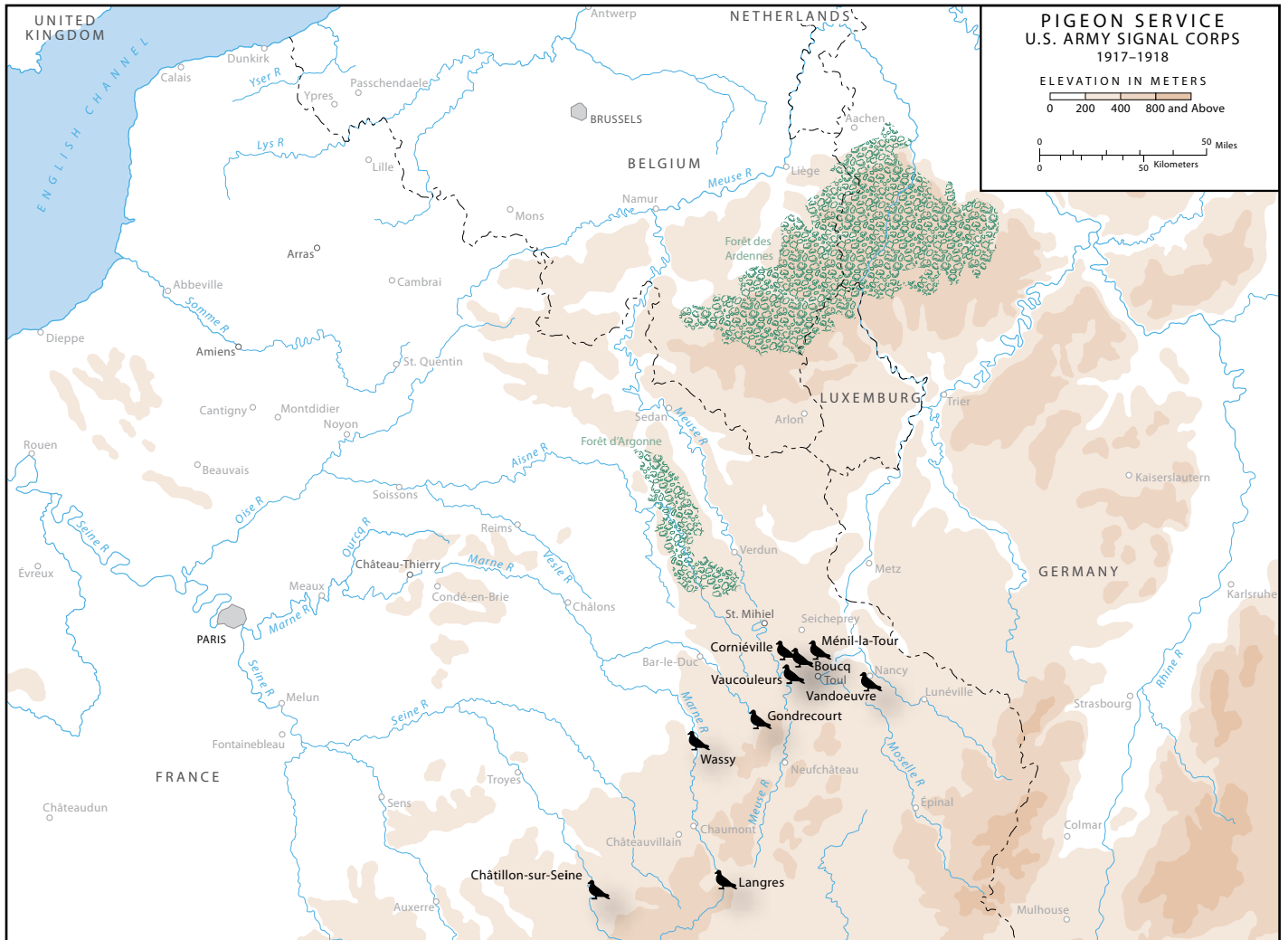
tions or tactical air strikes on urban residents and residences worldwide. In viewing a homing pigeon as a piece of equipment or technology, the best comparison is to a thoroughbred racehorse. To quote a 1918

U.S. Army pigeon manual, the birds are "the result of several centuries of intelligent cross-breeding between various races derived from the . . . rock pigeon. This crossing, which was only made with the perfect specimens of each race, has produced an amalgam: the Homing pigeon of today, a variety of the pigeon family noted for its superior intelligence and physique."³⁷ The pigeons themselves weigh roughly a pound for each sex, and are capable of flying uninterrupted for 12 to 15 hours daily, covering 500 to 700 miles, and at speeds varying from 30 to 60 miles per hour. Contemporary champion birds can sprint at over 90 miles per hour.³⁸

As AEF breeding operations stood up, the human component of the Pigeon Service likewise began to coalesce. The initial plan for the AEF's Pigeon Service assigned three officers and fourteen enlisted men to AEF Headquarters, one officer and eight pigeoneers for each Army corps, and fourteen pigeoneers for each division. In mid-December 1917, the chief



Soldiers in training at the II Army Corps Signal School, Châtillon-sur-Seine, France



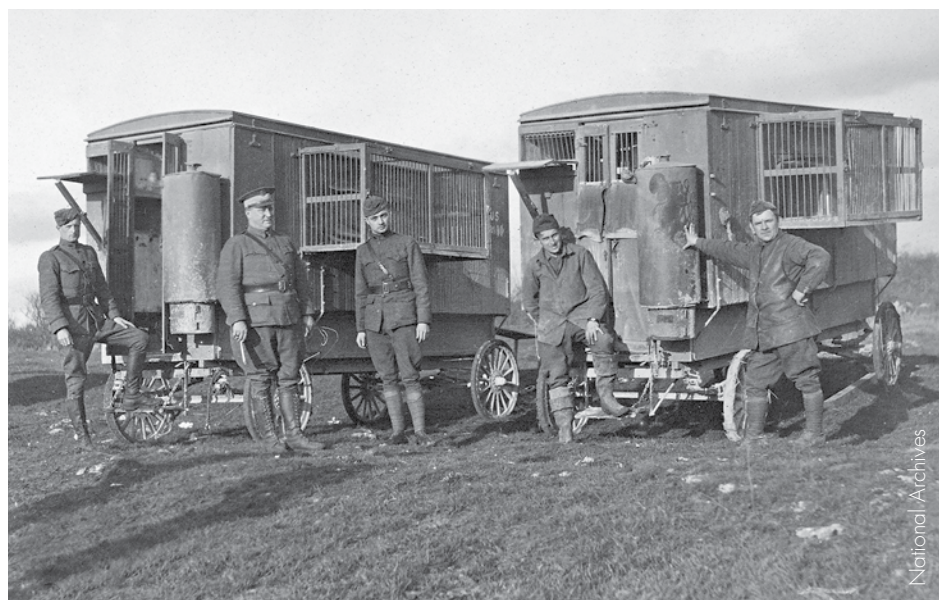
Map Note: This map is not indicative of all loft locations, only those mentioned in the text.

signal officer received orders for an additional 2 officers and 96 enlisted soldiers to join the small pigeon service vanguard. These personnel would complete the headquarters for Pershing's AEF General Headquarters and also would provide the pigeon needs of the I Army Corps and six infantry divisions. Almost immediately thereafter, the Signal Corps requested a second authorization for 10 officers and 602 enlisted soldiers for the Pigeon Service, both domestically and overseas. On 31 January 1918, just 2 additional officers and 81 enlisted personnel sailed for France, comprising the last pigeon-specific personnel sent overseas during the war.³⁹

In February, with personnel limited, Buscall and other senior Signal Corps officials began work on a plan to reorganize the Pigeon Service as an Army-level pigeon company. The company would maximize the use of existing personnel to support five corps, each composed of six divisions. The resulting company, Pigeon Company

No. 1, numbered 9 officers and 324 enlisted soldiers. With personnel authorized to staff ninety mobile lofts, each Army corps and

division headquarters could receive lofts and pigeonier support that could be tailored to the battlefield situation.⁴⁰ This plan received



American-designed mobile lofts

National Archives



The interior of a mobile loft

counterparts so American forces serving with Allied armies (and using British or French birds) carried their own AEF-issued pigeon equipment.⁴³

The mobile lofts provided the primary training for the birds assigned to them, because they could advance along with ground forces. At all lofts, pigeons would be stamped on the fifth or sixth primary flight feathers on the right wing with the letters "U.S." and numbers designating the bird's assigned loft. Prior to being sent out to the field, birds were separated by sex and marked just above the tail with blue ink for cock birds and red ink for hens. At the lofts, pigeoniers divided the birds into lots of twelve per field station, with each lot further subdivided into three sets of four. Soldiers could carry a maximum of four birds in a backpack-style infantry basket. The baskets also contained message blanks, carbon sheets, a pencil, food, message tubes, instructions, and a gas-proof cover. Two-bird baskets were also available for use, albeit designated for assault infantry, aviation units, or the tank corps.⁴⁴

To prepare the AEF's doughboys for this new battlefield resource, the Pigeon Service established a detailed training effort. A fixed instruction loft was erected at Gondrecourt in mid-May and stocked with forty pigeons on 3 June. American Pigeon Service personnel attended French and British training courses and then returned to teach AEF personnel assigned to the French and British sectors of the Western Front.⁴⁵ The AEF five-day course to train auxiliary pigeoniers covered such topics as the characteristics and proper handling

approval in Washington on 9 July in time for the AEF's first major engagements in the late summer.⁴¹

The next matter to address was supply and equipment. Under the command of 2d Lt. John K. Shawvan of Milwaukee, the Pigeon Service Supply Depot opened on 1 March in Langres to oversee the stocks of grain and an array of pigeon equipment required for field operations. The specialized pigeon field equipment placed into service with the American birds was predominantly French-designed. This equipment consisted of various message pads, loft cleaning tools, and baskets for transporting and holding pigeons in the trenches, aircraft, tanks, bicycles, and even inside submarines. Meanwhile, Shawvan prioritized acquiring suitable mobile lofts. The twelve American-designed mobile lofts brought over in late 1917 were assembled by February 1918. These initially were complemented by eighteen English mobile lofts, but the English lofts unfortunately proved to be cheaply constructed and were deemed unsatisfactory for both birds and pigeoniers.⁴²

Mobile lofts were the critical cornerstone of AEF pigeon operations, often serving at the battlefield. Each wooden loft was mounted on what was essentially an automobile chassis with leaf-spring suspension. The loft's interior consisted of three compartments. The first, rear-most compartment held feed bins and supplies while the forward two compartments housed the birds, separated into either old and young

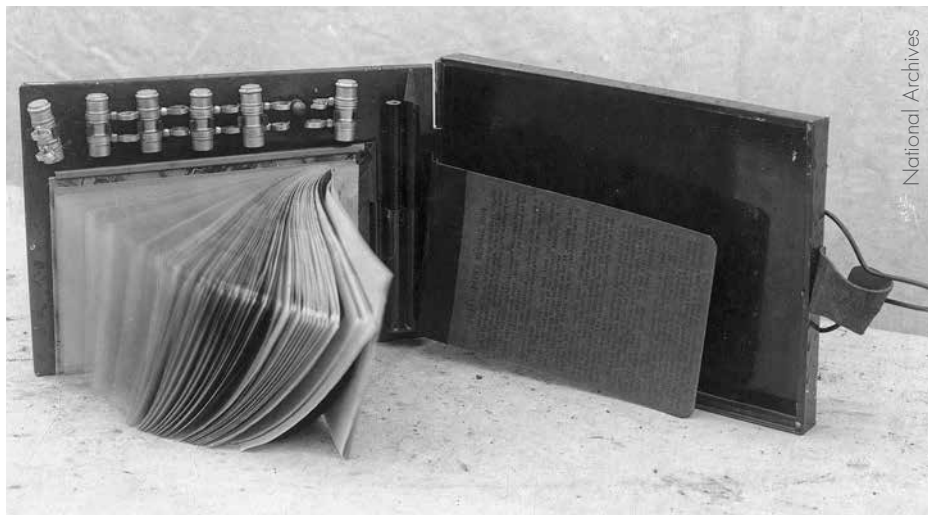
birds, or hens and cocks. Perches and nest boxes outfitted these compartments. Nest boxes were painted in varying colors of red, white, and blue to help identify nesting birds. A large water tank was mounted on the rear of the loft for siphon-system drinking troughs, and personnel were instructed to keep the lofts clean and in good order at all times. Mobile lofts also kept pigeon trench equipment and issued it directly to infantry regiments until August 1918, when the AEF issued such items directly to the infantry regiments. The reasoning for the change was to coordinate the AEF's Pigeon Service with that of the British and French



Identification stamps on a pigeon's wing

of homing pigeons, writing and attaching messages, feeding and watering, and the use of various pigeon equipment.⁴⁶ Students learned that the purpose of the birds is “to insure a quick liaison when other methods of liaison are too slow, unreliable or when they have broken down between the first line troops and the command.”⁴⁷

Restricting the pigeons’ food was arguably the most important concept for students to grasp. The primary method for training pigeons to home is to teach the birds that the loft is where food and mates are located. Soldiers were thus ordered not to feed pigeons in the field until they had been away from the loft for twenty-four hours, and then only with the food provided. As one lecturer explained, “The object in keeping the birds hunger during the day is to insure their quick entry into the loft in the event of their being liberated with a message.”⁴⁸ After forty-eight hours of confinement, however, the bird’s physical condition deteriorates, thereby limiting its



A Signal Corps carrier pigeon message book with carrying tubes

speed and potential desire to return to the home loft and making it more likely to seek a closer source of food or avian companionship. Outside of the training loft, individual mobile and stationary lofts also provided training in the field, with the added benefit

of better familiarizing the pigeoneers at the lofts with the doughboys at the front.⁴⁹

Pigeons would be used only when all other communication options had failed or were likely to fail. Once ferried by motorcycle dispatch to front-line troops, doughboys were instructed not to hold birds in the baskets for more than forty-eight hours. If a bird was required, the pigeogram would be concisely written in triplicate on thin tissue paper—one copy remained in the message book and one for the pigeon’s message tube, with an additional copy sent by a second bird as a backup for the original. Once the message was ready, it would be inserted into an aluminum message holder, which had metal clips that could be folded around the bird’s leg. After the pigeon entered the trap back at its loft, a handler would retrieve the message from the holder and relay its contents by telephone or courier to the appropriate headquarters.⁵⁰

The first field work for the Pigeon Service commenced in late January 1918. Initially, a French stationary loft at Corniéville supplied the U.S. 1st Division with French birds from the 2d Colonial Corps of the 1st French Army, before the American pigeoneers formally assumed loft operations on 30 January.⁵¹ Weeks later, Mobile Loft No. 1, carrying sixty American pigeons in the charge of Sgt. Henry J. Knoerschild of Buffalo, New York, arrived at the 1st Division headquarters at Ménil-la-Tour on 22 February. To the amazement of the French, Knoerschild soon had fifty-seven of his birds homing to the loft on the French front. The first American pigeons to enter action, however, were housed at the French stationary loft at Corniéville. Those pigeons, under the training of Sgt. Lewis Swanker



A soldier displays how birds are to be carried into battle at the II Army Corps Signal School, Châtillon-sur-Seine, France.



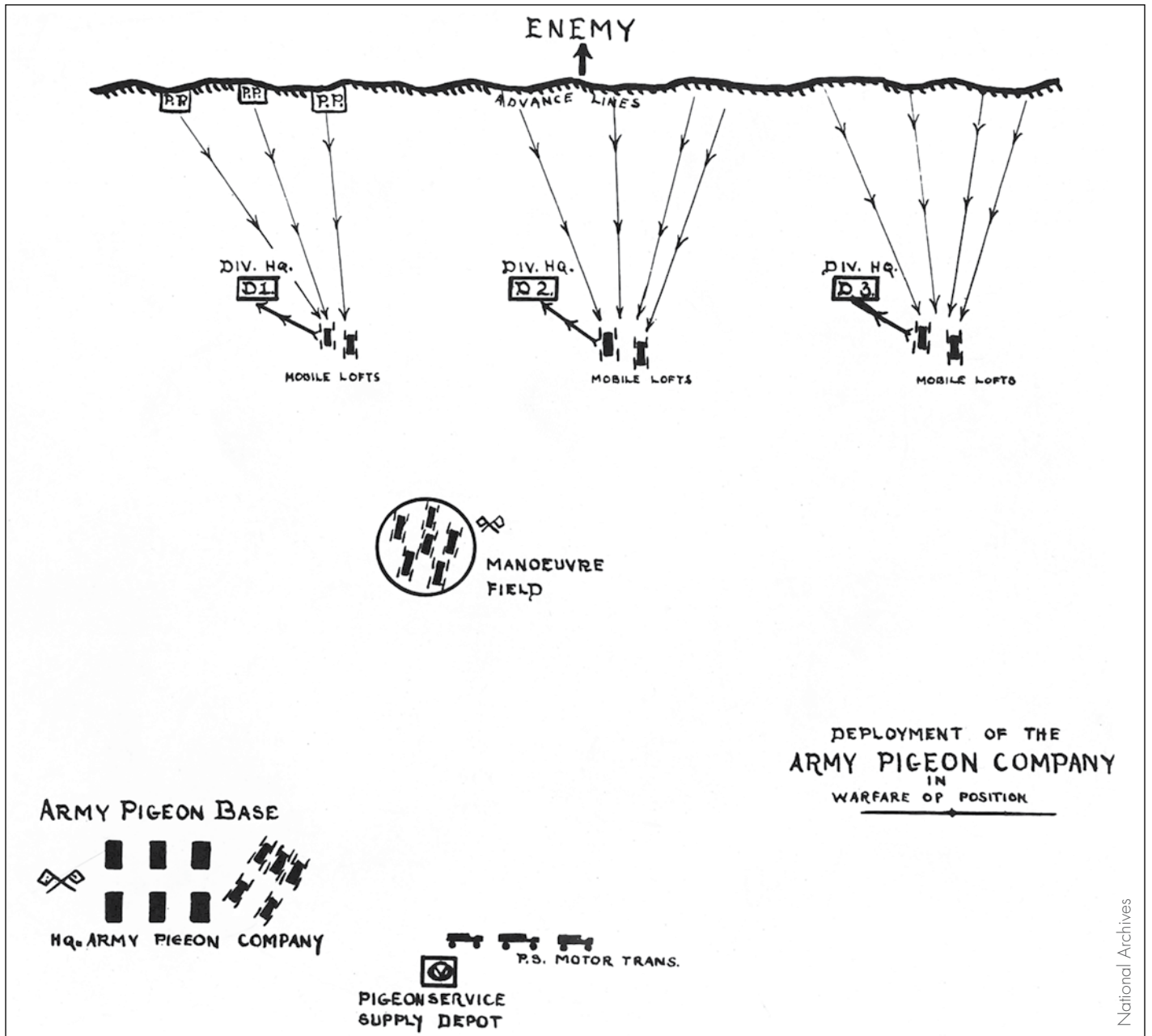
A motorcycle dispatch rider transports pigeons to the front.

of Lakewood, Ohio, entered the front lines at three trench posts with stations of four pigeons each. Two days later on 17 March, "Gunpowder," a black check hen bred by Herman Moser of Aurora, Illinois, delivered the first American pigeon message from the trenches of the front to the headquarters of the 26th Division at Boucq. Gunpowder was followed by a second pigeon, the black pied hen "Pretty Baby," carrying a carbon copy to ensure delivery in case the first bird went down.⁵² Thus, the American Pigeon Service entered the war. By the end of April, the AEF had fielded ten mobile lofts and one stationary loft, with 652 pigeons and available resources for a further twenty mobile lofts.⁵³

Within two months, this force had more than doubled. In July, the Pigeon Service numbered twenty-two mobile and five stationary lofts, fielding 1,635 birds. Buscall, in preparation for fighting in 1919, placed orders for 150 additional mobile lofts and 30 smaller portable lofts sufficient to equip 80 divisions. Buscall also needed more pigeoneers to manage the lofts, but he found that qualified personnel were in short supply. He wrote to Russel that the necessity for such "first class pigeon men cannot be too strongly emphasized. To successfully run the service it is necessary to have only men who are experienced and successful racing pigeon fanciers."⁵⁴ When American forces joined with French and Belgian troops

fighting at Château-Thierry in June and July, the Pigeon Service received orders to move eight mobile lofts to the Aisne-Marne Sector for liaison duty. American pigeons soon found their way to the doughboys at the front and suffered their first combat deaths from poison gas.⁵⁵ Despite the losses, these initial operations proved successful. From 29 August to 11 September, Mobile Loft No. 9 operated at the front, where it received 78 important messages and 148 test messages from its 72 birds, none of which failed to home.⁵⁶

Lessons from Château-Thierry and additional field training in August brought renewed emphasis on the proper use and care of pigeons as nonexpensible assets.



Sketch 2. Mobile pigeon lofts deployed with three divisions at H-Hour

On 6 August, Buscall issued guidance to all noncommissioned officers in charge of mobile or stationary lofts that, in the event they had to abandon the lofts, the men were to save as many pigeons as they were able to carry.⁵⁷ Lamentably, the initial field operations in July and August resulted in higher than anticipated losses of birds, often caused by improper handling. Unfamiliar with the special handling requirements, some soldiers treated pigeons as common equipment with a total disregard for the birds' health. Many birds were abandoned in the field; others suffered from muddy or broken feathers. These losses brought a stern rebuke to all I Army Corps division commanders from its chief of staff, Brig. Gen. Malin Craig.

He remarked how the recent mistreatment of the pigeons resulted in a "greatly reduced number of birds assigned" for use in each division. He thereafter instructed all division commanders to make sure that auxiliary pigeoners assigned to work with birds had thorough instruction in the proper treatment of homing pigeons.⁵⁸

The need for pigeon service increased in mid-September with the Battle of St. Mihiel and the first massed combat use of AEF pigeons. Prior to the battle, the AEF Tank Corps' 344th and 345th Battalions, under the command of Lt. Col.

George S. Patton Jr., had trained with

pigeons in simulated maneuvers and had decided to carry the birds into battle.⁵⁹ When the attacks commenced on 12 September, a total of 586 pigeons went into battle, 384 on the backs of doughboys in the trenches and 202 inside American tanks. Heavy mist and rain, together with muddy conditions in the trenches, hampered the birds' work, but most averaged respectable thirty-minute flights at speeds of approximately 37 miles per hour. One pigeon liberated from a tank at 0800 arrived back at its loft at





Soldiers from the 42d Division prepare pigeons to carry messages back from the front.

0820, and the message reached the IV Army Corps' chief signal officer by 0825. A total of sixty-four birds died in the operation, twenty-four of which were from the tank corps; their deaths primarily were the result of poor handling. Despite these losses, the surviving tanker birds safely delivered ninety important messages, resulting in an overall return rate of approximately 91 percent for the deployed pigeon force. Quite a few hero pigeons emerged from St. Mihiel, notably the American-bred birds "President Wilson" and "Lord Adelaide." Even birds that were wounded in the action, such as "The Mocker," who lost an eye, and "The Poilu," who suffered severe head lacerations, successfully delivered their respective messages.⁶⁰

No sooner had the fighting started to subside when word reached the Pigeon Service on 21 September to prepare for an

even larger operation. The Meuse-Argonne Offensive would become the bloodiest battle in American military history and it would be the culminating operation for the AEF's pigeons.⁶¹ Despite having only five days to reposition mobile lofts and train the birds to home, the Pigeon Service managed to place 14 mobile lofts and 442 pigeons with the U.S. First Army for the opening of battle on 26 September. On the eve of the offensive, six out of eight French lofts that had been promised to the American forces failed to materialize; only one mobile and one stationary loft provided partial compensation. These reductions forced 90 percent of the American pigeons to be at the front, leaving little time for the birds to rest at the loft before being sent back out. French pigeons from the two French lofts joined with the American birds, although some American command posts were left underequipped because French

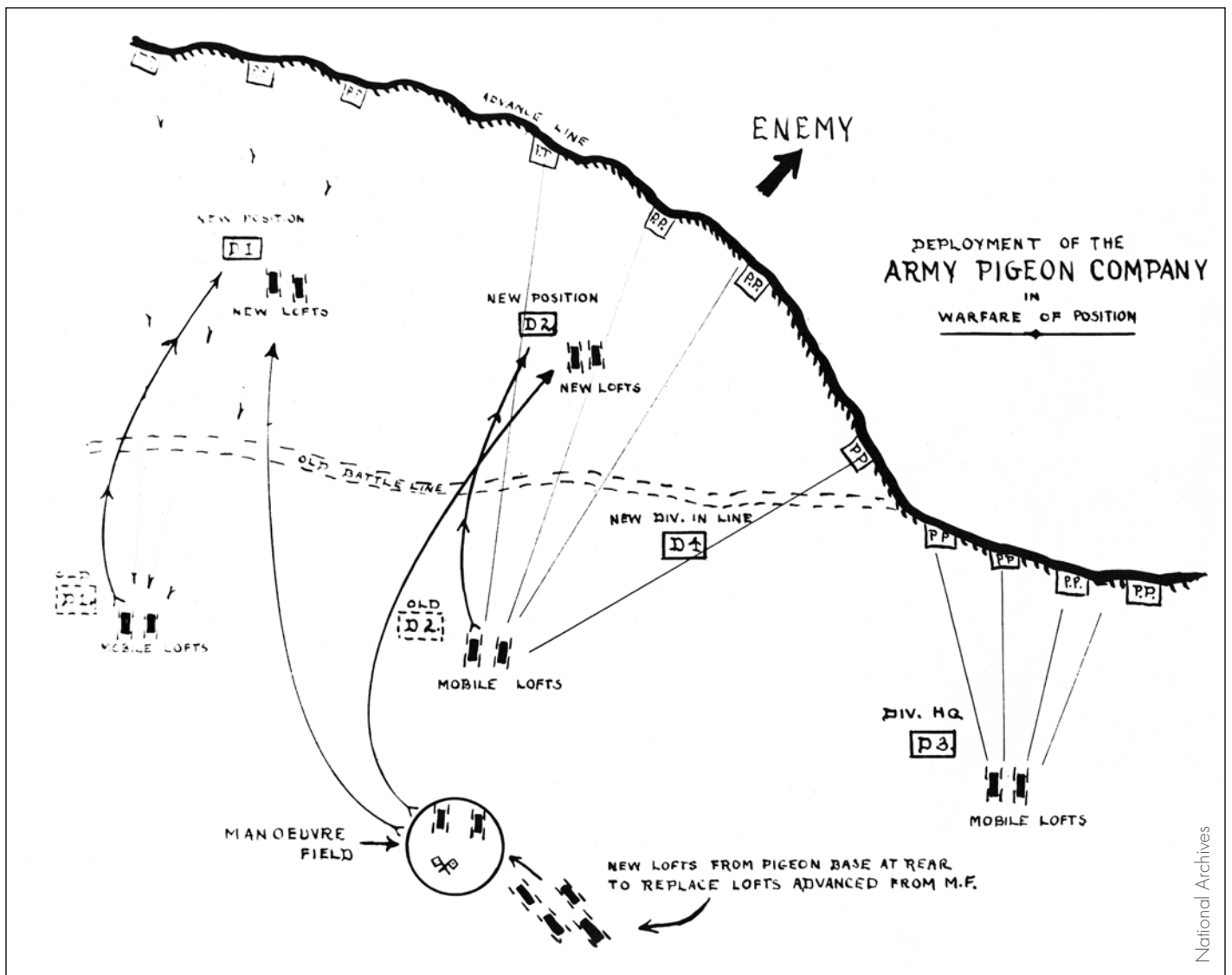
restrictions permitted only
30 percent of their
birds to

go to the front at any one time.⁶²

From 26 September to the Armistice of 11 November, the Pigeon Service faithfully provided communications to AEF forces in the field. Pigeons who were veterans of the fighting in Aisne-Marne and at St. Mihiel served again in the Meuse-Argonne. French and American lofts received 343 important messages from the field and a further 144 test messages from pigeons released at distances from five to twenty-five miles. Buscall estimated that some birds flew at speeds averaging 31 miles per hour in the face of severe and unfavorable weather. Buscall and his staff never compiled an official record of losses, but no pigeon carrying an important message is known to have gone astray during the offensive. Postwar, the Signal Corps estimated that no more than 10 percent of the AEF pigeons failed to return to their lofts.⁶³

The most prominent use of pigeons in the Meuse-Argonne involved the men of the 77th Division's 308th Infantry. Under the command of Maj. Charles W. Whittlesey and accompanied by two companies from the 306th Machine Gun Battalion, the





Sketch 3. Advance of mobile pigeon lofts after 24 hours

force advanced into the Argonne Forest with the objective of reaching the La Viergette-Moulin de Charlevaux-Binarville Road. Reaching the road on the afternoon of 2 October, Whittlesey's forces dug in to await further orders. Isolated from their flanking divisions, the men soon found themselves cut off by German forces, squeezed into a small pocket along the slope of the roadway, and able to communicate only through homing pigeons. Of the eight birds brought into the forest, seven successfully delivered messages from the stranded troops who would come to be known as the Lost Battalion.⁶⁴ The last bird, an English blue-checked pigeon named "Cher Ami," released on the afternoon of 4 October, brought an urgent message requesting a cessation of incoming friendly artillery. According to popular lore, Cher Ami arrived at its loft with the message tube hanging from the remains of its right leg

and a hole across its chest cutting through the breast bone, wounds most likely received from a shell burst or enemy bullet as the bird was escaping the pocket. The message provided the exact position of the trapped men, which facilitated the relief of the survivors on the night of 7 October.⁶⁵

Following the Armistice, the Pigeon Service immediately curtailed operations. All breeding ceased at the lofts at Fort de la Bonnelle, and loft attendants segregated the birds by sex to prevent unauthorized fraternization. Plans to construct additional breeding lofts at Wassy for the U.S. Second Army ceased. All but two mobile lofts assigned to the First Army were concentrated at Vaucouleurs and all of those with the Second Army concentrated at Vandoeuvre. Initially, the newly constituted U.S. Third Army did not request pigeon service until in position in the occupied territory, but beginning in

January 1919 it operated eight mobile lofts with 640 pigeons.⁶⁶

A HOMECOMING FOR AMERICA'S HERO PIGEONS

The human-animal bond, forged in battle, brought a change to the original plans for the disposition of the AEF pigeons. The Army initially informed Russel not to return any birds to the United States, but Russel disagreed. He wrote to Buscall on 3 December to share his opinion that the AEF should make "an exception in the case of the bird which brought in its message after being very seriously wounded." He directed for this bird to "be sent home in charge of an officer, surrounded by all luxury possible" and photographed with a large placard stating the nature of its achievement. Russel further asked Buscall for recommendations for the disposal of the remaining pigeons.⁶⁷ Buscall replied that approximately fifty pigeons, "all



Cher Ami

Third Army's 322d Field Signal Battalion to oversee the eight mobile lofts with the occupation force.⁷³

On 16 April 1919, the troop transport USS *Ohioan* docked at Hoboken, New Jersey. Along with men from the 40th Division and other units, John Carney and the twenty enlisted men of Pigeon Company No. 1 disembarked with their 174 feathered comrades.⁷⁴ Chief among the ship's celebrities was Cher Ami, the pigeon credited with saving the Lost Battalion, who had crossed the Atlantic for the first time in the comfort of Carney's cabin.⁷⁵ Dockside reporters interviewed Carney about the pigeons' heroics and thereafter began spreading Cher Ami's story across the nation, arguably making the pigeon the most famous bird in the world.⁷⁶ After various press events

of which specially distinguished themselves in combat liaison should be taken back to [the] U.S." as the birds "will be of great value in extolling Signal Corps work especially at the big shows held annually in the U.S."⁶⁸ On 15 December, a Signal Corps photographer visited the breeding lofts at Langres and photographed eight hero birds.⁶⁹ Before Christmas, Buscall again wrote Russel to recommend that six American hero pigeons and six captured German pigeons be sent to zoological parks in either Washington, D.C., or New York. He added instructions that when any of the Signal Corps birds died they should be properly mounted with the story of their achievements and kept at the Smithsonian Institution. Russel relayed these recommendations to Washington.⁷⁰

In mid-January 1919, Russel received authority from Pershing's headquarters to publicly auction off the remaining pigeons. Prior to the auction, Russel received a list with descriptions of special birds that were slated to return to United States, including 32 distinguished hero pigeons, 10 captured German pigeons, and 132 additional pigeons identified as breeders.⁷¹ The ensuing auction at the Pigeon Service breeding lofts at Langres on 12 February sold 2,049 birds for a total of 10,058 francs. Cognizant of civilian interest in the Pigeon Service personnel, Russel granted permission for the doughboys to bid on birds. As a result, some 800 additional AEF pigeon veterans came home to the United States for private use.⁷² General Headquarters, AEF, subsequently cut orders to return all Pigeon Service personnel to the United States, except for the thirty-two pigeoners who were transferred to the



Army carrier pigeons are exhibited at the Madison Square Garden Poultry Show in February 1918.

celebrating the pigeons' achievements in battle, the feathered heroes entered a special "veterans home" loft that was exhibited in Potomac Park in Washington, D.C, per General Pershing's orders. Officially titled the "Hall of Honor of the American Pigeon Service," the loft housed the honored birds who also received full pensions in feed. Although not required to work, the pigeons performed daily drill flights, weather permitting.⁷⁷ The remaining pigeons went to Signal Corps lofts in the United States, with breeding efforts consolidated at Camp Alfred Vail, New Jersey, in the Signal Corps Pigeon Breeding and Training Section.⁷⁸

Upon his return to the United States, David Buscall compiled a history of the Pigeon Service in the AEF. Drawing on his monthly reports, he outlined the establishment and operations of the service. In his brief concluding recommendations for the future, Buscall focused on personnel issues. He singled out a lack of "officers with sufficient technical knowledge of pigeons" and stated how less than a fourth of enlisted personnel were deemed suitable for pigeon work for similar reasons. Racing pigeon men, rather than pigeon fanciers, were essential for Signal Corps work. Rather pointedly, Buscall noted that "only two [Buscall and Carney] of the six officers detailed with the Pigeon Service up



National Archives

Four-week-old pigeons and recently laid eggs

to the time of the signing of the armistice, were racing pigeon men, the others were worse than useless for pigeon work." He concluded that the expertise of a few officers and enlisted men, combined with the stellar performances of American pigeons of "exceptional quality," proved to be the main reasons for the Pigeon Service's success.⁷⁹

Perhaps heeding Buscall's advice, the Signal Corps retained its Pigeon Service and maintained close relationships with civilian racing pigeon organizations until the disestablishment of the Army's pigeon program in 1957.⁸⁰ The hero birds of World War I made guest appearances at national conventions throughout the 1920s, and the Signal Corps entered its newest working pigeons in various exhibitions and races in the interwar period, winning a fair share of events. While participating in various civilian pigeon exhibitions and races, the Signal Corps recruited for the next generation of pigeoneers, seeking men with "pigeon knowledge" to train America's feathered Army messengers.⁸¹



National Archives

A soldier removes a message from the carrying tube of the pigeon Gunpowder.

Within a year of its "hatching," the Pigeon Service grew from a mere squeaker to a capable communication service. Even as an auxiliary or emergency line of communications, the pigeons proved reliable, with an average success rate over 90 percent and low loss rates when personnel were trained to handle the birds properly. Cooperation with the French and British armies yielded training, specialized equipment, and pigeons for breeding and field work, all of which enabled the AEF to stand up operations with considerable efficiency. Through the civil-military conduit of Buscall and Carney, thousands of high-quality birds

and a small, core group of talented citizen-soldiers allowed the AEF to field a pigeon force as capable as any other military in the field, ready and able to meet any requirement of the war and to serve the cause with honor.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author would like to thank the numerous colleagues at the National Museum of American History for their moral support, to Bryan Hockensmith, Cheryl Bratten, and Margaret McGarry for their comments and suggestions, and to the American Racing Pigeon Union, whose request for a museum tour launched my research into this topic.

Dr. Frank A. Blazich Jr. is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force and holds a doctorate in modern American history from the Ohio State University. Following his doctoral studies, Blazich served as the historian at the U.S. Navy Seabee Museum in Port Hueneme, California before moving to Washington, D.C., to serve as a historian in the History and Archives Division at the Naval History and Heritage Command. In January 2017, he assumed his current position as curator of modern military history at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History. His most recent book project, *An Honorable Place in American Air Power: Civil Air Patrol Coastal Patrol Operations, 1942-1943*, is slated for publication by Air University Press in late 2020.

NOTES

1. Memo, O. S. Albright for Ch Signal Ofcr, 4 Jan 1919, sub: Personal Historical Data, binder "Volume III, Copy No. IV," box 43, Rpts, Summs, Photographs, and Charts Relating to the History of the Signal Corps in Combat ("Historical File"), 1917-1919, Entry NM-92 2041, Records of the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF) - World War I (RG 120), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (NACP).

2. George C. Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services in the World War, 1917-1918* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976), pp. 96-98, 182-83.

3. Marshall, *Memoirs of My Services*, p. 184.

4. Bashford Dean, *Helmets and Body Armor in Modern Warfare* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1920), pp. 64-67.

5. Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in*

World War I (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998), p. 131; Dean, *Helmets*, pp. 193-94.

6. Rebecca Robbins Raines, *Getting the Message Through: A Branch History of the U.S. Army Signal Corps* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 2011), pp. 168-70, 188.

7. War Dept, Ofc Ch Signal Ofcr, "Instructions on the Use of Carrier Pigeons in War - U.S. Signal Corps," Confidential, Apr 1918, p. 1, box 502, Pigeon Service - HQ - Weekly Rpts, Entry NM-92 2051, World War I Organizational Records - Signal Corps, RG 120, NACP. Herein-after cited as "Pigeon Instructions."

8. "Pigeon Instructions," p. 2.

9. U.S. Congress, House, *War Department Annual Reports, 1919, Reports of The Chief Signal Officer*, 66th Cong., 2d sess., 1920, H. Doc. 426, p. 1218. 18 July 1917 is also listed as the date when the Signal Corps received a requisition for two officers and twelve men to begin the pigeon service (p. 909).

10. For a longer study of the military use of homing pigeons, see Jerome J. Pratt, *Courageous Couriers: Memoirs of a Pigeon Soldier* (Warrenton, Mo.: American Pigeon Journal Co., 1977), pp. 16-17; Frederick C. Lincoln, "The Military Use of the Homing Pigeon," *The Wilson Bulletin* 39, no. 2 (Jun 1927): 67-68; Andrew D. Blechman, *Pigeons: The Fascinating Saga of the World's Most Revered and Reviled Bird* (New York: Grove Press, 2006), pp. 11-12, 30-39.

11. William E. Birkhimer, *Memoir on the Use of Homing Pigeons for Military Purposes*, Signal Service Notes No. II, War Dept (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief Signal Officer, 1882), pp. 8-10; Raines, *Getting the Message Through*, p. 68.

12. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Homing Pigeons for Sea Service*, 55th Cong., 2d sess., 1898, S. Doc. 338; U.S. Congress, Senate, *Homing Pigeons*, 55th Cong., 2d sess., 18 Apr 1898, S. Doc. 241, pp. 3-4; *Cong. Rec.* 1898, 55, pt. 2, p. 6742; U.S. Congress, Senate, *A Bill for the Establishment of a Homing Pigeon Service*, S. 4857, 55th Cong., 2d sess., 7 Jul 1898, Congressional Record Index, Library of Congress; Laurence M. Burke, "The First Naval Aviators: Pigeons and Pigeoneers in the U.S. Navy" (paper presented at the 86th annual meeting of the Society for Military History, Columbus, Ohio, 10 May 2019).

13. "Big Homing Pigeon League Under Way: American Racing Union Elects Officers and Holds Successful Banquet," *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), 4 Nov 1910, p. 18.

14. "Washington Birds Enter Big Flight," *Washington Times*, 27 Jun 1909, p. 9; "Large Cash Prizes for Pigeon Races," *Evening Star*, 7 Dec 1910, p. 15; "Pigeon Racing is Their Sporting Fad," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 23 Apr 1911, p. 21.

15. Evan D. Cameron Jr., "The Development and Use of Homing Pigeons for Military Purposes," Signal Corps War Plans and Training Division, undated [ca. mid-1920s], folder "[311.91] Origin and History of Homing Pigeons," box 9, 311.91 Gen Folder. Vi 1/45-4/45 Thru 311.91 experiment 2-way pgns, Entry UD 1025, Rcds Relating to Army Pigeons, 1919-1948, Ofc Ch Signal Ofcr, Department of Defense (DoD), Department of the Army (DA), RG 111, NACP.

16. "Pigeons Cited for Bravery," *Boston Globe*, 30 Mar 1919, p. 52; "Lieut. Buscall in France Busy with Pigeon Camp," *Evening Star*, 27 Nov 1917, p. 5; "Cares for Army Pigeons," *Kansas City Times*, 26 Dec 1917, p. 14; Muster Roll of Officers and Enlisted Men of the U.S. Marine Corps, HQ, U.S. Marine Corps (USMC), Washington, D.C., 1-31 Aug 1917; Muster Roll of Officers, Noncommissioned Officers, Drummers, Trumpeters, and Privates of the U.S. Marine Corps, stationed at Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Washington, D.C., 1-30 Jun 1907, Ancestry.com.

17. Entry for "Buscall, David C.," Muster Roll of Officers and Enlisted Men of the U.S. Marine Corps, HQ, USMC, Washington, D.C., 1-31 Aug 1917, Ancestry.com.

18. "Saw Service in Two Wars," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 Aug 1901, p. 4; "Chicago Pigeon, Hero of Victory, to get Medal," *Chicago Tribune*, 17 Apr 1919, p. 1; "'Cher Ami,' Argonne Veteran, D.S.C. Winner, Chief Among Jack Carney's Bird Heroes, is Transport's Honor Guest," *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, 17 Apr 1919, p. 1; "Capt. Carney, War Veteran, Newspaperman, Dies at 68," *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, 5 Feb 1940, p. 10; U.S. Congress, House, *Reports of Chief Signal Officer*, p. 1218.

19. "Membership Over Hundred," *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, 21 Nov 1910, p. 9; "Big Homing Pigeon League Under Way," *Evening Star*, 4 Nov 1910, p. 18; "Pigeon Fanciers Organize Union," *Washington Herald* (Washington, D.C.), 3 Nov 1910, p. 12; "War Department Requests Pigeons from Pittsburgh," *Pittsburgh Daily Post*, 8 Jul 1917, p. 19; American Racing Pigeon Union, *AU Yearbook 2018* (Oklahoma City: American Racing Pigeon Union, 2018), p. 57.

20. "Pershing Asks for Racing Pigeons," *American Squab Journal* 6, no. 10 (Oct 1917): 314; "Thousands of American Pigeons to Carry Messages for Pershing," *Washington Post*, 8 Sep 1917, p. 4; "Army Orders," *Washington Post*, 6 Sep 1917, p. 6; 14 Sep 1917, p. 6; 18 Sep 1917, p. 6; 20 Sep 1917, p. 6; 22 Sep 1917, p. 6.

21. David C. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for December 1917," Exhibit No. 13 in Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, Monthly Rpt - Dec 1917, box 31, Ofc Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, 1917-1919, Monthly Rpts, Entry NM-92 2042, RG 120, NACP.

22. "U.S. Mobilizes Its Birds of War," *The Daily Notes* (Canonsburg, Pa.), 20 Sep 1917, p. 1; "Over 3,000 'Homing' Pigeons for Use in French War Zone," *Evening Star*, 25 Oct 1917, p. 17; "Homing Birds to France," *Baltimore Sun*, 12 Oct 1917, p. 5; "Pittsburghers Have Charge of Flock of Army Pigeons," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 27 Oct 1917, p. 5; "Pedigreed Pigeons Going to France," *Washington Post*, 28 Oct 1917, p. 3; Memo, F. R. Curtis and Alfred H. Osman, 25 Jun 1919, sub: Pertaining to the Return of Homing Pigeons from the A.E.F. to the U.S. After the World War, folder "000.7 Pigeon Publicity - Vol. II," box 1, 000.7 Pigeon Publicity Vol 1 thru 000.7 Pigeon Publicity Vol IV, Entry UD 1025, RG 111, NACP. It must be noted that the figure of 2,350 varies from 2,400 to 2,600 depending on the source. Buscall's December 1917 report to the Chief Signal Officer (note 21) lists 2,500 American birds on hand.

23. "History of the Pigeon Service, Signal Corps, American Expeditionary Forces," ch. 14, "History of the Pigeon Service," in U.S. Army Signal Corps, Chief Signal Officer of the Army, *History of the Signal Corps - American Expeditionary Forces*, vol. 7, Binder "Volume VI - Copy No. IV," box 44, "Historical File," 1917-1919, Entry NM-92 2041, Ch Signal Ofcr, RG 120, NACP. Hereinafter cited as "Pigeon History."

24. U.S. Congress, House, *Reports of Chief Signal Officer*, p. 909.

25. United States Army Transport Service, Passenger List for Homing Pigeon personnel, USS *Agamemnon*, 29 Oct 1917, Ancestry.com; David C. Buscall, "Report of Activities of Pigeon Service, Signal Corps, A.E.F. - From November 2nd 1917 to May 1919," folder "311.91 - AEF, Homing Pigeons - #2," box 128, 311.91 - Homing Pigeons, Entry NM-92 2040, Rcds of the Ch Signal Ofcr, Ch Signal Ofcr Correspondence, 1917-1919, RG 120, NACP. Hereinafter cited as Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report."

26. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for December 1917." The AEF Pigeon Service was detached from the Pigeon Service (also referred to as Section) in the United States. The latter was commanded by Maj. Frank J. Griffin, and the Pigeon Section's principal duties were "to provide personnel, pigeons, and equipment for training of all arms of the service, conduct this training at different camps and aeroplane stations, to coordinate pigeon activities with the other branches of the War Department, to procure personnel and equipment for the forces overseas and to answer all inquiries for information concerning pigeons and their training." U.S. Congress, House, *Reports of Chief Signal Officer*, pp. 1218-19.

27. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report."

28. "Pigeon History," p. 89.

29. United States Army Transport Service, Passenger List for Homing Pigeon personnel, USS *Henry R. Mallory*, 26 Nov 1917, Ancestry.com; Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report." See note 22 regarding the figure of 1,800 birds.

30. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for December 1917;" "Pigeon History," pp. 90-91.

31. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" "Pigeon History," pp. 91-93. Buscall formally assigned Carney his duties as being in charge of the breeding lofts, mobile lofts, and operations at the front on 21 March. See Memo, David C. Buscall, 21 Mar 1918, folder "Enroute from States to Langres," box 506, Entry NM-91 2052, RG 120, NACP.

32. "Winged Wireless Helps Sammies," *Evening Sun* (Baltimore), 15 Feb 1918, p. 3; United States Army Transport Service, Passenger List for Homing Pigeon personnel, USS *Agamemnon*, 29 Oct 1917, Ancestry.com; Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report."

33. Memo, David C. Buscall for Frederic J. Herrmann, 10 May 1918; Memo, Alfred H. Osman for C. V. Lawrence, 16 May 1918; Memo, C. V. Lawrence for Alfred H. Osman, 17 May 1918, sub: Movement of 600 Young Pigeons; Memo, Thomas P. Dudley for Frederic J. Herrmann, 19 May 1918, folder "Pigeons," box 507, Entry NM-91 2052, RG 120, NACP.

34. Monthly Rpt, Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, May 1918, Exhibit No. 10 - "Pigeon Division," box 33, Ofc Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, 1917-1919, Monthly Rpts, Entry NM-92 2042, RG 120, NACP.

35. Surviving records for pigeon transfers to mobile or stationary lofts records lists 465 English pigeons in operational use. Untitled red binder with pigeon transfer lists, box 505, NM-92 2051, RG 120, NACP.

36. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report."

37. "Pigeon Instructions," p. 4.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 5; *AU Yearbook 2018*, p. 63.

39. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for December 1917;" U.S. Congress, House, *Reports of Chief Signal Officer*, p. 923. This detachment consisted of one officer (2d Lt. John K. Shawvan) and ninety-nine enlisted men, who arrived in England on 16 February 1918. "Pigeon History," p. 91.

40. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" Terry M. Mays, "A Signal Company for the Birds," *Army Communicator* 12 (Summer 1987): 26, 29, fig. 3. Pigeon Company No. 1 used a total of seventy mobile lofts of American, English, and French design during the war.

41. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" "Pigeon History," pp. 93-94; Mays, "Signal Company for the Birds," p. 30n4; U.S. Congress, House, *Reports of Chief Signal Officer*, p. 936. Buscall's report lists 5 July as the date of authorization,

while the Chief Signal Officer report lists 9 July for the authorization. Originally, the Signal Corps intended to stand up two pigeon companies, both authorized on 9 July 1918, but the Armistice shelved this idea. See Memo, George S. Gibbs for Avery D. Andrews, 30 Oct 1918, sub: Pigeon Organization, Signal Corps, folder "Second Army - Pigeon Company No. 2, S.C.," box 506, Entry NM-92 2051, RG 120, NACP.

42. David C. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for January 1918," Exhibit No. 13 in Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, Monthly Rpt - Jan 1918, box 32, Ofc Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, 1917-1919, Monthly Rpts, Entry NM-92 2042, RG 120, NACP; Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" "Pigeon History," pp. 91-94; John K. Shawvan, "Lecture on the Military Use of Homing Pigeons in the Signal Corps U.S. Army," [ca 1928], folder "000.7 Pigeon Publicity Vol. 5," box 2, 000.7 Pigeon Publicity Vol V thru 000.7 Pigeon Publicity folder iii 9/44-5/45, Entry UD 1025, RG 111, NACP. Hereinafter cited as Shawvan, "Pigeon Lecture."

43. Shawvan, "Pigeon Lecture;" "Pigeon Instructions," pp. 12-19; Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report."

44. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" "Pigeon Instructions," pp. 12-19, 25-30; Pigeon Company Number One, Signal Corps, AEF, France, Company Order No. 28, "U.S. On Wing," 20 Sep 1918, box 506, Entry NM-92 2051, RG 120, NACP.

45. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" David C. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for August 1918," Exhibit No. 10 in Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, Monthly Rpt - Aug 1918, box 34, Ofc Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, 1917-1919, Monthly Rpts, Entry NM-92 2042, RG 120, NACP.

46. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" "Use of Homing Pigeons for Military Purposes," undated, ca. May 1918, folder "Auxiliary Pigeon Men," box 506, Entry NM-92 2040, Pigeon Service - HQ Property Accounts and Misc. Corresp Arranged by Subj., A-MI, RG 120, NACP; U.S. Congress, House, *Reports of Chief Signal Officer*, pp. 977-78.

47. Army Signal Schs, AEF, France, "Lecture No. 41 - Military Use of Pigeons," folder "Lectures," box 506, Entry NM-91 2051, RG 120, NACP.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*; Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report."

50. "Use of Homing Pigeons for Military Purposes," attached to Memo, Ofcr in Charge, Homing Pigeon Service, AEF for Commandant, Army Signal Schs, AEF, 15 May 1918, sub: Instruction of Auxiliary Pigeon Men; Memo, Malin Craig, HQ I Army Corps, AEF, 25 Aug 1918; sub: Lecture No. 41 - Military Use of Pigeons, box 506, Entry NM-92 2051, RG 120;

Shawvan, "Pigeon Lecture;" "Pigeon Instructions," pp. 31–34.

51. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for January 1918."

52. "Pigeon History," pp. 90–91; J. W. Greenaway, *With the Colors from Aurora, Illinois, U.S.A., 1917, 1918, 1919* (Aurora, Ill.: Eugene Smith Co., 1920), pp. 212–13. Pretty Baby was later a victim of fratricide, mistaken as a German homing pigeon. In his January 1918 report of the Pigeon Service, Buscall recorded that the pigeon service for the 1st Division was placed under the charge of Sgt. Louis Serrurier of Holyoke, Massachusetts. Monthly Rpt, Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, Jan 1918, Exhibit No. 13 – "Pigeon Service Division," box 32, Ofc Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, 1917–1919, Monthly Rpts, Entry NM-92 2042, RG 120, NACP.

53. David C. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for April 1918," Exhibit No. 11 in Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, Monthly Rpt – Apr 1918, box 32, Ofc Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, 1917–1919, Monthly Rpts, Entry NM-92 2042, RG 120, NACP.

54. David C. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for July 1918," Exhibit No. 10 in Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, Monthly Rpt – Jul 1918, box 33, Ofc Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, 1917–1919, Monthly Rpts, Entry NM-92 2042, RG 120, NACP.

55. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" "Pigeon History," pp. 94–95; Document, "List of Managers and Assistants with Lofts," folder "Location – Mobile and Stationary Lofts," box 506, Entry NM-92 2051; Document, "Location of Lofts Sept. 8, 1918;" Document, "Location of Lofts Sept. 13 1918;" Document, "Location of Lofts Sept. 19, 1918," box 502, Entry NM-92 2051, RG 120, NACP; "Homing Pigeons Used by the Signal Corps During the World War," *Signal Corps Bulletin* 30 (Jun 1925), folder "000.7 Pigeon Publicity Vol. II," box 1, Entry UD 1025, RG 111, NACP.

56. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" United States Army Training Manual No. 32, *The Pigeonier – Students Manual for All Arms* (Washington, D.C.: Government Publishing Office, 1925), p. 104.

57. David C. Buscall, "Instructions for N.C.O. in Charge of Mobile, Portable and Fixed Pigeon Lofts," 6 Aug 1918, folder "Agreement – French, British, American Pigeon Services," box 506, Entry NM-92 2051, RG 120, NACP.

58. Memo, Malin Craig for I Army Corps, 25 Aug 1918, sub: Instructions on the Care of Pigeons, folder "Miscellaneous," box 506, Entry NM-91 2051, RG 120, NACP.

59. Memo, John K. Shawvan for Asst Ch Signal Ofcr, Gen HQ, AEF, 7 Sep 1918, sub: Pigeon Equipment, Light Tanks, box 505, Entry NM-92 2051; Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for August 1918."

60. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" "Pigeon History," pp. 95–96; "Homing Pigeons Used by the Signal Corps During the World War;" Memo, Charles E. Ries for Edgar A. Russel, 3 Feb 1918, sub: Description of Pigeons, folder "311.91 – AEF Homing Pigeons – Folder #2," box 128, Entry NM-92 2040, RG 120, NACP; David C. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for September 1918," Exhibit No. 10 in Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, Monthly Rpt – Sep 1918, box 34, Ofc Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, 1917–1919, Monthly Rpts, Entry NM-92 2042, RG 120, NACP.

61. Robert H. Ferrell, *America's Deadliest Battle: Meuse-Argonne, 1918* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2007).

62. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" "Pigeon History," pp. 97–99; "Homing Pigeons Used by the Signal Corps During the World War;" David C. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for October 1918," Exhibit No. 10 in Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, Monthly Rpt – Oct 1918, box 35, Ofc Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, 1917–1919, Monthly Rpts, Entry NM-92 2042, RG 120, NACP.

63. David C. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for October 1918;" "Homing Pigeons Used by the Signal Corps During the World War."

64. One pigeon escaped from the hands of the pigeonier before a message could be attached.

65. Alan D. Gaff, *Blood in the Argonne: The "Lost Battalion" of World War I* (Norman: Oklahoma University Press, 2005), pp. 116–251; Louis Wardlaw Miles, *History of the 30th Infantry, 1917–1919* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1927), pp. 148–52; Robert J. Laplander, *Finding the Lost Battalion: Beyond the Rumors, Myths, and Legends of America's Famous WWI Epic* (Printed by author, Lulu Press, 2006), pp. 249–76, 353–56; Memo, Charles W. Whittlesey for Cromwell Stacey, 9 Oct 1918, sub: Report of 1st and 2nd B'nds. 308th Infy from Oct 2nd to Oct. 8th 1918, folder "77th Div. 308th Inf. 1st Bn [Rpt of Opns] [Lost Battalion] 277-33.6," box 37, Rcd of Combat Divs, 1918–1919, 77th Div, Historical – 308th Inf Reg – 11.4 to 308th Inf Reg – 50, Entry NM 1241; pigeon message from Detroit Red [Charles W. Whittlesey], 4 Oct 1918, folder "77th Div. 308th Inf. Field Messages 1918 [1 of 3] 277-32.16," box 37, Rcds of Combat Divs, 1918–1919, 77th Div, Historical – 308th Inf Reg – 11.4 to 50, Entry NM-91 1241, RG120, NACP; Buscall, "Pigeon Service Division: Report for October 1918;" Thomas M. Johnson, "Written Under Fire: The Lost Battalion is Decimated by its Own Artillery in Dramatic Climax of Private Jim Larney's War Diary," *Hartford Courant* (Conn.), 3 Oct 1937, p. 53; "Rescue Pigeon's Keeper Hears Story on W-G-N," *Chicago Tribune*, 13 Mar 1932, p. 38;

"Pigeon Messenger of Lost Battalion Home with D.S.C.," *New York Tribune*, 17 Apr 1919, p. 5.

66. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" Henry G. Gale, "Special Service Division: Report for November 1918," Exhibit No. 8 in Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, Monthly Rpt – Nov 1918, box 36, Ofc Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, 1917–1919, Monthly Reports, Entry NM-92 2042; David C. Buscall, "Officer in Charge, Pigeon Service – Report for December 1918," Exhibit No. 10 in Ch Signal Ofcr, AEF, Monthly Rpt – December 1918, box 38, Entry NM-92 2042, RG 120, NACP.

67. Memo, Edgar Russel via Henry G. Gale for David Buscall, 3 Dec 1918, sub: Disposal of Pigeons, folder "311.91 – AEF, Homing Pigeons – Folder #2," box 128, Entry NM-92 2040, RG 120, NACP.

68. Telg, U.S. Army Signal Corps, David Buscall for Edgar Russel, 7 Dec 1918, box 503, Entry NM-92 2040, RG 120, NACP.

69. The hero pigeons photographed included "Big Tom" [Cher Ami], "President Wilson," "The Mockler," "The Poilu," "Kaja Boy," "Blanchette," "Petite Rosette," and "Lord Adelaide" [Cuisy Bill].

70. Memo, David C. Buscall for Edgar Russel, 21 Dec 1918, sub: Disposition of Wounded and Captured Messenger Pigeons; Memo, Edgar Russel for George O. Squier, 28 Dec 1918, sub: Disposition of Wounded and Captured Messenger Pigeons, folder "311.91 – AEF, Homing Pigeons – Folder #2," box 128, Entry NM-92 2040, RG 120, NACP.

71. Memo, Charles E. Ries for Edgar A. Russel, 3 Feb 1919, sub: Description of Pigeons.

72. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" Document, "Auction Sale of Racing Pigeons," undated, folder "Auction," box 508, Entry NM-92 2051, RG 120, NACP.

73. Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report;" U.S. Congress, House, *Reports of Chief Signal Officer*, p. 1387.

74. Memo, Curtis and Osman, 25 Jun 1919, sub: Pertaining to the Return of Homing Pigeons from the A.E.F. to the U.S. After the World War; "Carney, John L.," Passenger List of Organizations, Transport *Ohioan*, 4 Apr 1919, Ancestry.com; "Kockler, Ernest P.," List of Military Personnel Returning to the United States, Transport *Pastores*, 14 Mar 1919, Ancestry.com; "Troops at Sea Bound Home are Announced at Capital," *Reno Gazette-Journal* (Nev.), 8 Apr 1919, p. 1; "77th Soon to Return," *Baltimore Sun*, 9 Apr 1919, p. 3.

75. "Chicago Pigeon, Hero of Victory, to Get Medal," p. 1; "Cher Ami Home Wearing Scars and the D.S.C.," *San Antonio Evening News*, 17 Apr 1919, p. 7; "Captain Carney Brings Home

His Pigeon 'Cher Ami,'" *Pittsburgh Post*, 3 May 1919, p. 3.

76. Gaff, *Blood in the Argonne*, p. 264.

77. "To Pension War Homers: Veterans' Home Open to Hero Birds that Helped to Defeat Boches," *The News Journal* (Wilmington, Del.), 3 Jun 1919, p. 8; H. E. C. Bryant, "Pigeon Heroes to be Honored," *The Charlotte Observer*, 16 Apr 1919, p. 9; "Wounded Pigeon Which Got War Cross for Carrying Messagee [sic] from 'Lost Battalion,'" *Wilmington Morning News* (Del.), 1 May 1919, p. 2.

78. 78 Raines, *Getting the Message Through*, p. 222; Historical Ofc, Ofc Dep Ch of Staff for Operations and Plans, U.S. Army CEOMC Life Cycle Management Command, *A History of Army Communications and Electronics at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, 1917-2007* (Fort Monmouth,

N.J.: Government Printing Office, 2008), p. 6. Two additional groups of breeding birds arrived in the United States on 17 July 1919 (300 breeders and 22 captured German birds) and 19 August 1919 (300 breeders purchased from the British Army Pigeon Service). Memo, Curtis and Osman, 25 Jun 1919, sub: Pertaining to the Return of Homing Pigeons from the A.E.F. to the U.S. After the World War; Cameron, "Development and Use of Homing Pigeons for Military Purposes."

79. 79 Buscall, "Pigeon Service Report."

80. 80 Memo, J. D. O'Connell for Commanding General, Fort Monmouth, N. J., 30 Nov 1956, sub: "Discontinuance of Pigeon Breeding and Training Facilities," box 10, Documents and other Paper Related Materials Related to Pigeons, U.S. Army Communications - Electronics Command Historical Office, Aberdeen

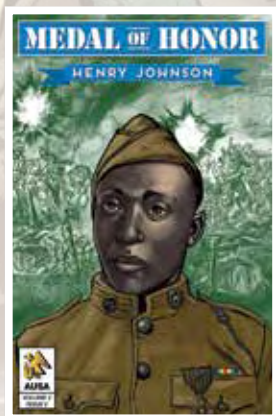
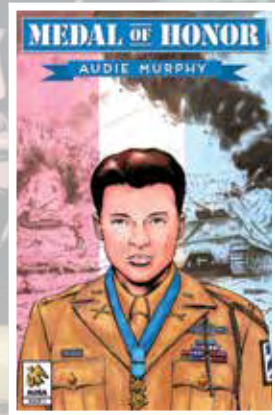
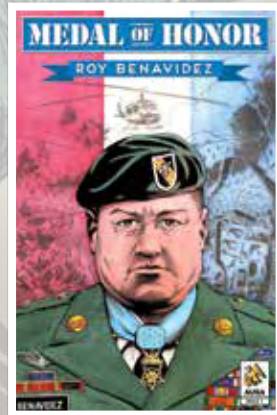
Proving Grounds, Md.; Jack Raymond, "Army's Pigeons to Turn in Wings," *New York Times*, 5 Dec 1956, p. 1; "15 Pigeon Heroes to Go to New Roosts; Army Closing Their Monmouth Center," *New York Times*, 7 Apr 1957, p. 120.

81. 81 Raines, *Getting the Message Through*, p. 222; Frank H. Hollmann, "First National Pigeon Show a Great Success," *American Squab Journal* 9, no. 2 (Feb 1920): 52; Edwin Teale, "Mile-a-Minute Pigeons," *Popular Science Weekly* (Jun 1936); Carter W. Clarke, "Signal Corps Pigeons," *The Military Engineer* 25, no. 140 (Mar-Apr 1933): 133-38; War Department, Ofc Ch Signal Ofcr, *The Signal Corps Bulletin, January-February 1932* (Washington, D.C.: Government Publishing Office, 1932), p. 41.



MEDAL OF HONOR

GRAPHIC NOVELS



Visit <https://www.USA.org/medal-honor-graphic-novels>