

## Budgetary Appropriations For Army Pigeons 1921

Pigeons played an important role in Army Communications during World Wars I and II, and in the Korean War. The Pigeon Program was a major part of Fort Monmouth Signal Corps operations from 1919, just after WW I, until its deactivation in 1957. There was even consideration given to reactivating the program during the Vietnam War.

Pigeons played a vital role in communications, with some birds attaining “hero” status for carrying out their tasks. One such bird was “Mocker,” with an eye destroyed by a shell fragment and his head a mass of clotted blood, Mocker homed “in splendid time” from the vicinity of Beaumont, France on 12 September 1918 with a message giving the exact location of certain enemy heavy artillery batteries. American artillery silenced the enemy guns, saving countless lives. The success of courier pigeons in war prompted the Army to perpetuate the service after the Armistice.

Of course perpetuation of the program had associated dollar costs. The need for money meant there were budgets, budget requests, and appropriations. Recently, CECOM Historians discovered a 1921 New York Times (NYT) article that discusses pigeon appropriations at that time.

The article which begins “Army pigeons eat well”, states that the House of Representatives had given the Army an allowance of \$5,000 to feed its pigeons. However, the Chief Signal Officer, MG George Owen Squier, was contesting that allowance, stating it was not enough, General Squier had appealed to the Senate Military Affairs Committee to override this appropriation, and give “his feathered personnel a larger appropriation.”

GEN Squire was seeking a \$35,000 appropriation to “keep and train the birds.” He defended this appropriation because the birds were an essential part of the Army Air Service. He also noted that many of the birds had heroic war records, and that “others had achieved distinction since they figured in the Canadian balloon trip of Lieutenants Farrell, Kloor, and Hinton.” The balloon trip was a failed balloon flight that had been launched in the Canadian wilds in the winter.