

## Pigeons as Pure 'GI' Soldiers

The Army's Signal Corps used pigeons for communications from WWI, and into the Korean War; to this end, the Pigeon Service was active at Fort Monmouth until its discontinuance in 1957. In 1943, an article titled "Even Pigeons Are Pure 'GI' Soldiers" appeared in *The Signal Corps Message*.

The article starts with an explanation that a lot had been written about Signal Corps pigeons, their training, capability to fly long distances, and the vital role in the War, but "usually overlooked is the fact that a pigeon's life is all Army.

Blogs on this site have previously talked about the 828<sup>th</sup> Signal Pigeon Replacement Company. At this point in time, October 1943, the Company was stationed at Camp Edison, an outpost to Fort Monmouth that was a former National Guard Encampment located near Sea Girt, NJ. It had been leased by the Signal Corps for a training center.

The pigeons Army life at Camp Edison included the "bugaloo" known as reveille. As noted, like Soldiers, pigeons were divided into platoons. They also had an "all-present-or accounted-for check" each morning. Birds that failed to return to their loft were reported as AWOL just as a Soldier that missed reveille would be. Pigeons also had "sick call" and a sick pigeon would be removed from quarters and sent to the veterinarian.

Stray birds that would appear in the company area, Army or civilian, would be placed in the AWOL loft until it could be returned to the proper platoon or its owner. Pigeons also wore "dog tags", a small leg band, with "USA" and the pigeon's serial number on it. They had a service record, a life history of its flights, unusual speed, age, and general performance while in service. Calisthenics and close order drill included two exercise periods a day when the pigeon was released from its loft and allowed to fly in the area; they also received combat training. The daily routine also included feeding, cleaning, and inspecting the birds.

Young pigeons began training at one-month of age and were ready for action by their second birthday; they were retired from active service at age four. Discharged pigeons did their part on the production line; they were mated to produce offspring "capable of carrying on the heritage of their parents."

Human members of the 828<sup>th</sup> qualified by having experience with pigeons in civilian life; they operated in platoons and each group had its own clerks, pigeoneers, drivers, and veterinarian. Stationed at Camp Edison, they would be moved into the field for training. The 828<sup>th</sup> represented officers from all branches of service; it had been activated at Fort Meade, MD earlier in the year, it was commanded by Major Joseph F. Spears.

The photographs are scenes from the 828<sup>th</sup> Signal Replacement Center while located at Fort Meade, MD.