

Pigeons Set War Records

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 1944, an article titled "Pigeons Set War Records: all Messages Elude Foe" appeared in the Signal Corps Message.

In a quote by a member of the 828th Signal Pigeon Co., "one hundred percent of all messages sent by pigeons in the African, Sicilian and Italian Campaigns were delivered in record time." The 828th was stationed at "Camp Wood," as an outpost operation to Fort Monmouth and is currently operated as the Charles Wood Area. Lt William Praeter, who is quoted in the article, had recently returned from the European-African theatre, and at the time of the interview was stationed at Camp Wood; by the time the article was published, Praeter had been transferred to Philadelphia, as the Assistant to the Chief for the "Army Pigeon Service."

Earlier in the War, Lt Praeter's unit had shipped out (November 1942) to Casablanca, French Morocco, North Africa. Due to an accident when landing, equipment was limited. However, pigeon lofts were set up immediately and communication with pigeon was quickly established. In a little over a week, efficient pigeon service was available, and pigeon communication was provided continuously during mobile maneuvers of the advancing forces.

When the theatre moved, there was radio silence, despite these resulting radio downtimes constant communications were maintained, thank you to the pigeons. As the article states, "many times this entailed flying over long water hazards." With the invasion of Italy, again, pigeons supplied the only means of communication "until long after beachheads had been established. The writer points out that pigeons were still reliable as a means of communication "from the front to Army headquarters."

Lt Praeter mentions a pigeon named "Yank" that carried a secret message to report the fall of Gafsa; Yank flew 90 miles in 110 minutes, to deliver the message over two hours before any other agency got through. As noted, in several instances, birds carrying messages flew 60 to 80 miles, at rates of less than a mile a minute.

Because of the pigeons efficiency, the article states that this service was so important that the original detachment was enlarged to meet the great demand for pigeon communication, and that "General Patton's SOP notes that a duplicate of all important messages be transmitted by pigeon, to ensure safety and rapidity in delivery."

Maj Otto Meyer, Director of the Army Pigeon Service complimented the 828th for their efficiency and training.