

War Era Story Project 2012

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Age: 87

After graduation from high school, I was drafted into the Army on July 15, 1943. After my basic training, I was originally designated to be a tailgunner on a bomber. Because of my hobby of raising racing homing pigeons, I was reassigned (top priority) to the U.S. Signal Pigeon Corps. When overseas I was placed on Detached Service to the 9th Army - 29th and 102nd Infantry Division to supply homing pigeons for frontline combat communications.

Communications in wartime are vital not only to have full coordination of one's own forces, but also obtaining the conditions of the enemy. There have been great improvements in electronic systems of communication, but there still remain flaws of not operating properly. When that happens, locations can be intercepted. The racing homing pigeons have not only filled a 99% completion rate of sent messages, but have done it with secrecy.

To prove their value on all campaign fronts the racing homing pigeon received praise from the commanding officers for their outstanding performance and value in obtaining victory. Thousands of lives were saved in land and sea rescue operations. During the Nazi occupation of Europe, valuable information was obtained by Allied racing homing pigeons that were dropped by parachute in special containers and released by partisans to fly back to England. This information concerning Nazi troop strength, factory locations, etc., made the invasion of Nazi Germany possible.

Frontline conditions showing the locations of enemy artillery where pigeons were released from reconnaissance planes saved the lives of troops. The lives of 1,000 British troops were saved by a message from a pigeon named "G.I. Joe." The troops captured a German-occupied Italian town ahead of schedule. Not knowing this, our allied bombers were scheduled to annihilate the town. The British troops were saved by minutes by pigeon G.I. Joe delivering this important message. G.I. Joe delivered this 25-mile message in 25 minutes. For this, he was awarded the Dickens Medal of Honor.

Victory in the Burma campaign was attributed to information received by pigeons that were parachuted deep into Japanese territory. The secret launching location of the Nazi V-2 missiles was destroyed by a message delivered by a pigeon. The life of the U.S. commander General George Patton was saved by a message delivered by a pigeon, averting a Nazi ambush. The very first information of the Nazi surrender was by a pigeon released by Nazi General Von Model.

Besides being under constant German shellfire and combat conditions, there were a couple of situations where luck played a part. We were behind the lines in German territory and entered a small German farm village in a Jeep. We rounded a corner building and came face to face with about 20 German

troops. They were all flirting with a young German girl and had their rifles stacked about 35 feet away. That beautiful blond German girl saved our lives.

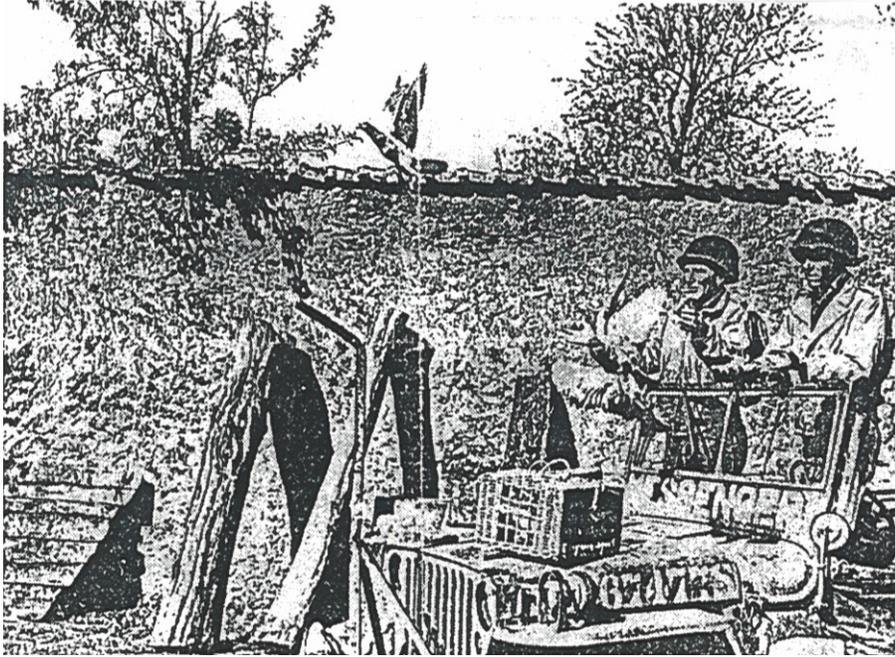
Another time, we had readjusted the release pins on a half dozen hand grenades because they were easier to pull, and placed them in a compartment of the Jeep. Luckily when we checked them we found out that the release pins were only 1/4 inch from being jostled loose and being activated.

At the end of World War II the US Signal Pigeon Corps consisted of 70,000 pigeons and 3,000 enlisted pigeoneers in 13 companies. The Theaters of Operations were European, Italian, African, Pacific and Burma.

The fine quality pigeons that were supplied by the United States Racing Pigeon fanciers attributed to the outstanding communication feats. At present, the United States Signal Corps is dependent on the racing pigeon fanciers to supply the pigeons for National Security.



Exercising pigeons from an Army Portable Combat Loft, designed to be transported into a trailer for relocation.



Signal Corps Pioneers Sgt. Donald Kendall and PFC Roman J. Oleslo releasing Army messenger pigeons.
4/20/45, 278th Signal Pigeon Company, 2nd Armored Division, U.S. Ninth Army, Magdeburg, Germany