

by Henk van Limpt-De Prut

# The Janssen Brothers of Arendonk, Belgium

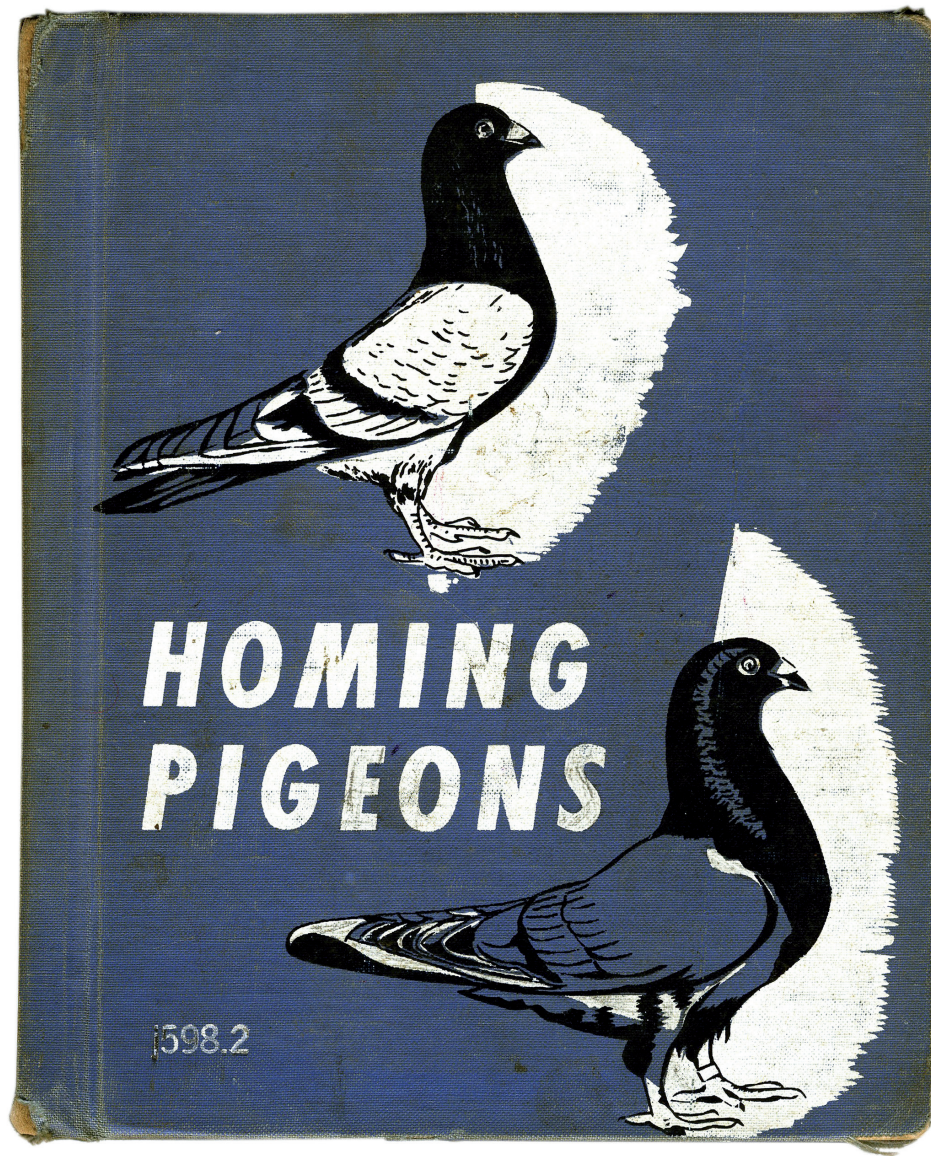


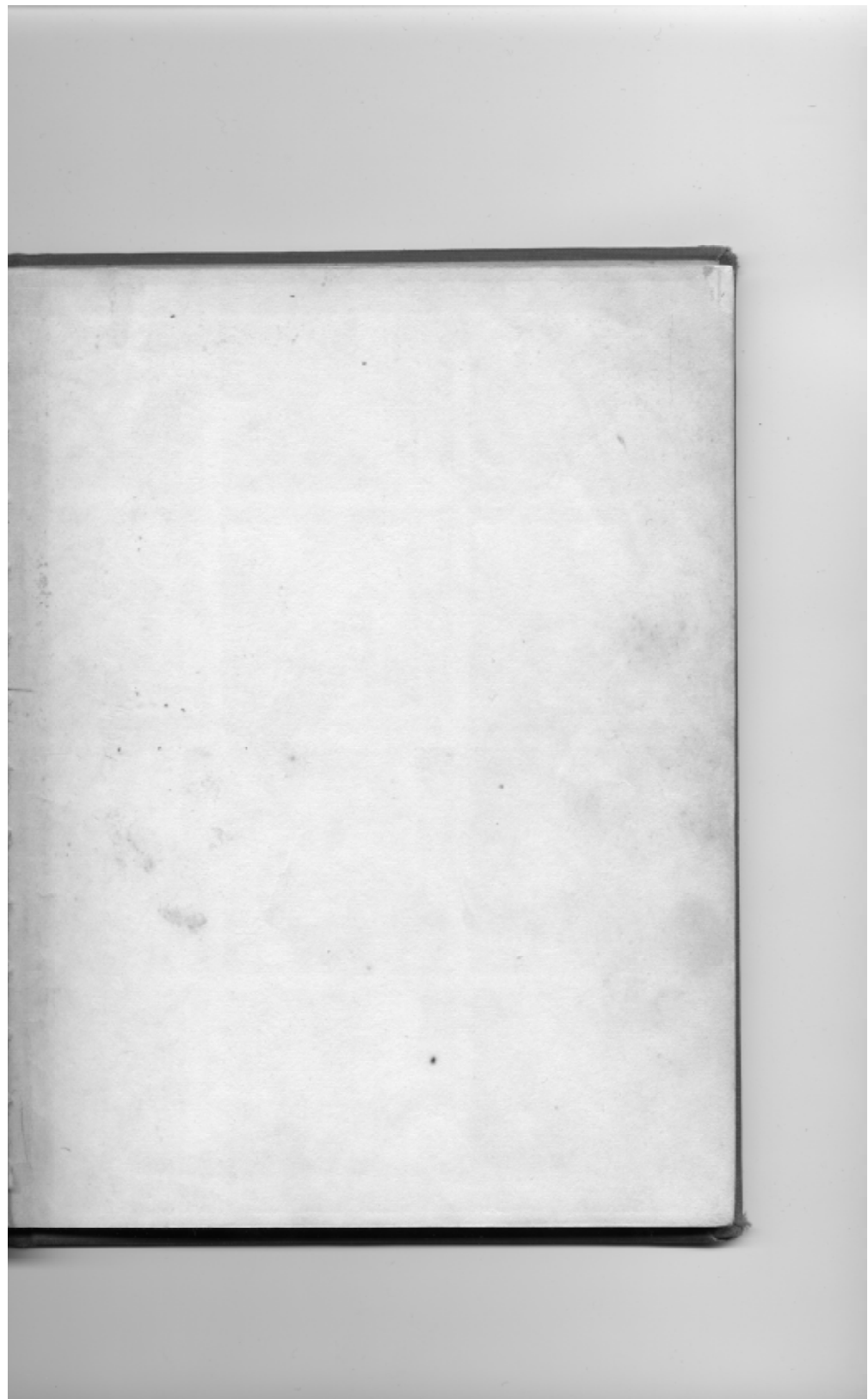
by J.D. Hayhurst O.B.E.

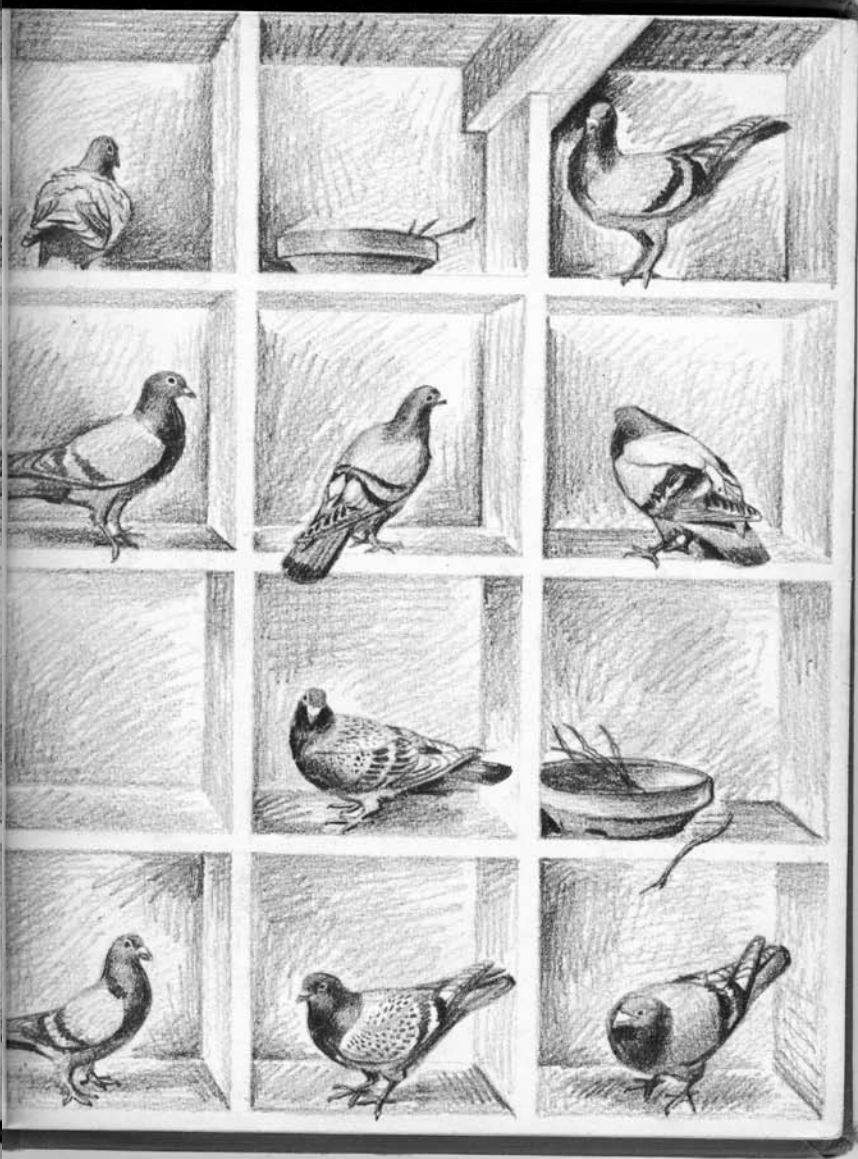
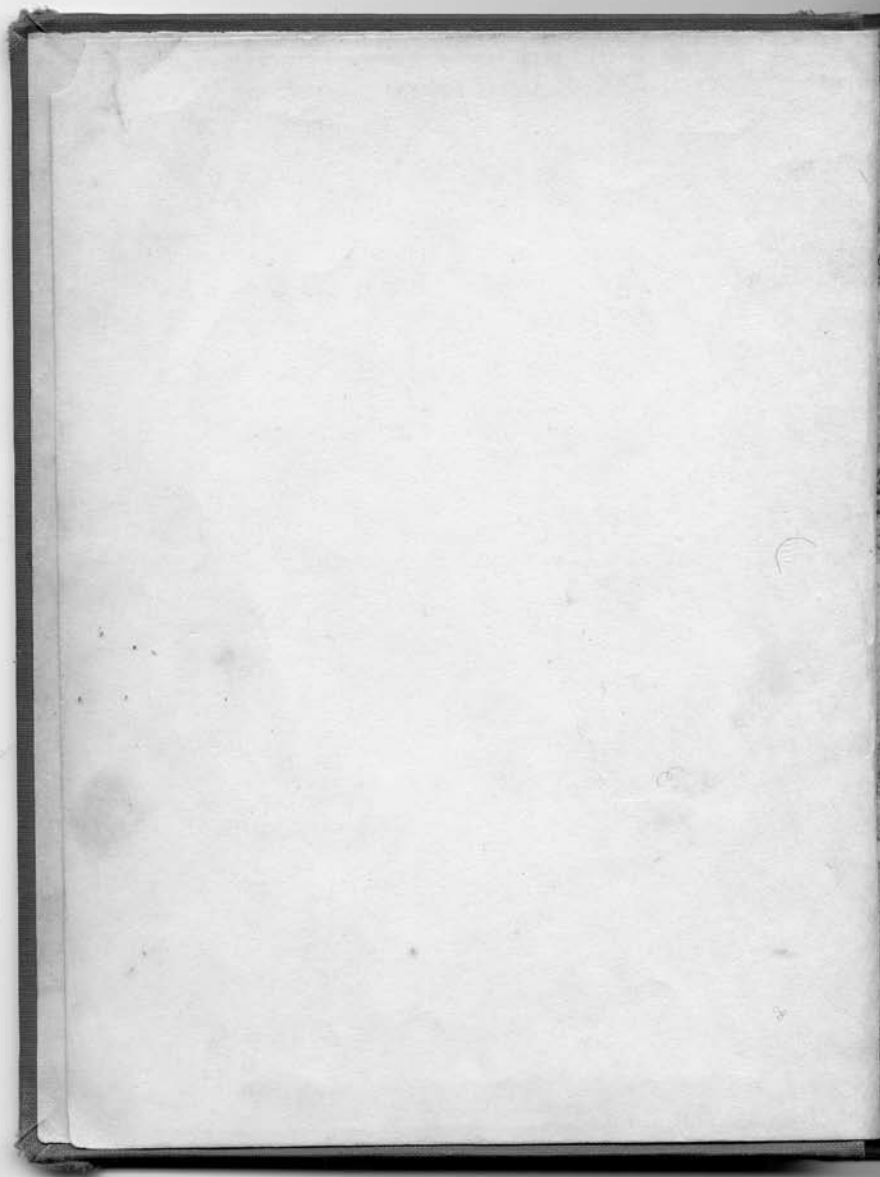
# The Pigeon Post into Paris 1870-1871

jason dodge homing pigeons

onestar press







# Homing Pigeons

HERBERT S. ZIM

Illustrated by JAMES GORDON IRVING

William Morrow & Company

New York, 1949



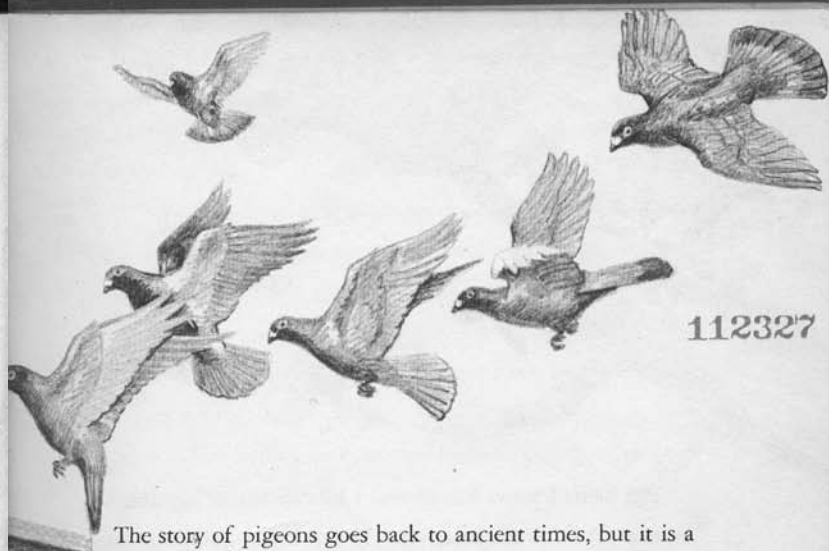
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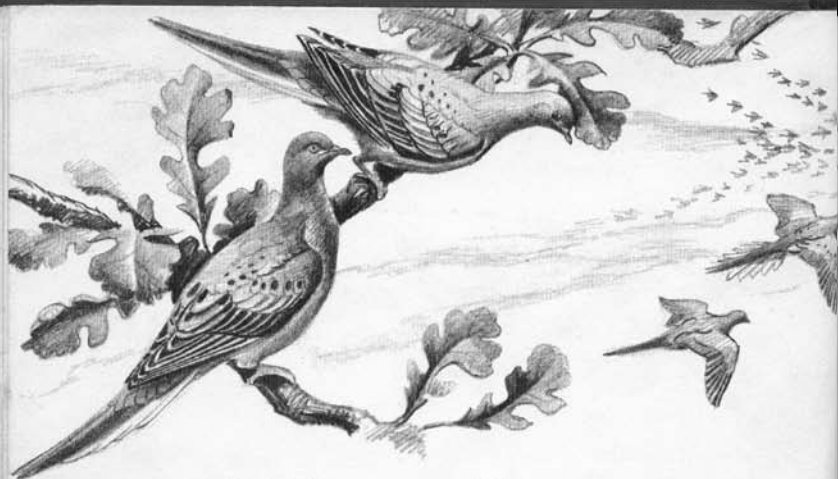
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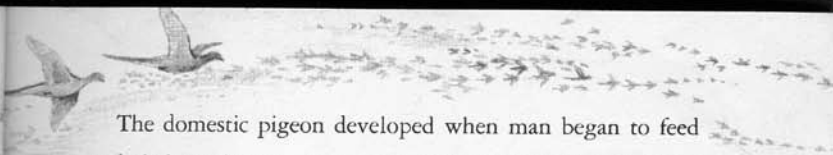
The story of pigeons goes back to ancient times, but it is a modern, up-to-date story too. Men first tamed and trained these birds thousands of years ago. Today, thousands of people, young and old, will tell you that breeding, racing and showing pigeons is a more popular hobby than ever.

Doves and pigeons are put in the same family by scientific experts. In this family are nearly five hundred kinds of pigeons and their relatives. They live in every continent except the cold Antarctic, but mostly in the tropics where the largest and most beautiful pigeons are found.



The United States has several kinds of native pigeons, but none as famed as the passenger pigeons that once flew in huge flocks, covering the entire sky. Today not a single passenger pigeon remains alive. The uncontrolled hunting that killed them off has been stopped, but the birds are gone forever.

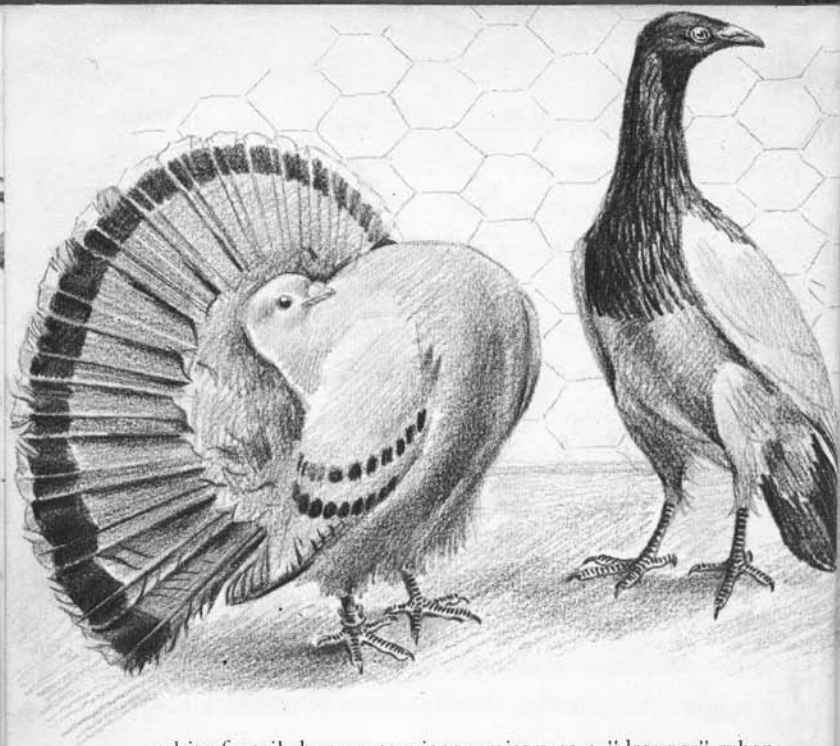
The homing pigeon and all other tame pigeons are descendants of a wild bird, the common rock dove of southern Europe, northern Africa and western Asia. Perhaps the rock dove found it easier to get food in grain fields and to nest on the rafters of huts and barns. Pigeons can still be found living in this half-tamed way, nesting on ledges of buildings.



The domestic pigeon developed when man began to feed and shelter pigeons. As people took more interest in these birds, they bred them to produce more desirable features. Some were developed into heavy, meaty squabs that finally wound up on the dinner table. Others were selected and bred for their beautiful or odd appearance. Finally, since pigeons find their way home from distant places, they have been bred for racing and carrying messages.

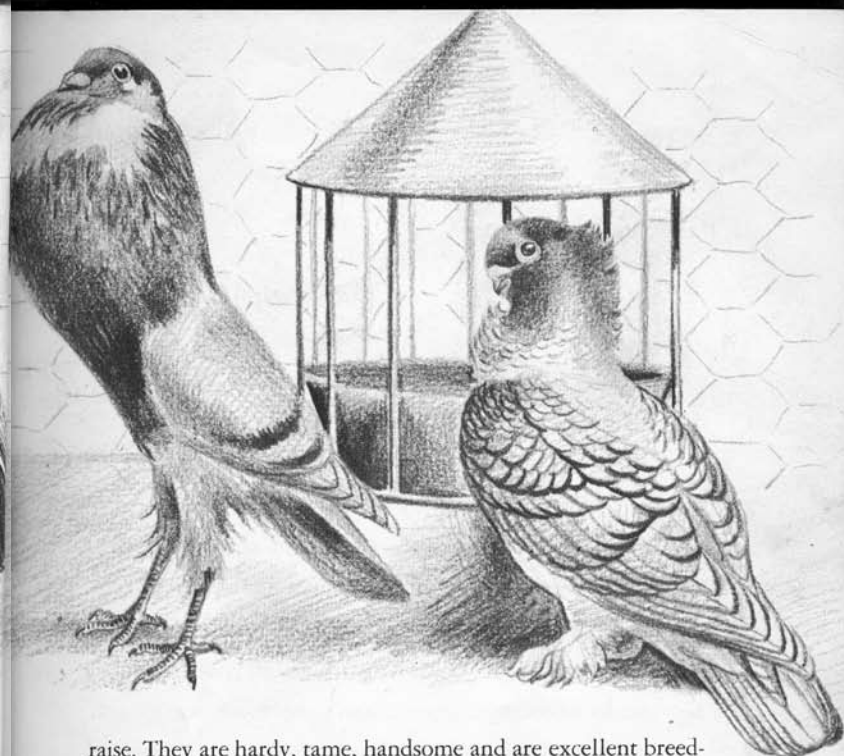
Several hundred varieties of the domestic pigeon have been developed through careful selection and mating. This process cannot be allowed to stop. If the different varieties were allowed to breed together, their offspring would soon resemble their wild ancestors.

Not many amateurs raise squabs. That is more likely to be a business than a hobby. More are interested in raising and exhibiting the fancy breeds of pigeons—the strutting fantails, the frills with twisted, curled feathers, the proud pouters, the tumblers that somersault as they fly. Fancy pigeons are so attractive that people who raise and fly homers often keep a few pairs around. Homers are often attracted back to the loft by a



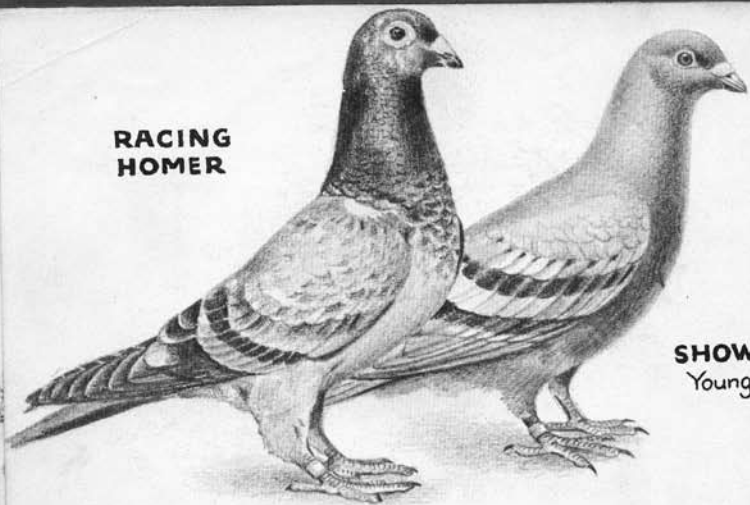
white fantail, known to pigeon raisers as a "dropper" when used for this purpose.

Homing pigeons are better known and more widely raised than fancy breeds. Some are raised for show, but more are kept for flying and homing. Homers are about the easiest birds to



raise. They are hardy, tame, handsome and are excellent breeders. This does not mean that any novice can turn out champion birds without long, painstaking work. It does mean that the beginner is likely to have more success with homers than with almost any other kind of pigeon.

## RACING HOMER



SHOW TYPE  
Young Hen

Racing homers, to give these birds their proper name, are a fairly new variety, developed from four or five breeds of European pigeons, each with top homing ability. The result is a bird that can wing its way home a thousand miles or more. The breeder of racing homers doesn't pay much attention to color. He strives for a sturdy, broad-breasted, strong-winged bird that he can train to break flying records. Form and carriage are only important because they contribute to powerful, speedy flight. Homers are usually stocky birds with broad, deep breasts, strong, arched wings and well-formed tails.

It was an exciting experience when I first handled a pair of champion homers. I had often handled common pigeons—the kind you feed in the park—and perhaps that was why I felt the homers were such strong, clean, attractive birds. Fully grown, male racing homers weigh fourteen to sixteen ounces; females, ten to twelve. The male bird is about ten to eleven inches long; the female slightly shorter.

The ability to return from great distances is no unique gift of pigeons. Some birds return to their exact nesting sites year after year. But the homing of pigeons may be quite distinct from the migration or return of wild birds in spring. It is a problem that is still being studied.

Records of using pigeons to carry messages go back over two thousand years. At early Greek Olympic games, pigeons carried the news of victory back to the home towns of the contestants. Roman generals used pigeons to send messages back from the front. Regular pigeon postal service was set up long before racing homers, as a breed, existed. The Caliph of Bagdad had such a service back in 1146. The development of racing birds was begun by the Belgians about 1700. At the first





pigeon race in 1732, the time for the three-mile course was two and a half hours. Modern homers can do a hundred miles in less time than that, because amateurs in England and America have steadily bred the birds for stamina and for speed.



If you want to start raising your own racing homers, begin with only one or two pairs of birds. Get them from the best source you can. Consult pigeon magazines for reliable dealers. Get the finest birds you can afford, for nothing takes the place of sound, pedigreed breeding stock. But if you buy adult birds, remember that they are homers. If you leave the loft open or attempt to give them exercise by flying them, the homers will soon be on their way back to the loft from which they came. Homing pigeons have been known to fly back to the loft where they were trained after a year of captivity in a different place.



One of the world's flying records was made by a female sold to an engineer at Caracas, Venezuela, for breeding. A few months later she escaped from the loft and headed for her home on Long Island some three thousand miles away, and arrived there months later. So keep your expensive breeding stock confined.

If you cannot afford breeding birds, get squeakers, birds just out of the nest. There are distinct advantages in starting with youngsters. They cost less and there is a better chance for the birds and yourself to get acquainted before you start training and breeding them. Knowing your birds is another fundamental. If you want your birds to be champions, learn their fine points and their weaknesses. Do that by spending time with them, feeding them, training them and observing them constantly.

It is important for the beginner to proceed slowly. Too often a novice sets out to increase his flock as fast as possible, before he is really ready to handle many birds. He soon finds his loft

File No. 8 Pair No. 40

## PEDIGREE OF

Name Hansenne, Logan, Gurnay  
 Color-Sex Blue Bar Cock  
 Reg. No. J45-NRC-IE-48  
 Hatched April 21, 1948  
 Bred By Benjamin Pericone  
18 Samuel Place, Staten Island  
 City of New York State N.Y.  
 Transferred to Thomas F. Mahony  
2101 Cedar Ave. Bronx  
 City of New York State N.Y.

Blue Bar 34  
 Shown once-  
 Asbury Park  
 Kept for 5

Blue Bar 3425  
 Never shown--

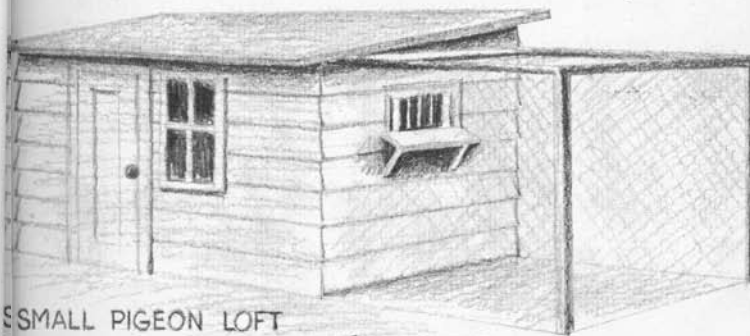
RACING RECORD

YEAR	80	100	150	200	250	300	400	500	600

overcrowded, his birds sick, and his feed bill enormous. Such pigeon raising becomes all work and no fun. So go slowly. If you have funds for only ten pairs, keep your flock down to this size by selling or trading birds.

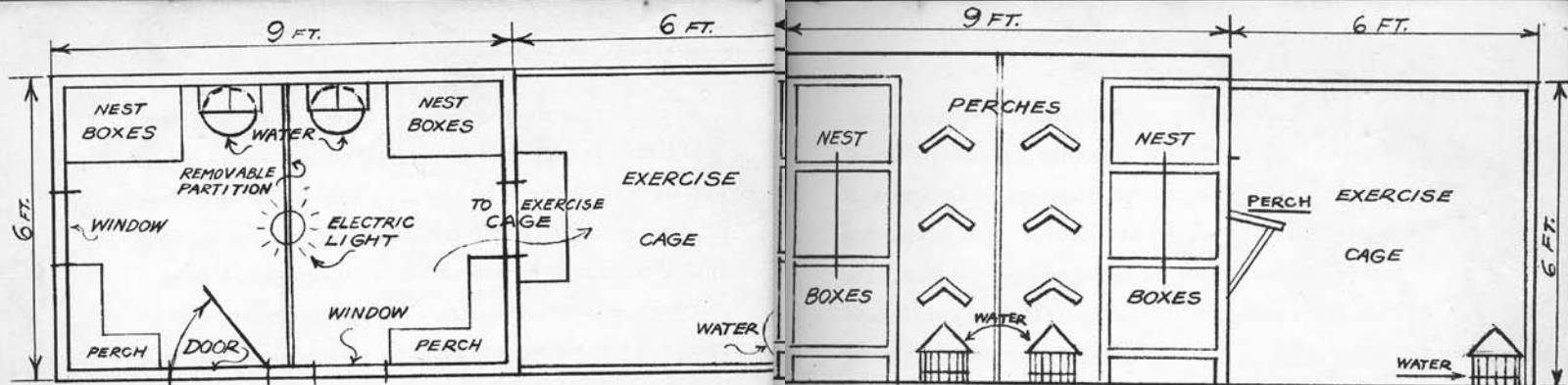
Keep a record of *each* bird as you start breeding. Band every nestling and fill out a pedigree sheet. Note the distance each bird flies and the time. You'll be surprised how important these records will be after you have kept them a year or so.

Start planning for your pigeons *before* you get any birds. Your loft, as every pigeon house is called, may be the key to your success, whether it be an old packing case or an elegant building. Some kind of loft is necessary, even if the climate is mild. Pigeons must be protected from rain and drafts. So plan your loft to accommodate all the birds you expect to have when your flock is complete, and avoid the trouble Henry ran into. Henry started keeping pigeons in a crate set up alongside his father's garage. In six months the whole wall was a jumble of boxes and screening. And by then the birds started nesting inside the garage with disastrous effects on the family car. Finally there was a session with father that ended with "Get rid of those birds or else..." Avoid a makeshift loft that is hard to clean and unsafe for your birds.



SMALL PIGEON LOFT

Floor Plan, Elevation On Two Following Pages



DESIGN FOR SIMPLE LOFT  
— FLOOR PLAN —

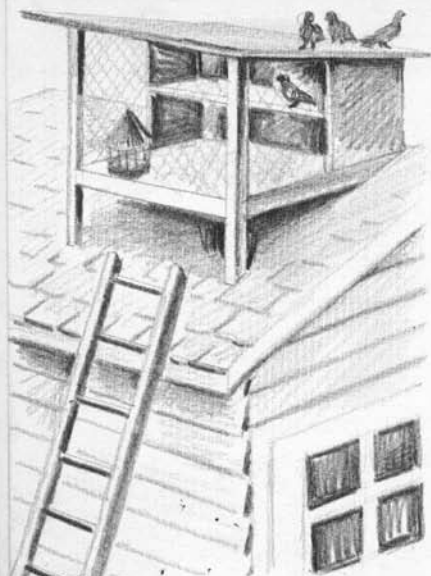
First visit some lofts in your neighborhood to see how they are run. Then make a simple plan and have a pigeon raiser check it for you. Planning does not mean expensive material or a large loft. You can use old boxes and secondhand lumber and still have a very satisfactory loft. Allow one cubic yard of space (3 x 3 x 3 feet) for each bird. If you plan to keep six pairs of pigeons, your loft might be about six feet wide, nine feet long, and six feet high. A roof, sloping slightly for drainage, is best. Be sure it is watertight. If your roof extends a foot or so over the front and back walls, it will help to break a

ELEVATION OF INTERIOR WALL  
— NEST BOXES AND EXERCISE CAGE —

driving rain and to give shade to your loft in the summer.

A good floor is as important as a good roof. It may be wood or cement, but be sure the floor and the rest of the loft is rat-proof. Set the floor two feet above the ground level and use metal lining for the base of the walls and door.

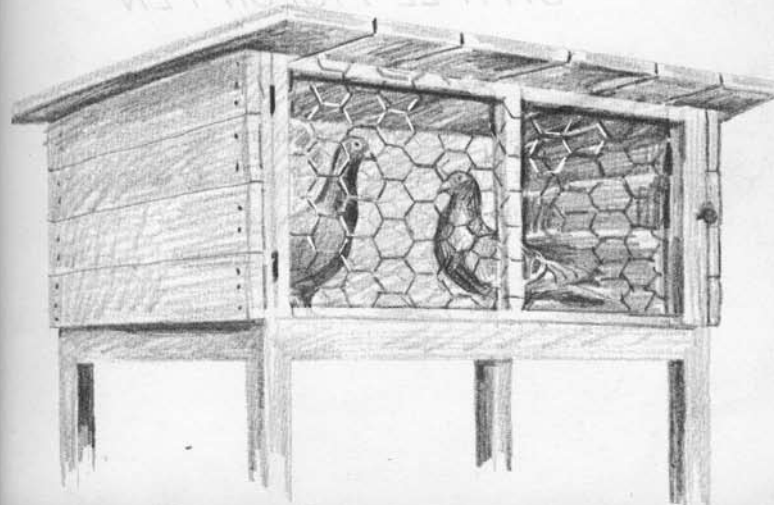
Keep your loft fairly in the open so that the birds can see it from the air. Have it face south to get the most sunlight possible. Lofts for racing homers are often built on top of garages or in some other high, open place where birds will have no difficulty landing and taking off.

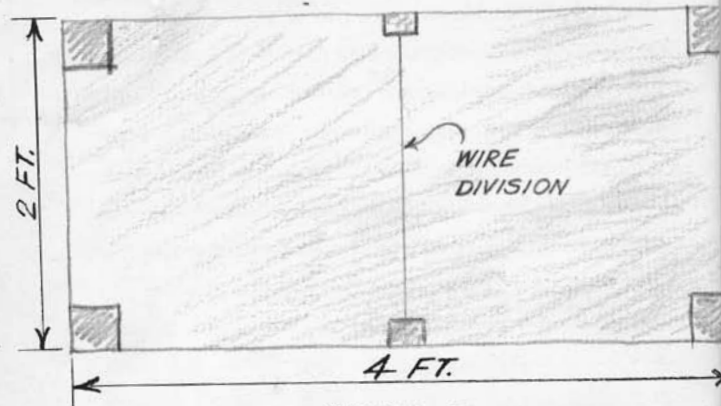


In designing the loft interior, remember that male and female birds are separated for over half of the year. Arrange your loft so that a simple partition can be set up. It is often good to separate breeding birds from young stock. This means another partition. Finally, a large wire-covered framework, adjoining the loft, is desirable as an exercise cage.

A medium-sized loft might take a month to construct and might cost well over a hundred dollars. But most beginners start on a much smaller scale. Perhaps you hope for a twelve-foot loft with an eight-foot exercise cage. You might begin with a six-foot loft planned so that the end wall can be moved and the loft enlarged to the twelve-foot length later. For detailed hints on building see the books listed on pages 61-62. Articles describing lofts often appear in pigeon magazines.

It is entirely possible to keep a pair of pigeons before you have a loft. A simple pen can be built to house them. The illustration shows what such a pen is like. One-by-four-inch boards and one-inch wire screening are the principal materials. Scrap wood from boxes or even boxes set up on legs may be used. The pen should be enclosed on the back and sides. A piece of tar paper makes a good waterproof roof. Remember that this shelter is only a temporary one. You should be planning and building your loft while you use it.





FLOOR PLAN  
SIMPLE PIGEON PEN

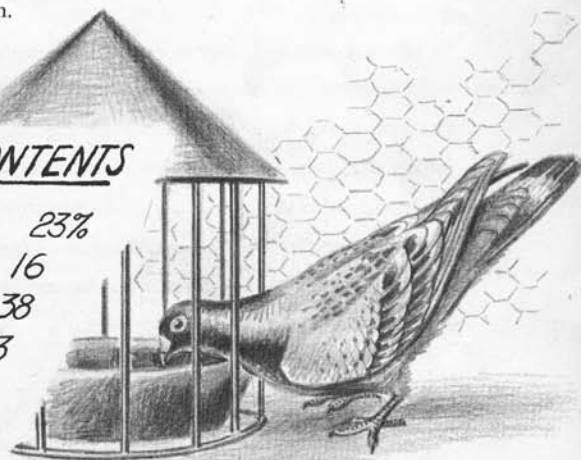
Domestic pigeons feed only on grain and other plant food. But they cannot stay healthy on corn alone or any other single grain. A good feed mixture for pigeons contains at least four kinds of grain. The birds like a change in diet every now and then.

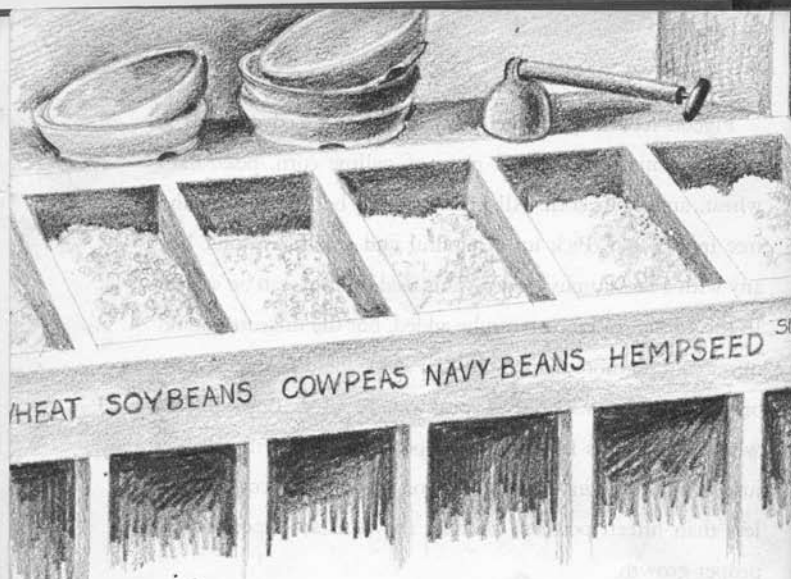
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Pigeon feed may be bought in any large feed store. It is usually a mixture of equal parts of yellow corn, peas, hard wheat, and kaffir corn. All grains should be whole, dry, and free from mold. Pick up a handful and smell it. Don't buy any with a moist, musty odor. This feed mixture can be varied. In the winter, more corn can be added, but the mixture should never contain more than about half corn. Field peas, cowpeas, or the wrinkled varieties of peas can be used. Buy feed for which an analysis is available, if possible. This will tell you just what the grains contain. Pigeon feed should contain not less than fifteen per cent protein, the food so important for proper growth.

#### PROTEIN CONTENTS

Beans, navy	23%
Sunflower seed	16
Soybeans	38
Hempseed	23
Cowpeas	24
Wheat	12
Corn	9





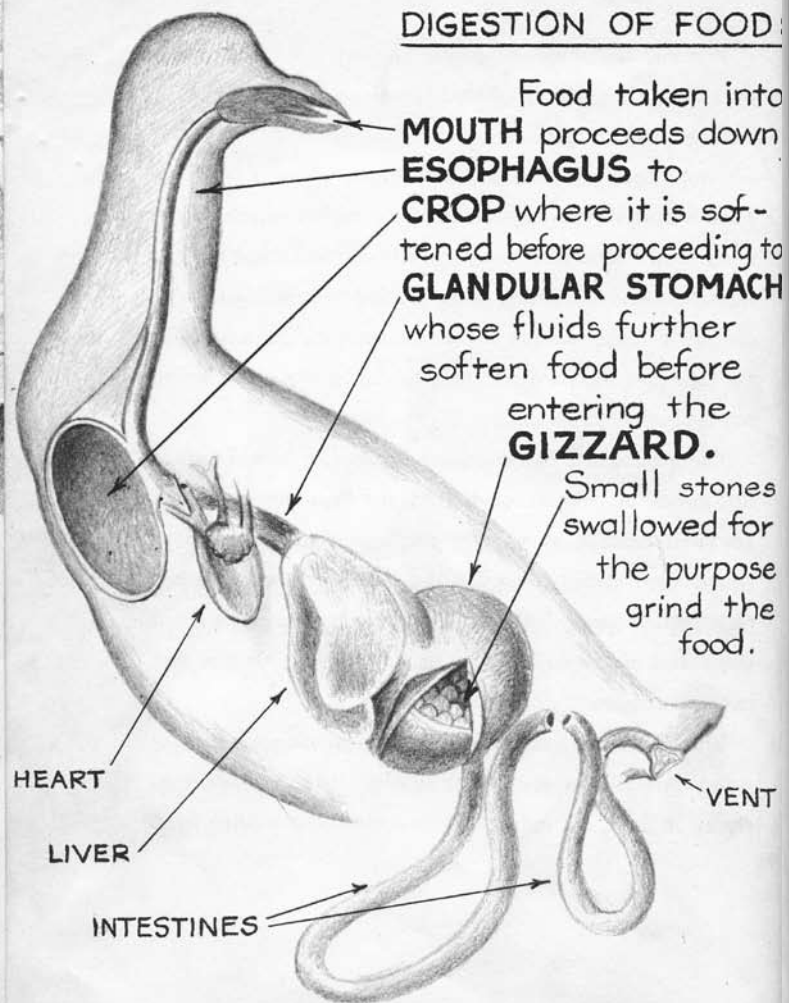
Pigeon raisers with large flocks find it cheaper and better to mix their own feed. You can do this too, using the ingredients just mentioned. Vary your feed by adding small amounts of millet, oats, barley, buckwheat or hempseed. Store your feed in a cool, dry place. Illness caused by wet, moldy grain may ruin a beginner's flock. Besides the grain, pigeons will take some greens once a week or so. A few lettuce, kale, or cabbage leaves will do.

Pigeons, like other birds, have no teeth and cannot chew their food. The grinding of hard kernels of wheat and corn is done by the gizzard. Grain is swallowed whole. It passes into the crop, a sac at the base of the throat, where it is stored. Then it moves down into the pigeon's small stomach, where it is softened somewhat, but not really digested. Next the gizzard takes over and strong muscles grind the grain with sand and grit that the bird has also eaten. After the gizzard breaks the food into fine particles, it goes into the intestines, where actual digestion takes place.

The gizzard acts like a grinding mill with bits of grit as tiny grindstones. So, although grit is not food, pigeons cannot get along without it. Specially prepared pigeon grit can be bought more cheaply than it can be made. It contains crushed rock, ground oyster shell, charcoal, and salt. Pigeons eat about one pound of grit for every six pounds of grain. Be sure they have all they want.

This mixed grit you buy is more than grinding material for your pigeons. Pigeons need salt in their diet. Since salt is included in the grit mixture, you need not add it to their food.

## DIGESTION OF FOOD:

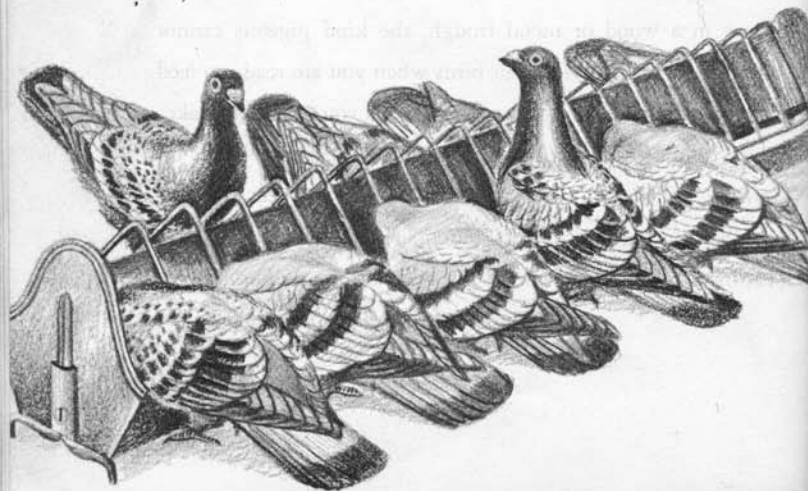


Pigeon egg shells are largely lime. The ground oyster shells in the grit provide this. Charcoal absorbs gases and so may aid the pigeon's digestion.

The purpose of food is to keep your birds alive, healthy, and growing. Scattering grain around the loft where it may become spoiled before it is eaten, defeats your purpose. *How* you feed your birds may be as important as *what* you feed them. As you build good feeding habits, you begin to train your birds for flying. Feed your birds yourself. Feeding time is the best time to learn to know them and get them to know you.

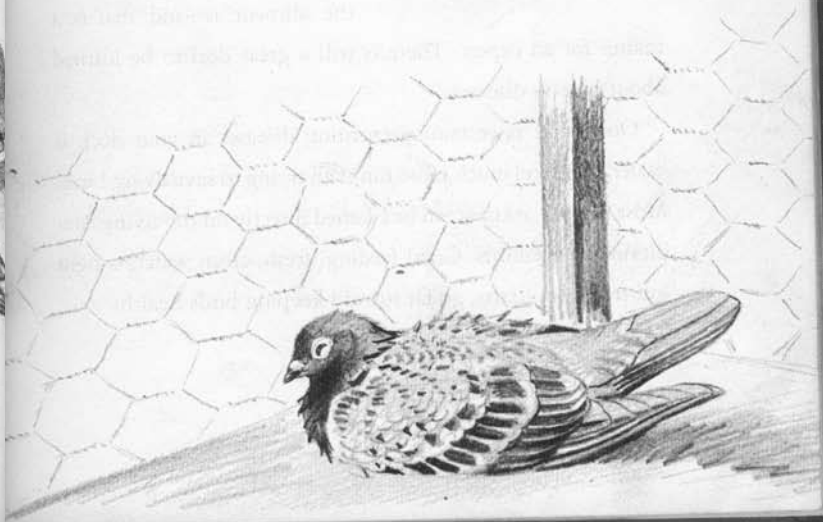
Experts prefer to feed their birds twice a day, at about seven in the morning and at three or four in the afternoon: Healthy birds can get all the food they need on this schedule. Put the grain in a wood or metal trough, the kind pigeons cannot climb into. Whistle for your birds when you are ready to feed them. They will soon learn to come when you call. This makes their training easier. How much to feed pigeons depends on several things. During a cold winter birds may eat twice as much as during the summer. Parents feeding their young may eat more than usual. Young birds eat more than old ones.

Leave the food in the cage for about fifteen or twenty minutes. But watch your birds as they feed. Let them continue as long as they are pecking and eating steadily. But when they begin to scratch around and slow down, they've had plenty. The feeding trough should be big enough so that all your birds can get to it. If it is too small, the birds will fight for a place and may not get enough to eat. Allow six inches of feeding space per bird. A trough three feet long, from which birds can feed on both sides, is large enough for ten or twelve birds. The trough can remain in the loft, if you fit it with a wooden or metal cover that can be removed at feeding time. Grit and clean drinking water should be left for the birds to use as they need it.

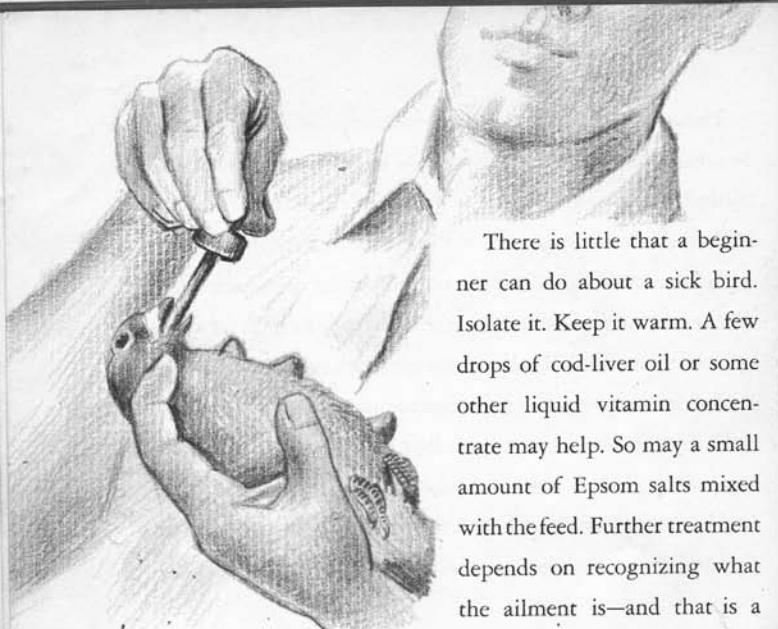


The fine points of feeding come with experience. As a starter, be sure that the grain for your birds is clean, dry, and fresh. Use plenty of grit and drinking water. Don't overfeed. Vary the birds' diet now and then.

Pigeons get sick. When away from the loft they may drink dirty water or eat spoiled grain. You may notice that a bird's eye has dimmed a dull yellow. It may huddle in its box, feathers fluffed or drooping, avoiding exercise and even food. Separate a sick bird from others at once. Treat it as though the sickness were serious and contagious, for that is just what it may be. If disease spreads through your loft it may wipe out your entire flock and endanger any new birds you put in the loft.

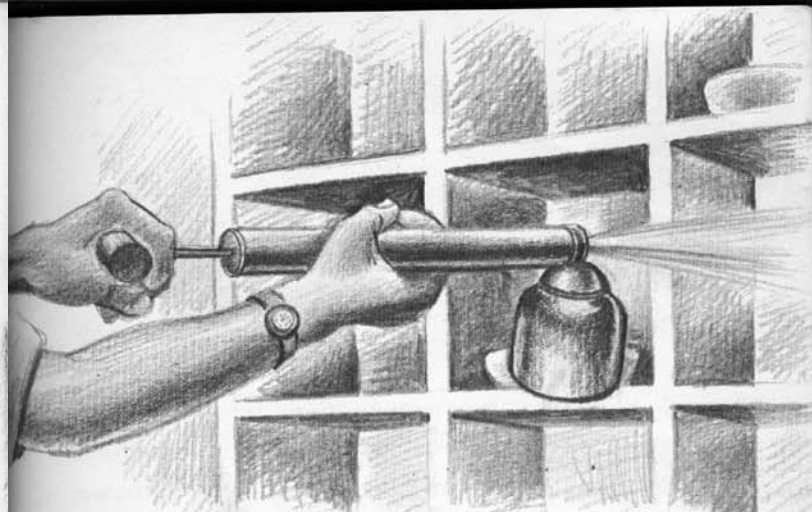




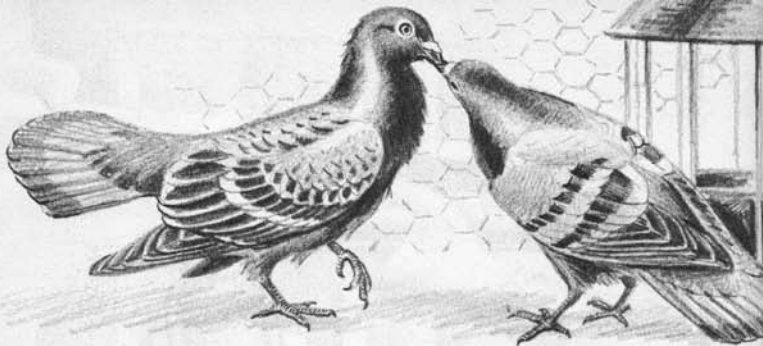


There is little that a beginner can do about a sick bird. Isolate it. Keep it warm. A few drops of cod-liver oil or some other liquid vitamin concentrate may help. So may a small amount of Epsom salts mixed with the feed. Further treatment depends on recognizing what the ailment is—and that is a matter for an expert. There is still a great deal to be learned about pigeon diseases.

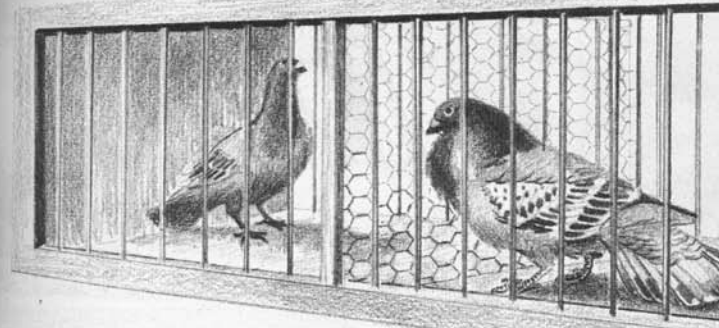
One thing is certain: preventing diseases in your flock is easier, safer and much more fun than trying to save dying birds. Most pigeon sickness can be blamed directly on the living conditions of the birds. Good feeding, fresh, clean water, a tight loft free from drafts, go far toward keeping birds healthy.



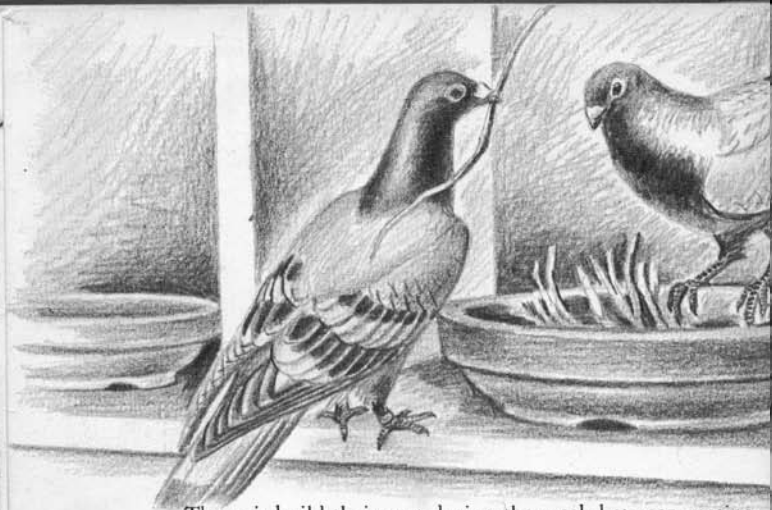
There is one more specific step toward health worth taking. All wild birds have lice and other parasites that feed upon them. Your pigeons can be kept free of these pests by the use of DDT and other poisons. Large doses of these insect poisons can kill your birds. They should be used with care and only as directed. Another chemical, sodium fluoride, is dusted at the base of feathers to kill lice. Mites which live in cracks in the loft can be killed by spraying the loft with DDT or nicotine sulfate after the birds have been removed. If there are eggs in the nest, cover them with a cup before spraying.



Homers lay only two eggs. Some wild pigeons lay only one. Other birds lay two or three times that number, but the pigeon population grows faster because pigeons breed from three to eight times a year. One pair of pigeons in a warm climate may raise sixteen nestlings a year. And before the year is out, some of the young will have young of their own. Pigeon raisers usually separate male and female birds in the summer when they begin to molt (shed their feathers). In February they are paired off again, and from then on they will keep busy raising young till separated. Breeders know their birds will be healthier and better if they hold them down to not more than three hatches per year. The same male and female usually stay together, though pigeons do not mate for life, as some people believe.

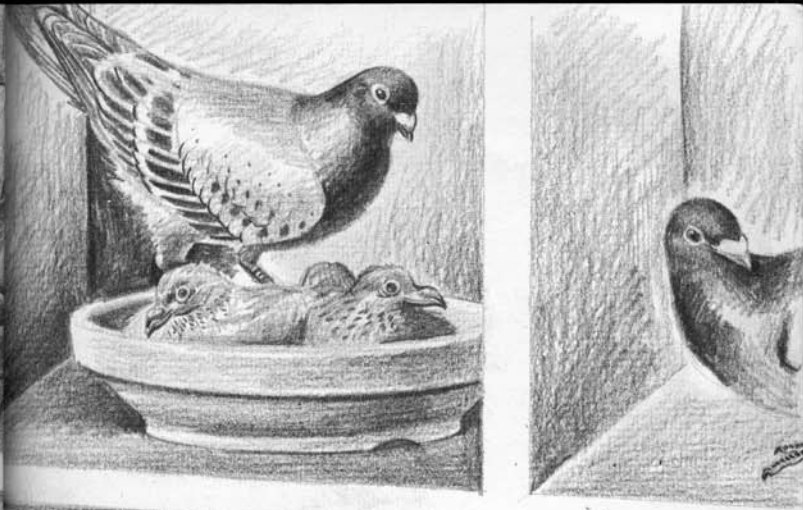


The pigeon raiser tries to get a certain male and female to mate because the young may inherit the good qualities of both parents. To do this, he puts them in a small cage, separated into two compartments by wire mesh. Soon the male starts wooing the female. The male will bow and scrape, coo and bill. Billing is not exactly kissing, though it may look like it. The male actually feeds the female some partly digested grain and she loves it. The partition is then removed and the birds will mate. About a week after mating, the female lays her first egg—all white, slightly over an inch long and not quite as wide. The second egg is usually laid forty to forty-eight hours later. The female does not begin to sit on the eggs and incubate them till both are laid. So both eggs hatch at the same time.



The pair build their nest during the week between mating and egg laying. Each pair of pigeons has *two* nesting boxes or an extra large box partly covered by a board across the front. While the parents are still feeding young in one nest they will be incubating eggs in another. No nesting box should be smaller than one cubic foot. Build the boxes in rows or tiers. A shallow bowl, about eight inches across, is put in each box. Keep a supply of pine needles or thin tobacco stems in the loft for nesting material when the birds are mating. The pungent smell of pine or tobacco will help keep lice away from the nest.

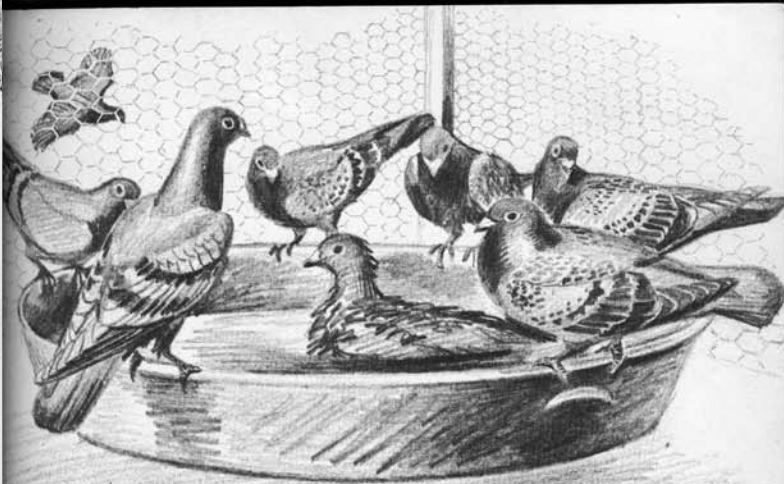
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Soon after mating, the male will start to put nesting material in the bowl. The female will join him and both will work on their very crude nest.


Even before the nest is finished, the male will start "driving" the female to it, pecking at her, and forcing her into the nesting box. Nest building will continue right up till the female lays her eggs.

After the second egg is laid, a steady routine is set up. Most of the setting is done by the female, but the male takes his turn too. The female is on the nest about eighteen hours a day—from late afternoon till the middle of the next morning. During the night, the male stays near by. Should another pigeon approach, a fight is likely to result. At about nine or ten in the morning, the male takes over the job of setting and the female leaves the nest for about six hours. Once incubation of the eggs has started it must not be interrupted, for if the eggs cool the embryos developing within them will die. Pigeons will not normally leave their nest when they are setting. Incubation continues for seventeen to eighteen days, during which the male and female both do their share of the setting.



Occasionally eggs do not hatch. The fault may be the male's or the eggs may be infertile for other reasons. Take each egg four or five days after it has been laid and candle it, by holding the egg between your eye and a bright light. Look for a dark spot. That shows the egg is fertile and the embryo is growing.

The eggs need moisture as well as warmth to develop. Provide a pan of water for your birds to bathe in about twice a week. The female will pick up enough water on her feathers to keep the eggs moist.



The young pigeons begin to peck their way out of their shells sixteen or seventeen days after incubation has begun. It takes about a full day for the birds to cut their way out. The young usually hatch in the morning and the parents immediately remove the eggshells from the nest.

When young birds hatch there is enough food in their bodies (from the egg) to keep them alive for a few days. But soon the adult birds must start to forage for insects or some other kind of *animal food* for their young. Very few young birds can eat plant food, and so the food of the young may be very different from that eaten by the adult birds.

Adult pigeons feed almost exclusively on hard seeds, a food quite unsuited to nestlings. But the birds which long ago developed into the pigeons and doves of today found a solution to this feeding problem. The ability to produce "pigeon milk" is one of the most unusual developments among birds. It has helped pigeons to survive and raise their young. While other wild birds are out hunting insects for their ever hungry nestlings, pigeons can stay nearer home and may even start raising another brood, because they have no feeding problems.



Pigeon milk isn't milk, for milk is produced only by mammals—animals with hair. But pigeon milk serves the same purpose, and the chemicals it contains are about the same as those in real milk. Oddly enough, pigeon milk is produced by both the male and female pigeons and it is always ready at the time the eggs hatch.



Newly hatched



3 or 4 days old

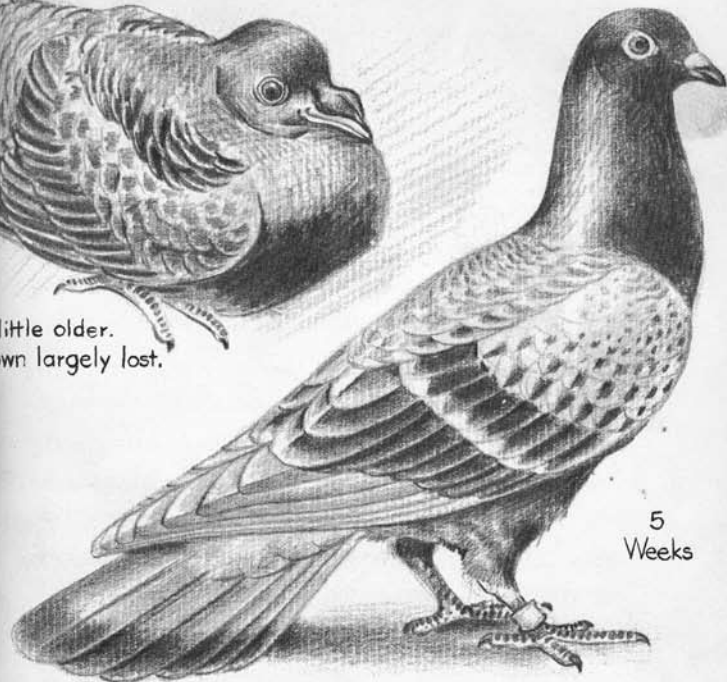


3 weeks old.  
Down still with feathers

This yellowish creamy or cheesy substance forms in the lining of the pigeon's crop. Its effectiveness is proved by the fact that young pigeons grow faster than any other birds, doubling their weight within forty-eight hours after they hatch. At birth,



A little older.  
Down largely lost.

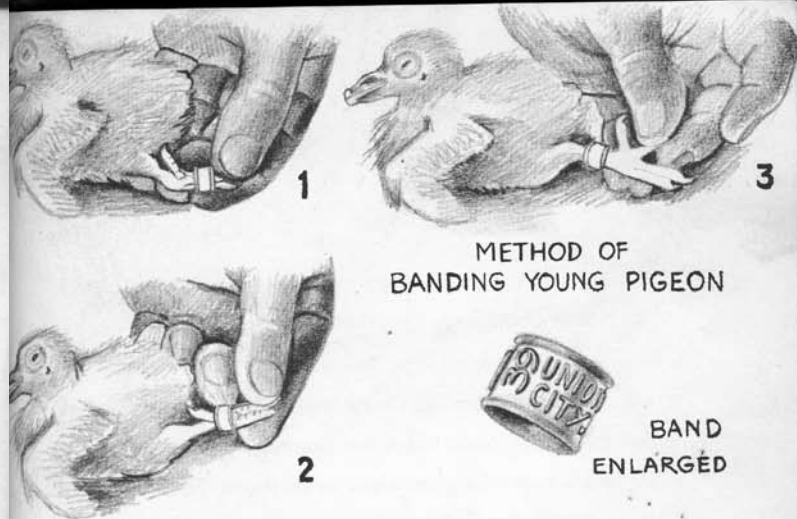


5  
Weeks

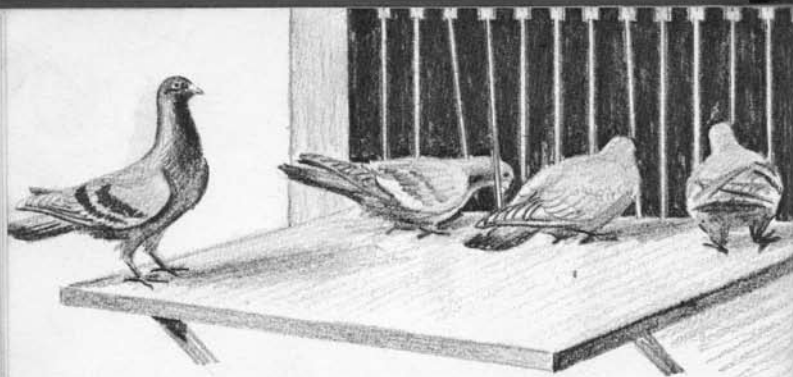
pigeons weigh about three quarters of an ounce. At the end of a week they weigh about four ounces. They grow rapidly. When a month old and about ready to leave the nest, most larger varieties weigh at least a pound or even more.

When the nestlings are about a week old it is time to band them. A metal band stamped with the year is slipped over the foot. When the squab grows, the band can no longer be removed and it becomes a permanent record of the bird's age. The large pigeon clubs supply these bands to members. Non-members can also obtain them. Look for this band when you buy pigeons. It tells you the bird's age. There is no other way of knowing how old a bird may be.

The parents feed the young on pigeon milk for about a week. To this they gradually add bits of partly digested grain that they bring up (regurgitate) from their crop. This feeding continues till the squabs leave the nest and perhaps for a bit longer. Then the young birds start picking up grain for themselves and soon eat the same food as the adults. Meanwhile the parents have mated again and are sitting on eggs in another box. The squeakers are usually allowed to stay in the same loft with the breeding birds till they are put into a separate loft. At about four months of age they are well able to care for themselves. Then they are practically adult birds, and are then called young cocks and hens.



Calling a bird a cock or a hen implies that you can tell the males from the females. You sometimes can, when they get to be four or five months old. It takes a real expert to tell them apart much before then, as the plumage of male and female pigeons is identical. The pigeon who does the courting and drives the other to the nest is the male. But until this mating activity gets under way there is very little to go by. True, the male is usually larger than the female and more aggressive in feeding and drinking. Yet I had a female that took over one



whole end of the feeding trough, fighting with any other bird that came near. Males often coo continually, sometimes turning around in a complete circle as they coo. Females do not often do this. The male sits on the eggs during part of the day. The female has the late afternoon and night shift.

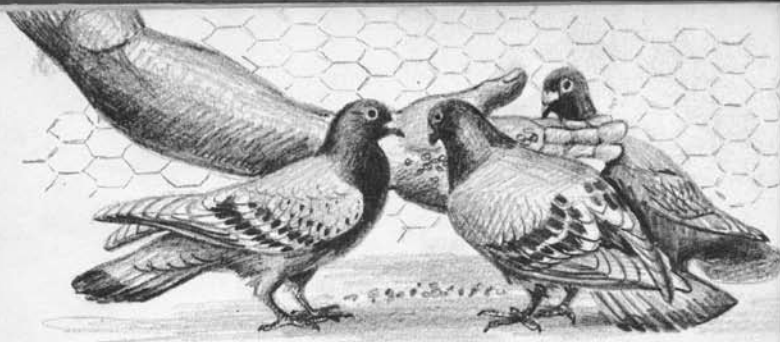
The amateur who raises pigeons has his hands full caring for his young birds. Training must start early and continue steadily if you want to use and improve the homing instinct of these fine birds. Training pigeons is a painstaking task because, with all their good points, pigeons are not very intelligent animals. They cannot be compared to dogs or even cats. Some pigeon raisers do claim that their birds recognize them and will come when they whistle. The pigeons do not pay any attention

when strangers whistle. At any rate, pigeons are good show birds; they carry messages and win races. That's enough for most pigeon raisers.

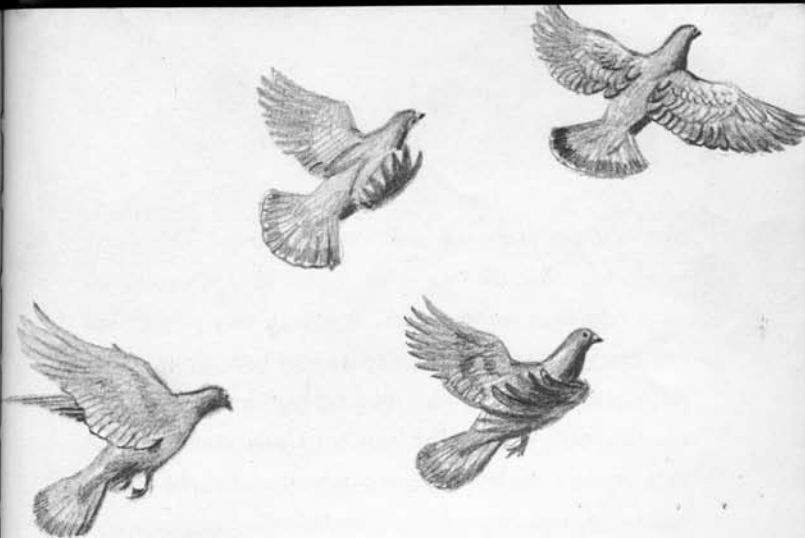
The training of racing homers usually begins as soon as the young get used to being away from their parents. If training is delayed after the birds are much over eight weeks old, it may be more difficult. The Pigeon Service of the Army Signal Corps begins training its birds as soon as they leave the nest, when they are one month old.

Patience and gentleness are essential in training. You can't argue with or bully pigeons. Food is the key to success. Begin by whistling for your birds as you feed them, so they will learn to know that the sound means food. After a week or so, gently place the birds on the landing platform just outside the loft. Now, with their food ready, whistle for them. Coax them. If they do not see how to get back inside, nudge them. Soon the birds will come into the loft for food. Put your birds on a box a few yards away, let them see their surroundings, but each time attract them back into the loft with food. As the birds learn the loft means food, they will return promptly.





Exercise is a part of training too. Many pigeon raisers exercise their birds in the early morning or in the early afternoon, feeding their birds *after* they have exercised. As the birds fly near the loft they learn to recognize their home from the air.

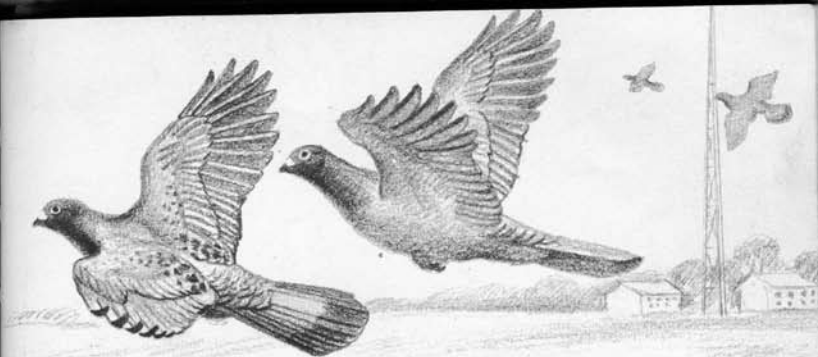


Soon you will be ready to take your birds several blocks away in a basket. Release them all at once. This is called *group tossing*. Pick a clear, calm day when the weather conditions and visibility favor your beginning homers. Your birds may circle once or twice, but the chances are they will fly in a beeline for your loft. Try them again from the same spot. Then *single-toss* them: that is, release one bird at a time and wait till it is out of



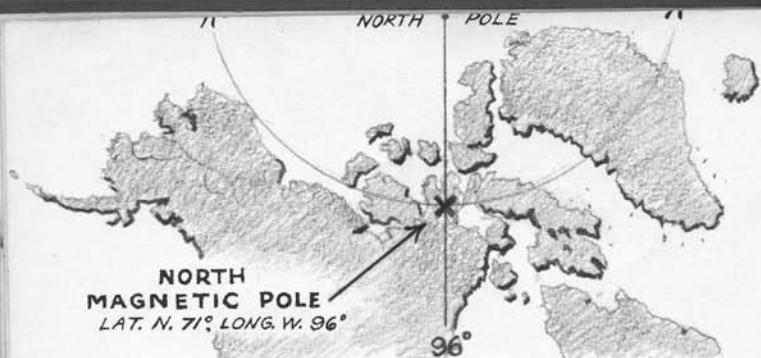
sight before releasing the next. Now take them farther away: a mile, five miles, then ten miles. At this stage you will need some help. It is just impossible to make a long journey and hurry back to your loft in time to see your birds arrive. If you join a pigeon club or work with other pigeon raisers, you can share the work. When the birds are flown from greater distances they are often sent by express and then released by the express agent or by some cooperating pigeon fancier.

No book can be a complete guide to the training and racing of homers and it would be rash for anyone to attempt the task on book knowledge alone. Fortunately you can probably locate at least one pigeon fancier within an easy trip of your home. If you cannot, a letter to any of the pigeon organizations listed at the back of this book may put you on the trail of the help you need. Talking with an experienced pigeon raiser and watching him with his birds will go a long way toward giving you a start at training your own birds.



We know a good deal about training and racing homers, but we still know very little about why they "home" so well. Homing and migration may seem alike, but some experts believe they are very different. Experiments with blindfolded pigeons have shown that good eyesight is part of the explanation of homing. But eyesight is not the whole answer, because pigeons shipped in baskets through territory they have never seen before, will return straight to their loft.

It has been reported that pigeons flying near broadcasting stations or in radar beams became confused and lost. This suggested that pigeons might be sensitive to invisible radio waves. But experiments conducted by the Army at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, clearly showed that pigeons do not "home" by following radio beams or using radio waves.



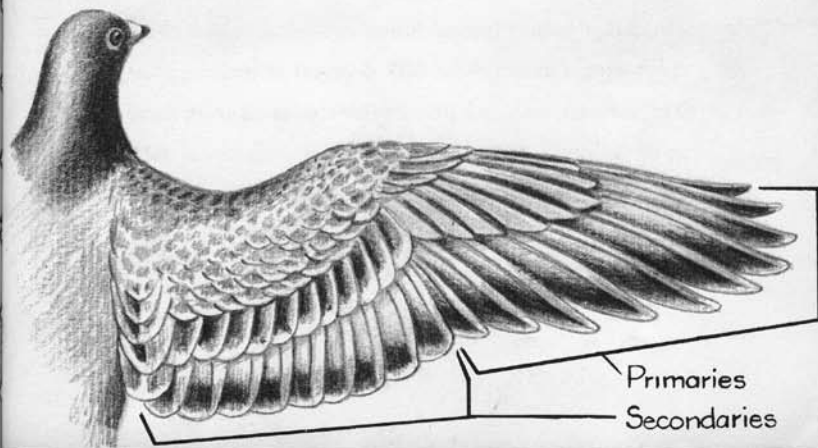
It was recently suggested that the earth's magnetism and rotating speed might be involved in homing. Homing pigeons, released with small but powerful magnets on their wings, became confused and lost. Pigeons with pieces of copper the same weight on their wings, instead of magnets, flew back to their lofts. On the other hand, sea birds did not seem to be affected by the very powerful magnetic fields generated on mine sweepers during the war.

None of these theories about homing give a satisfactory explanation. But whatever homing is, it is something pigeons do without thinking. *You* may recognize a street and an avenue and so find a house. Pigeons find their loft, but never know how or why they got there. This kind of action is called *instinct*. Most of what pigeons do is instinctive.

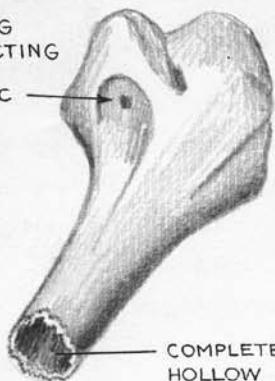
46

Every pigeon raiser knows the homing instinct is far from perfect. Fog or a sudden storm may send half a flock astray. Birds get lost even when flying conditions are at their best. There is always some risk in flying homers, but it is a risk everyone has to take. Besides, the homing instinct by itself isn't enough. A pigeon must have the strength and stamina to reach home from a far-off place. Fortunately, pigeons do have that stamina. Their ability as racing birds has been steadily improved by breeding.

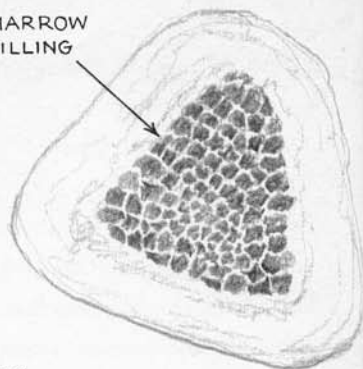
Like most other birds, pigeons are well adapted to life in the air. That means much more than having wings (though moving wings are something which man has not yet been able



OPENING  
CONNECTING  
WITH  
AIR SAC



MARROW  
FILLING



COMPLETELY  
HOLLOW INSIDE

### PIGEON WING BONE ENLARGED      MAMMAL BONE

to duplicate). The entire bird is dedicated to flying, down to its light, hollow bones. A number of air sacs connected to the lungs also help. Pigeons' hearts beat much faster than ours; their temperature (about 107 degrees) is much higher, too. The pigeon's body is a heat engine that is more effective than our own. Even the eyes of the pigeon are adapted for flight. They have transparent third eyelids which cover the eyes when the pigeon is in the air, like a pair of built-in goggles.

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EYELIDS AS IN SLEEP



FOOT

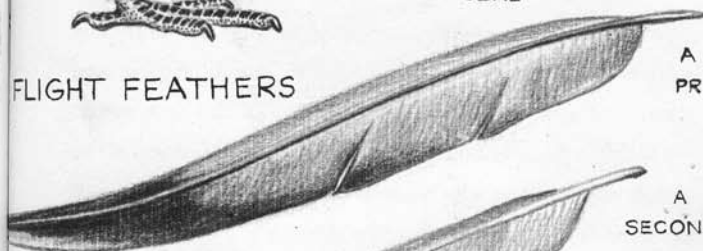


AURICULARS OR  
FEATHERS COVERING  
THE EARS  
EYE-RING OR  
EYE-CERE  
CERE

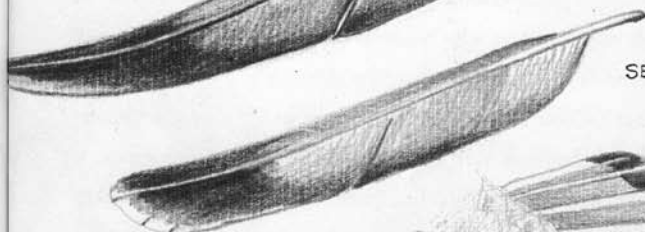


INNER EYE-  
LID (AS SOME-  
TIMES CAUGHT  
BY THE CAMERA)

FLIGHT FEATHERS



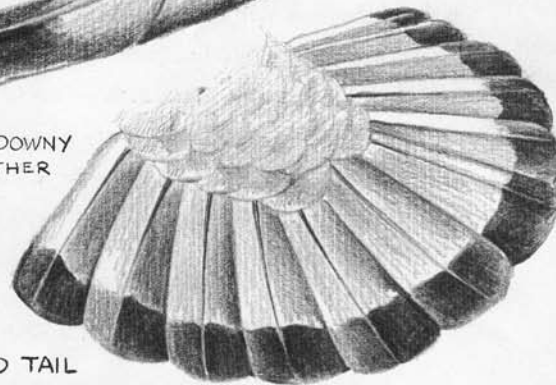
A  
PRIMARY



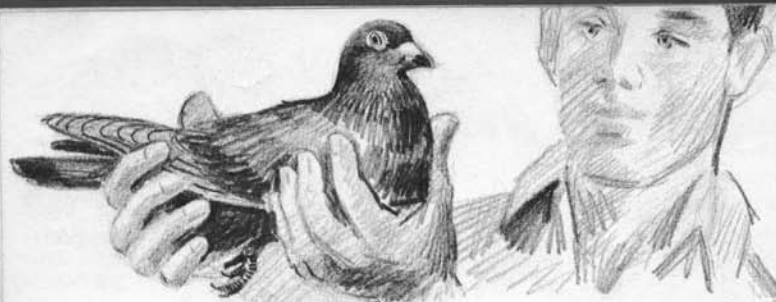
A  
SECONDARY



A  
PARTLY DOWNY  
BODY FEATHER



THE SPREAD TAIL  
AND ITS UPPER COVERTS



What makes a champion homing pigeon? It is an inherited instinct, improved by breeding and by training, in a physically fit, healthy bird, raised to top form by careful feeding and handling in a clean, sanitary loft. Given all this as a starter, what can we expect from the homing pigeon? "Miracles," is the reply of the expert who has seen these birds perform. He will tell you of the champion that flew thirteen hundred miles from Havana, Cuba, to Baltimore, Maryland, in five days. Then there is that flight from Venezuela to Long Island and many others. Flights of over one thousand miles are championship flights. Young birds are usually trained to fly up to one hundred miles during their first year and up to five hundred during their second. Champions will soon work up to the thousand mile mark—or over. A pigeon in good condition may keep up long distance flying for five years and more.

**"TAMERLANE" →**

Blue Bar Cock.

Owned by J. J. Reinhardt, President,  
National Show Racing Pigeon Association.

A winner in many races.  
As a yearling flew 2 races in  
one week totaling 1000 miles.

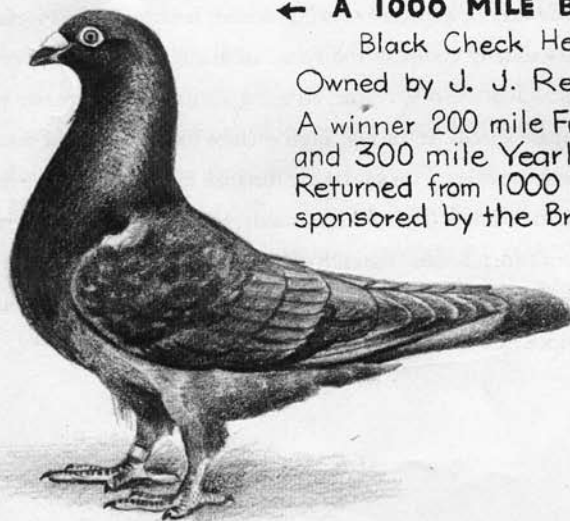


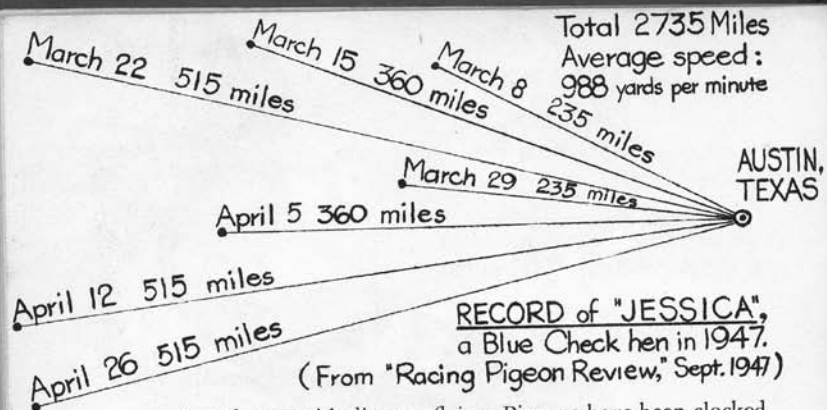
**← A 1000 MILE BIRD**

Black Check Hen.

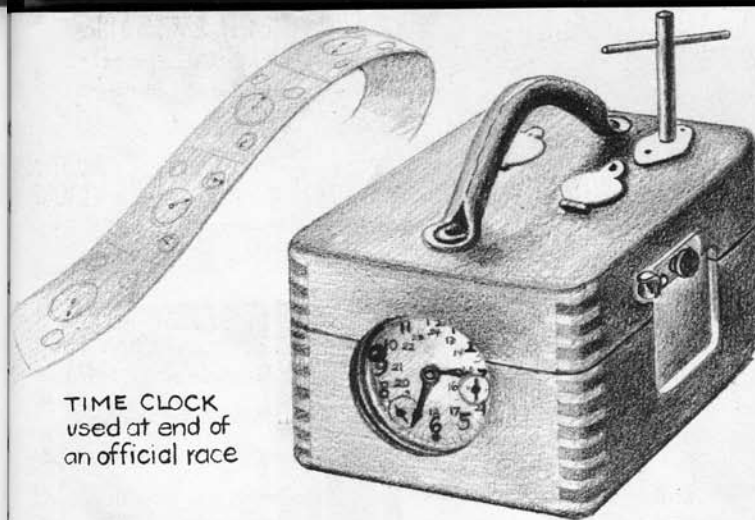
Owned by J. J. Reinhardt.

A winner 200 mile Futurity Race  
and 300 mile Yearling Race.  
Returned from 1000 mile race  
sponsored by the Bronx Club.



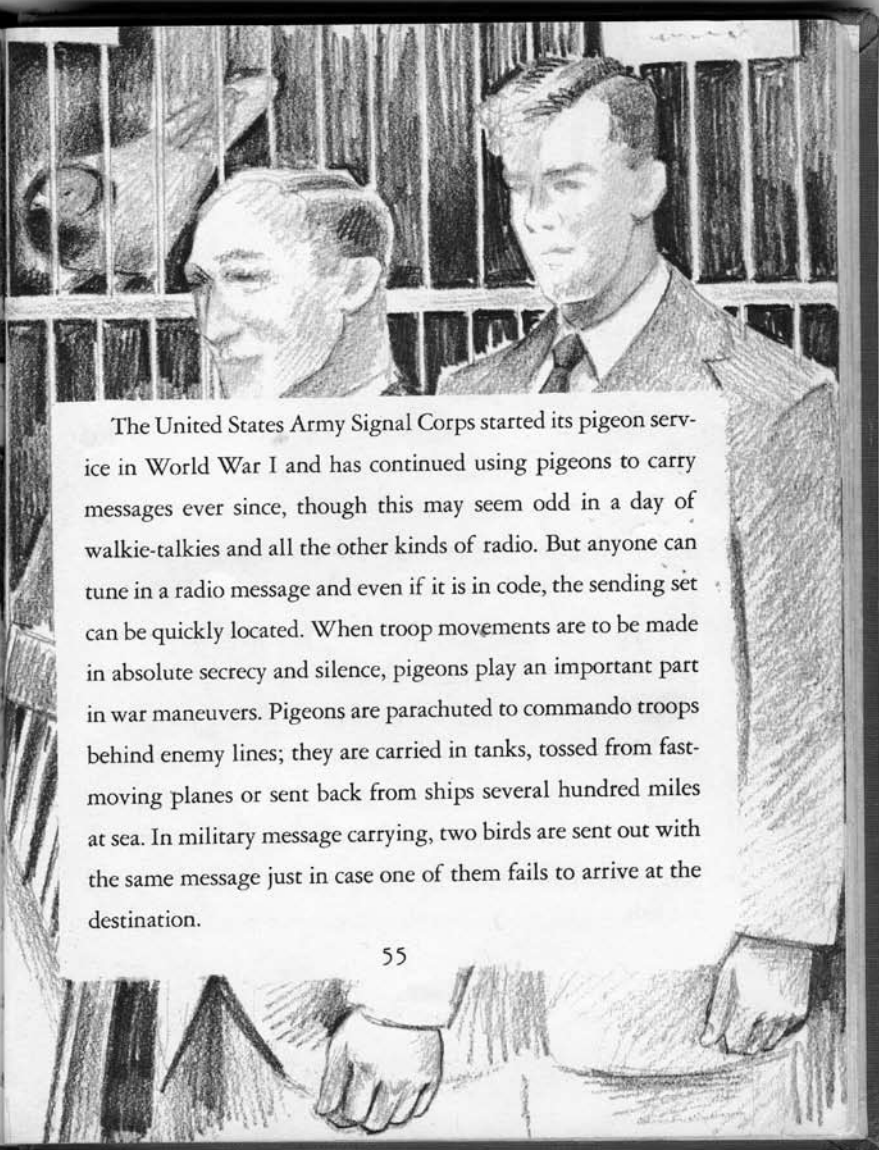
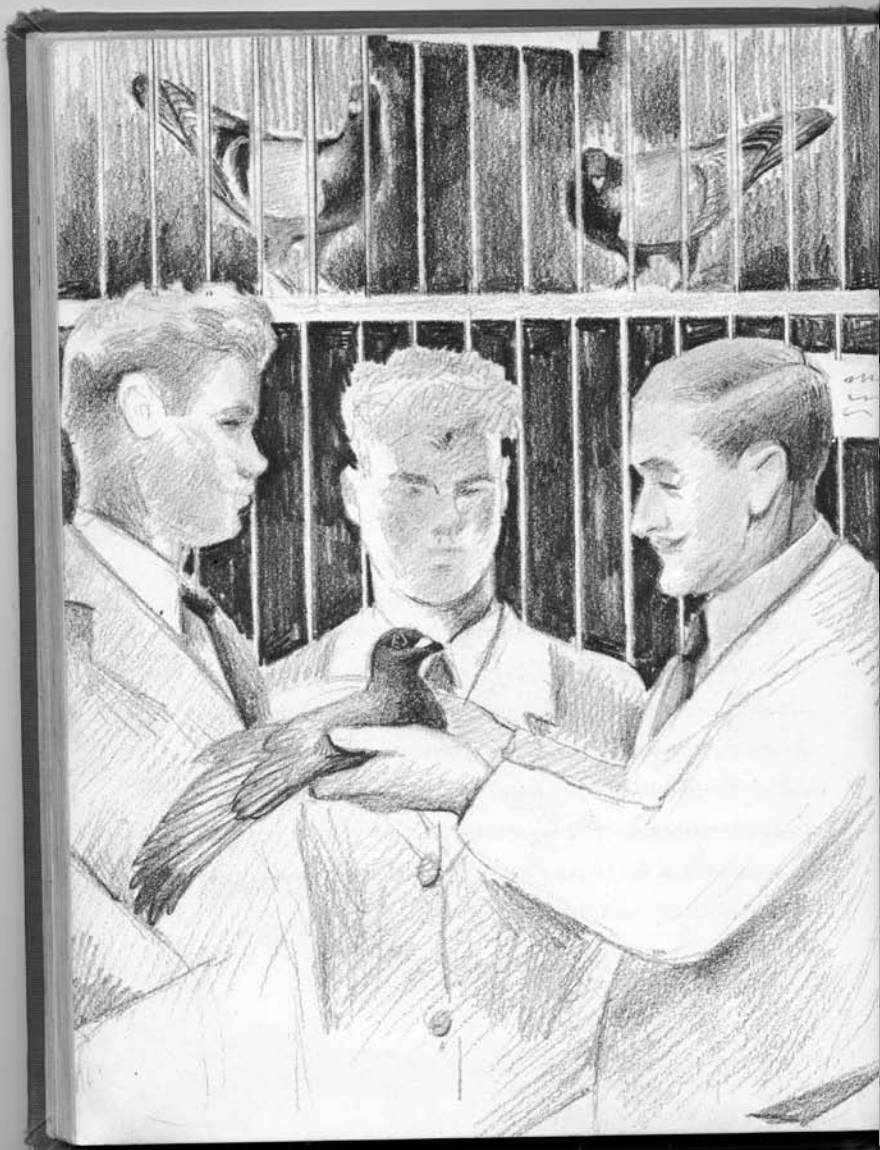


Speed goes with distance flying. Pigeons have been clocked at over seventy miles an hour with wind and weather favorable. Birds have finished official races at average speeds of over sixty miles. Generally, they will not do this well, but fifty-mile speeds may be expected of well-trained, healthy birds. Pigeon racers usually compute the speed of their birds in *yards* per hour. Races are often close, so using yards makes it easier to compare speeds. In racing, pigeon clubs have a surveyor who figures out exactly (in yards) the distance from the point of release to each loft. Time is kept exactly, too, from the minute the pigeons are released (the club officials are notified by telegram) to the time they arrive in the loft and have their flying time stamped on a recording clock.

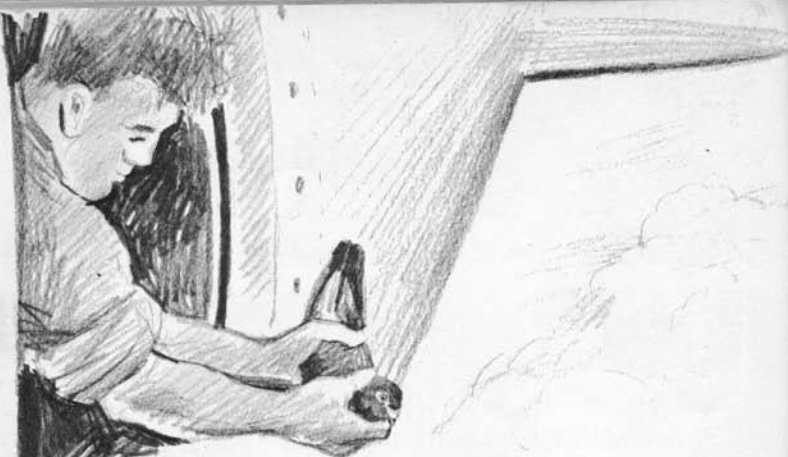


TIME CLOCK  
 used at end of  
 an official race

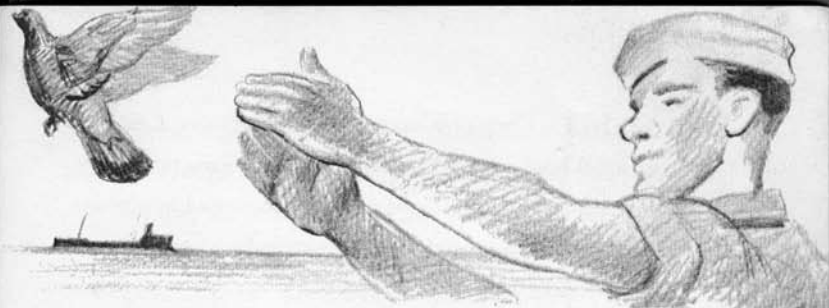
When the racing season is over, pigeon fanciers turn their attention to pigeon shows. Some shows are held for homers only. Both young birds and experienced racers are exhibited. The racing birds are entered in several classes, depending on the distances they have been flown. There are classes for 100-, 200-, 300-, 500-, and 600-mile birds. Beginners look forward to the time when their birds are ready for showing. All varieties are exhibited at the larger shows. So a visit gives the novice a chance to learn about the fancy breeds at first hand.



The United States Army Signal Corps started its pigeon service in World War I and has continued using pigeons to carry messages ever since, though this may seem odd in a day of walkie-talkies and all the other kinds of radio. But anyone can tune in a radio message and even if it is in code, the sending set can be quickly located. When troop movements are to be made in absolute secrecy and silence, pigeons play an important part in war maneuvers. Pigeons are parachuted to commando troops behind enemy lines; they are carried in tanks, tossed from fast-moving planes or sent back from ships several hundred miles at sea. In military message carrying, two birds are sent out with the same message just in case one of them fails to arrive at the destination.



This interest in pigeons has kept the Army experimenting with homers for many years. The idea of training pigeons to return to the mobile loft was worked out during World War I for the use of pigeons at the front. Pigeons have now been trained for night flying, and to fly over water (which they don't like). They carry messages from ships to shore and, what is much harder, from shore to ships. Army experiments also show that pigeons fly well at altitudes of 35,000 feet where pilots need electrically heated suits and oxygen masks. Pigeons stand cold, as low as 35 degrees below zero, better than other small animals.



One handicap in using pigeons has been the fact that they are one-way messengers, performing their job only on a return trip. Now two-way pigeons have been trained. These birds have learned to come to one loft for feeding and return to another for water and rest. This makes round-trip messages possible for short distances—and most military messages do not have to go very far.

It is quite clear that no matter what progress we make in radio and other kinds of communication, we will still find use for pigeons as did the people in Babylon, Egypt and Greece thousands of years ago. What is even more important is that pigeon raising is a world-wide hobby which is enjoyed as much in India and Turkey as it is in Belgium, England and the United States. Such hobbies help people in distant lands understand one another better because they share common interests.



This book is a primer, a work which the dictionary defines as "any small book of first instructions." First instruction is not intended to be the last. If you are really interested in pigeons there are second, third and fourth steps to take when you have finished reading.

1) If you do not have pigeons already, get one pair or more and start raising them. Build a simple pen or loft. Train your birds. Nothing counts as much as first hand experience. You can get more help as you proceed, but learning any more about pigeons without having pigeons of your own is likely to get as dull as reading a baseball rule book, while the other fellows are out having a game.

2) Join a pigeon club, if possible. Here are the names and addresses of the homing pigeon organizations. Write to them to inquire about a *local* club near you.

American Racing Pigeon Union  
214 Congress Street, Jersey City, New Jersey  
International Federation of American Homing Pigeon Fanciers  
Jerusalem Avenue, Hempstead, New York

3) Attend pigeon shows or agricultural shows where pigeons are exhibited. Learn to know what a first-class bird looks like. You may see birds exhibited that you could never afford to buy, but you will also learn what to try for in breeding your own birds. Soon you may be ready to exhibit birds yourself. Going to these shows and meetings is a fine way to meet and talk with pigeon experts.

Pigeons are sometimes exhibited at poultry and pet shows, but the shows that interest pigeon raisers most are those conducted by the following organizations:

National Show Racing Pigeon Association  
Peter J. Gimlett, Secretary  
101 Excelsior Avenue, Prince Bay, Staten Island, N. Y.

New England Racing Show Pigeon Association  
Joseph F. Potts, Secretary  
104 Yoeman Avenue, Medford, Massachusetts

Pioneer Racing and Show Racing Pigeon Association  
William B. Gray, Secretary  
P. O. Box 926, New Rochelle, New York

Write these clubs for a copy of their show standards, for which there may be a nominal charge.

4) Subscribe to a pigeon journal. Reading the pigeon magazines is the best way to get the "feel" of this hobby. They tell what is happening and when, give you practical advice and point the way to get better results with your birds. Agricultural, bird and pet magazines carry occasional articles about pigeons, but the magazines devoted exclusively to these birds are:

*American Racing Pigeon News*  
Norristown, Pennsylvania

*Pigeon News*  
Medford, Massachusetts

*Racing Pigeon Bulletin*  
Box 183, Marcus Hook, Pennsylvania

*Racing Pigeon Review*  
656 West Patterson Ave., Glendale, Calif.

These magazines will send you a free sample copy if you ask for it.



5) Read some more books. Not as much has been written about pigeons as is needed. Some of the books and pamphlets are out of print and may be hard to get. If you cannot find them in your library ask the librarian for help. She may be able to get them from some other library on an inter-library loan. Here are some publications you may want to read:

Bonner, Mary G., *Couriers of the Sky*. Knopf, New York, 1944. The only book written specially for young people. Directions for care and raising of birds.

Lee, Alfred R., *Homing Pigeons*. United States Department of Agriculture, Farmer's Bulletin 1373, Washington, D. C., 1923. A good government pamphlet, now out of print.

Levi, Wendell M., *The Pigeon*. Published by the Author, Sumter, South Carolina, 1941. Considered to be the standard book on pigeons and their care. The author was formerly president of the National Pigeon Association.

Levi, Wendell M., *Pigeon Raising*. Boy Scouts of America, New York, 1943. A pamphlet in the Merit Badge Series with brief information on general pigeon raising.

Naether, Carl A., *The Book of the Pigeon*. David McKay, Philadelphia, 1944. An excellent, general book with information on care, feeding, and breeding plus descriptions of the most common kinds of pigeons and doves.

Swanson, Leslie C., *The Racing Homer*. Published by the Author, Moline, Illinois, 1936. Care, feeding, breeding, training, and racing of homers.

These are only a few of the many sources of information on pigeons. There have been some excellent articles in the National Geographic Magazine (January 1926 and April 1947) and any number of books and pamphlets written (and often printed) by pigeon raisers.

One word of caution about pigeon books. Much of what we know about the care, feeding and breeding of pigeons reflects the long experience of practical pigeon raisers. It is quite natural that such men push their own pet ideas perhaps regarding some special feeding mixture, some method of breeding, or a type of loft that has met their needs exactly. Another expert

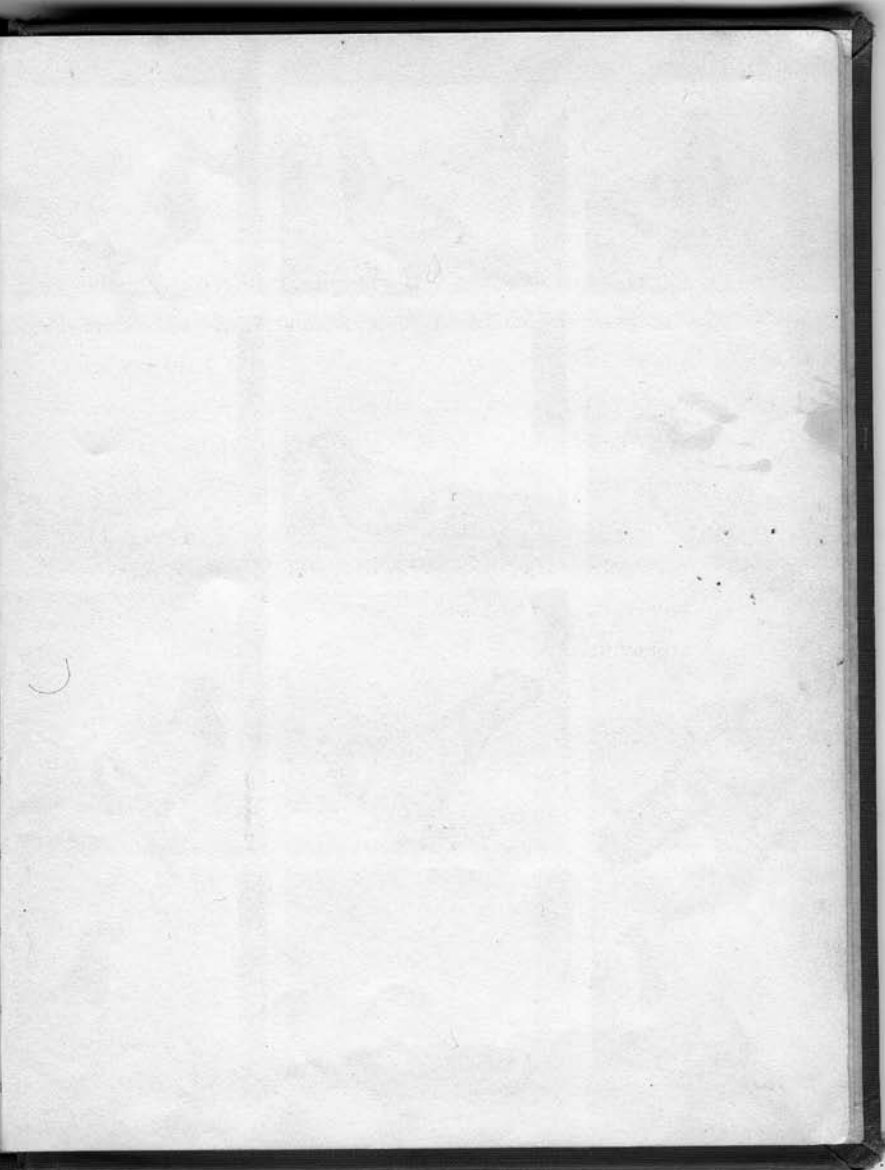
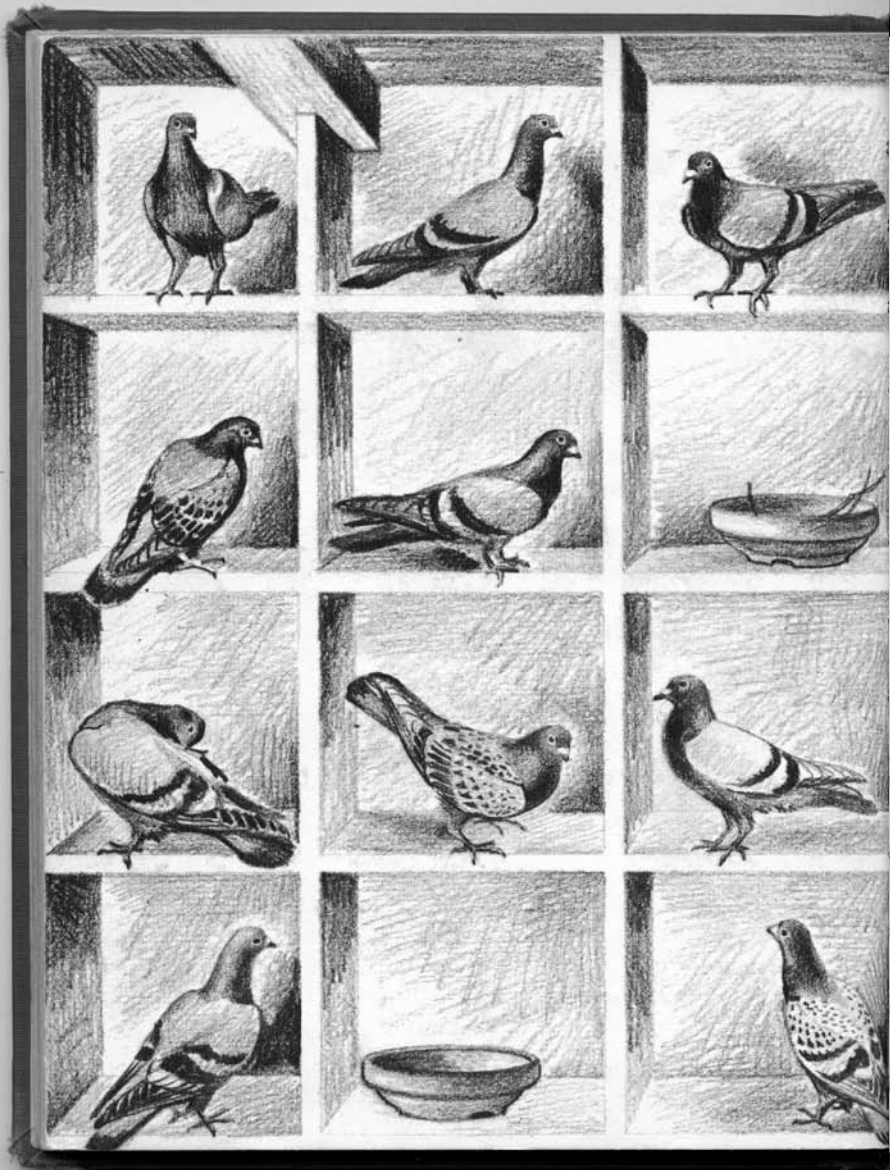
will have a somewhat different view, and will say so bluntly. The opinions expressed in books often contradict one another. The beginner should try to compare what different experts have to say, paying special attention to the points on which they all agree. There are many of them.

Nearly all the people who keep pigeons keep them for the fun they get from their hobby. When their birds are winners at a show or in a race, they feel more than repaid for the time they have spent. And even if they have no winners in their lofts, there is still the thrill of seeing a flock wheeling overhead and coming into the landing board after exercise. There is a lot of satisfaction in watching eggs hatch and seeing the young develop into the kind of birds you had planned for. These are the joys of keeping pigeons. If you are not having your share of them now, you shouldn't be wasting another minute. Go get some birds, and here's wishing you success.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author and the artist wish to express their gratitude to the executives of the National Show Racing Pigeon Association for their invaluable help. They also wish to thank the following for their expert advice: Major Otto Meyer, Pigeon Center, U. S. Signal Corps, Fort Monmouth, N. J.; Thomas F. Mahony, Emerald Loft, New York, N. Y.; Joseph J. Reinhardt, Staten Island, N. Y.; and Charles G. Senger, Teaneck, N. J.; and thanks also to Vera Brookins of the Mid-Town School, New York, whose classroom experiments in raising pigeons were most helpful.



## Jason Dodge Homing Pigeons

First edition limited to 250 numbered copies.  
In addition to this book a limited edition multiple by the artist  
is available from onestar press.

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. Everything at a time schedule

. Patience

. Learn how to race pigeons

. Never force anything

. Watch your birds carefully

. Watch the balance, the wing, the head, and the feathers

There is no doubt that this is a great lifelong hobby for all the family.

I would like to thank the Janssen Brothers on behalf of all the fanciers that will read this article for the way they cooperated in order that I could make this report. Since we know them already for years, they have given their best as friends to us. In spite of all the fame they have, they managed to stay the same people they always were.

A special word of gratitude to Mr. Bol de Bruyn and his brother, Wim, who always accompanied me to Reusel.

of over 200 years. Their age-and more importantly, their ability-deserve great respect.



. From 1935 to 1939 they won over 60 firsts, including: April 10, 1938 - 380 pigeons, shipped 17, they were 1-2-3-8-9-15-26-36-56-57-82-100; April 24, 1938 - 294 birds, shipped 12, they were 1-2-4-10-12-26-28

. From 1945 to 1951 they won 80 times first, including: May 5, 1945 - 682 birds, shipped 15, they were 1-2-4-5-6-7-18-25-30-42-92; August 29, 1949 - 526 pigeons, shipped 14, they were 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-13-17-28-31-65-96-174; May 28, 1951 - 700 pigeons, shipped 18, they were 1-2-3-4-9-12-23-35-38-39-62-85-142-170-185

. April 27, 1952 - 203 birds, shipped 12, they were 1-2-3-4-5-6-9-12-13-18-32-57

. 1953 - 28 times first

. 1954 - 30 times first

. 1955 - 32 times first

. 1956 - 30 times first

. 1957 - 17 times first

. 1958 - 15 times first

The pigeons were raced in the club as well in the region. Many fanciers, being envious, were happy to not have them as competitors. The result of it was that the Janssen Brothers were suspended in 1954. That was a hard judgment against them. They were punished just because their birds were too fast.

During the years 1960 to 1970, the cracks were born that are still in the pedigrees of the Janssen birds nowadays, the "Merckx", "Raket", "Scherpe", "Geeloger", "019", etc., pigeons that won an enormous amount of first prizes. In the year 1972, they became Champion of "Zuiderkempen" with seventeen prizes out of twenty they could win as a maximum with pickbirds (two birds on top of the shipping list). From 1976 to 1985, they won 31 times first. All these prizes were won from races between 240 and 350 km. "Only the birds that are in top condition are good enough to be shipped," Louis said. "That's why we win such a high percentage of prizes."

The best racers now are the "Kleine Blauwe", "Witkiske", "Grote en Kleine van de Vos", the two "Blauwkes", "Zoon van de Grote", "Stier", "Vuil Blauw", "Licht van de 019", "De Afgekeurde", and "Blauw van den Afgekeurde". "De Afgekeurde" became his name because he strayed in somewhere. The brothers don't like this. They wanted to eliminate him, but decided to give him another opportunity right after this the bird won a first in warm weather with a head-wind, and they decided in his favour.

### Tips for Starters

- . The Janssen Brothers advise the following things.
- . A very dry loft with a lot of fresh air.
- . A good family of pigeons





During the feeding, they touch all the birds, one by one, so that they get used to the hands of the fancier. They also try to get the birds to eat out of their hands for the same reason. Another thing that they do is talk to the birds constantly. The Janssen birds are so tame that they fly on the shoulders of their bosses and pick their ears. The brothers dislike shy birds. It is a joy to go to the birds because you can see that they like their bosses. When you see the brothers take care of the birds you notice immediately that they love their birds.

The birds are allowed to loft fly until twice per day until the races begin. After that, they get trained together with the oldbirds. The training is no more than three times from 15 km away. After that they get five training tosses with the club at a distance of 38 km. When the youngbirds are healthy and not heavily moulting, they have to fly the whole youngbird program.

They like to race youngbirds on the nest. As soon as they notice that there is a pair, they put a nestbowl right on the spot where the birds like to build a nest. If youngbirds are raced on the nest, they simply have to perform well. If not, they won't be there the next season. They say that youngbirds can also perform very well on the perch. After the races, the birds have to moult very quickly. Late-breds don't have to go entirely through the moult. As regards keeping a youngbird that isn't raced, the brothers say that they hardly ever do so-the exception being only when a very good pair is getting old and they are afraid they will stop breeding. Then they keep one or two youngsters from that pair in order to save the family line.

Tip: Keep your eyes open in the youngbird section. For instance, when a youngbird chooses a very high perch, also give it a high nestbox as a yearling. They will pay you back in performing very well.

### The Training of the Birds

Loft flying should be given every day at the same time. The birds stay in when there's fog, heavy rain, and snow. Long ago, they trained the birds very often. Charel brought them away by bike 20 km and Adriaan watched them coming home. Nowadays, the young- and the oldbirds are only trained three times before they are shipped for the training tosses of the club. Pigeons that are trained later in the season they ship at all kinds of clubs in the neighbourhood where they have training tosses all the time.

Tip: Charles thinks it is very important that the birds are watched when they come home from a training toss in order to get them used to going in very quick after landing. If you can't watch them coming, put some food for them as soon as they arrive.

### We Asked the Brothers a Lot of Questions

*Do you ever give your birds pellets?*

The birds have to stay healthy with normal food. They are not pigs.

*What do you think about fanciers that never clean their lofts or put peastraw*

*on the floor?*

That is no way of keeping pigeons. Again pigeons are not pigs.

*Why don't you race long distance?*

We hate long-distance races because there are too many risks for the birds and you loose them often. That our birds can do the job we have proved, but only to stop all that nonsense that our birds couldn't handle the distance. One time we shipped three birds to Chateauroux (575 km). We won first, second, and fourth in the club. "De Scherpen" we shipped to Montargis and Bordeaux (800 km) and he won two times first. Then the gossip was over. After that, we decided only to ship for the short and middle distances. That's what we like.

*Are there any real breeding pairs?*

Pairs that give good birds are not rare, but pairs that give real superbirds are very seldom found. Whenever you breed a superbird, this pair is already a very good breeding pair.

*Do you have any prisoners?*

No, and we never will, because we think a bird must be able to loft fly.

*Did you do any polygamous breeding with your "Stier"?*

No, we never did that. The bird "Stier" (means bull) was given to him because he was such a strong bird.

*Do you give any injection in order to make the bird fertile longer?*

No, over is over. Besides that, we think older pigeons should give their places to younger ones. The "019" will probably die here.

*What is it that you like the most in pigeon-sport?*

To watch the birds coming home from a race and see the youngbirds grow in the nests.

*How long will you continue racing pigeons?*

As long as we can walk and climb the stairs to the loft.

*How do you manage to get along with all these people that visit here?*

Well, we are used to that. Taking care of the birds is always first in line.

### Race Results Over 75 Years!

For 75 years the Janssen Brothers have won top prizes in the races. They have never advertised. It's the race results that took care of the advertising. We want the readers to realize that Jef, Charel, and Louis together have a combined

come back down. On the first days the brothers watch very carefully because sometimes they fly down or fall down and can't fly all the way to the high roof to get back to the landing board. In the beginning they can fly around from 13.00 to 16.00 hours.

The brothers breed for themselves sixteen winter-bred and fourteen summer-bred youngsters. All the birds are weaned in the same section that is 2.5 x 2 meters. The brothers don't think that it's the most ideal, putting different rounds together, but they have no alternative because of a lack of room. When the summer-breds are weaned they get extra food when the winter-breds are outside for exercise. They also have a problem when the winter-breds take the summer-breds with them to fly away when the summer-breds have just flown a few rounds around the loft. And when it is warm weather, Charel says that there is more chance that the summer-breds get sick.

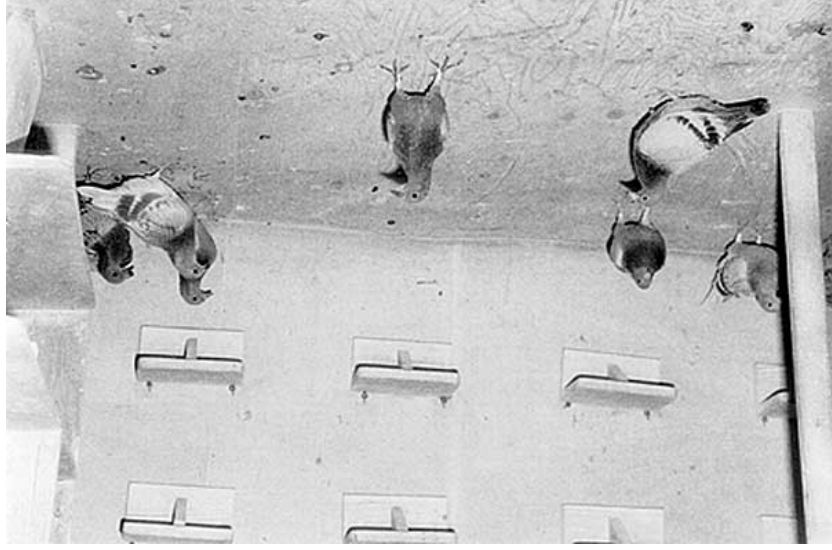
The youngsters get the same mixture as the nestbirds, only the corn is replaced by popcorn and very small French corn. This is only for the first weeks so that the youngsters learn quickly to eat the corn. It is very important that the youngsters eat all the grains.

They give special care to the youngsters because they are the future of the loft. Besides that, they try, through contact with the birds, to develop a friendship with the birds that will endure rest of their lives. The youngsters are trained to come in with a referee whistle so that they rush in as soon as they hear the sound of it. Always when they feed the birds this whistle is used. This way they also call the birds in when they return from a race. It's Jef that can whistle the best. "You have to be good to do it the way Jef does," Charel says. "Our Jef can whistle the same way as our brother Jan did a long time ago."



Louis is taking care of the widowhood hens. The way of feeding is the same as for the cocks. The hens are locked up for three months in a box at night on the days they are in the aviary. Only when it's good weather are they allowed to go in there. A hen only is good for widowhood during three or four seasons; after that, the love for the cocks is gone and the interest for the cock isn't there anymore. In order to get used as a breeding hen later on, they advise to keep a hen no longer than two years as a widowhood hen. Double widowhood they never tried so far.

Tip: Take very good care of your widowhood hens and try to keep them healthy, don't treat them like they are of no use. Also watch them very carefully because they often make the prizes for the cocks, Charel says. All of a sudden Charel raises his finger and says, "Don't think you can only race widowhood, because you cannot breed many good youngsters if you don't know what your good hens are. This way you end up as just a fancier." It's for you to decide!



## The Youngbirds

When the youngsters are weaned they stay for one day at the youngster section to get used to it. The next day they are put outside on the landing board, in order to have a good look around as soon as possible. This is done daily, as they think this way they will lose less pigeons from the loft. When the youngbirds are too old before they get weaned, they often are lost from the loft because they go into the air and are not familiar enough with the area to

in. The old widowers are not shown their hens and put in the basket first. After that they show the hens to the yearlings. When the hens are laying down in the nestbowl the cocks are taken and put into the basket. At the Janssen loft there are no big windows the birds can fly in, so they have to get in through the landing board. After the race, they're locked up with their hens and can stay together for half an hour. If it was a bad race they stay longer. The birds that get home later or the next day also get to see their hens. In that case, the other cocks are locked up in their nestboxes. As soon as the hens are away, they put a curtain in front of the windows that is put away in the evening. The widowers are sitting free in the section the whole week. Widowers that are not shipped are not allowed to see their hens. The boxes of the other cocks are closed, of course.

Widowers can easily do two races in one week. You don't bring them out of their rhythm. Every cock has his own strange behaviour. One is very quiet, and the other is very busy. Important is indeed that the cocks must keep their nestboxes under all circumstances. If one is thrown out of his nestbox, you'd better take him from the loft. The cocks stay on widowhood for three months; after that period of time they raise one youngster. Very often they race the former widowers a few times in the autumn. This can do no harm to them. According to the Janssen Brothers, a former widower can easily be a nestbird after; it doesn't do harm to it. They also never had problems with nestbirds arriving at the same time as widowers. They both go as quickly as possible into their own sections. When a widower is racing very well, you should give him the same hen next season.

### The Widowhood Hens

The hens play a major part in the success of their partners, according to Charles. The hen must be very much in love with her cock. When some hens are not, they try to get the cocks very angry. They never show him another hen. After showing the hens they go immediately back to their section. Right before the return of the cocks, the hens are locked up with a nestbowl in half the box.



younger than six days. The longer the hens are in the baskets the less chance you have to win a good prize. The results of hens are better when they are liberated early in the morning. Hens feel that they don't have to sit on the nest later in the day. Hens that go to the fields when they feed youngsters are locked up in their nestboxes. This is also to prevent them from taking other birds to the fields. Nestbirds can also make excellent widowhood cocks. The yearlings are very sharp on their nest. On the second and third nest you have to try to make them more motivated by giving them special care.

### The Widowhood Cocks

These are let out twice a day (at 7.00 and at 18.00 hours). In the morning they always get a little bit of small seeds. In the evening they get the race-mixture. In the beginning of the week they get 25% more barley than at the end of the week. The cocks get their food in the boxes. The widowers are let out first in the morning and are locked out for half an hour. No flag or any other thing is used to force them to fly. You shouldn't frighten a bird, they say. A bird has to fly by itself. If that isn't the case, it isn't healthy. If they can't land on their own loft because of the flag, they start landing elsewhere, and that's a bad habit. The widowers all raise one youngster in the spring, and after ten days of breeding on the second round, they go on widowhood. All the hens are taken away the same time, also when they're only breeding for a few days. The loft sections are situated directly above the nestbird and youngbird sections. On my question if this isn't a disadvantage, they don't answer. This is like it always was, so it doesn't matter.

During the cleaning of the sections and when there are visitors, they don't worry about disturbing the widowers. They're used to that, so it's not a problem. Charrel says it's a fairy tale that you're not allowed to disturb the widowers. He goes to the widowhood sections three times a day and spends just as much time there as with the other birds. "Also when I walk to the nestbirds they hear me, and to the youngbirds the same. And I'm not very quiet when I go to the birds, so they are disturbed many times," Charles says.

At our question how widowers show their form, Charles thinks every bird has his own way of showing. You just have to know them very well. "Our 'Schal-lyblauw' was always sitting on the landing board, while the 'Lichte' always practiced landing manoeuvres on the roof. When you expected him to land, he just flew away again."

Widowhood cocks always fly in a flock. The yearlings are put in the free nestboxes in the fall as early as possible. Before shipping they put the nestbowl

## The Feeding

The feeding of the birds is by far the most important part. Most of the fanciers give their birds too much food. It is extremely important to feed the birds in a way that they always have their ideal weight. Their feeding-schedule for the short- and middle-distance races is as follows: On Monday and Tuesday, very light grains; after that, bit by bit, some more energy in the food; and on Saturday morning only small seeds. Charel gives an extra tip by telling that you must be sure birds, when shipped, do not have too much food, otherwise they get thirsty in the basket. The Janssen Brothers mix their own food; all kinds of grains stay separated in bags in the attic, and daily they turn it by mixing it with a stick. The feeding time is adapted to the season. According to the Janssens, it's not important if you feed them at daylight or with electric light, but for them, they stay with nature as long as they can. Important, however, is that the birds get fed always at the same time of the day.

The birds get in the winter: 31% corn, 38% barley, 15% wheat, and 15% beans. In the summer: 30% corn, 25% English peas, 27% wheat, 13% barley, and 5% beans.

## Special Things

The well is, as you have read, the secret weapon for the pigeons. The pigeons always get this water, and one time a week also as bathing water. In the bath-water is always a big spoon of salt. At first they gave Aviol in the drinking water, but later on they stopped that. The whole year long, the pigeons get on Sunday honey in the drinking water. Once a week they give carrots cut in very little pieces; other vegetables they never give. In all the sections the pigeons can eat Vitamineral as much as they want, also grit with a spoon of salt mixed in. Pickstone they also give, but never on the day of shipping because otherwise the birds would get thirsty in the basket.

## The Nestbirds

They are let out for loft flying three times a day: At 7.30 in the morning, 12.00, and 17.00 hours. This is done in order to give both the hens and cocks an opportunity to loft fly. In the past, they let the birds out all day, but now it's too dangerous because of the poison on the fields. In the morning when they are called in, they get a little bit of small seed. At lunchtime they get a little bit of flying mixture, and in the evening they get as much as they want until a few birds go to the drinker. The nestbirds get fed in their own nestboxes. This is because some of the pigeons get fat very quickly and this way you can

control this tendency. When the birds just have youngsters in the nest they get more barley in their mixture. After a few days this is changed into wheat. In the spring they wean the youngsters at four weeks of age, in the summer already after three weeks. The breeding pigeons are sitting in the darker half of the nestbox. This makes them more quiet and protects them against cold and draft. They take particular care to watch the health of the nestbirds and also the vitality.

The hens are shipped the most. As long as the cock isn't chasing too much, they are shipped. The best nest position of a cock is, according to them, when he's chasing the hen. For the hens the best position is a youngster of eight to ten days. All the nestbirds raise only one youngster while racing. Very important is that the pigeons that raise youngsters keep looking very healthy. The feathers must look silky and feel like that. Special signs that nestbirds are in excellent conditions are:

- When they rarely leave the nest
  - When they defend the nestbox when the fancier gets near to it
  - When at feeding time they only take a few grains very quickly and then hurry back to the nest
  - When pigeons show behaviours that they never do normally
- At our question as to whether a nestcock later on can be a good widower, they answer in the affirmative. They often see that yearlings that are raced on the nest the first year are the next year often their best widowers. A nestbird can even be used as a widower after three or four years. They still don't like to talk about making birds excited or do tricks with them. One of the nicest stories we've ever heard is that on the day of shipping a hen was lying dead on the floor. The brothers saw it and decided to lay her in her own nestbox in front of the cock. After that he was shipped and won first prize that race. "You had to see him arrive," Louis said.

The next question was if it's possible to race the nestbirds very often. Louis says that at first the birds have to be very healthy and recuperate very quickly. Their nestbirds are mostly shipped about fifteen times a year. As an example, he mentions "Oude Blauwke", that was shipped five times within fourteen days and won five top prizes. This isn't an exception but rather a rule, because when a nestbird is in excellent condition it stays for at least fourteen days. But the fancier has to make sure that the birds do not get overweight and are not forced to do things they can't do. The eyes of the fancier are very important in such cases.

Tips: During very warm periods it's not wise to race hens that have young-

The matings in Arendonk are agreed to by the brothers after long conversations. The long winter nights are super for this kind of pigeon talk. The cocks usually keep their own nestboxes. If a hen is racing very well, she also keeps her own nestbox. As soon as a cock, after feeding youngsters, starts showing new interest in his hen, they put an extra nestbowl in the box. The material provided to build a nest is tabacco.

After mating for the first time they let the pairs out one by one, and in the evening they are all locked up in their nest boxes to insure that there are no fights. After two days the pairs can go in and out as long as they want (open loft).

During the first days, the brothers spend a lot of time being in the lofts in order to be present when something goes wrong. As soon as the eggs are laid, the brothers are already curious to know what the colour of the youngbirds later on will be. The colour of the feathers at the Janssen lofts shows a lot of variety. You see dark and light chequers, blues, reds, schally's, and pigeons with one or more white primaries.

To my question if white feathers were a sign of strength the brothers start laughing, "You must know better, good ones and bad ones come in all colours. It's just a matter of taste for us."

As far as the "Vossen" are concerned, they have to be red. Though they don't like silvers, they readily admit that there are very good ones amongst them as well!

The time they mate their birds is:

- January 8th - 8 breeding pairs

- January 22nd - 13 nest pairs

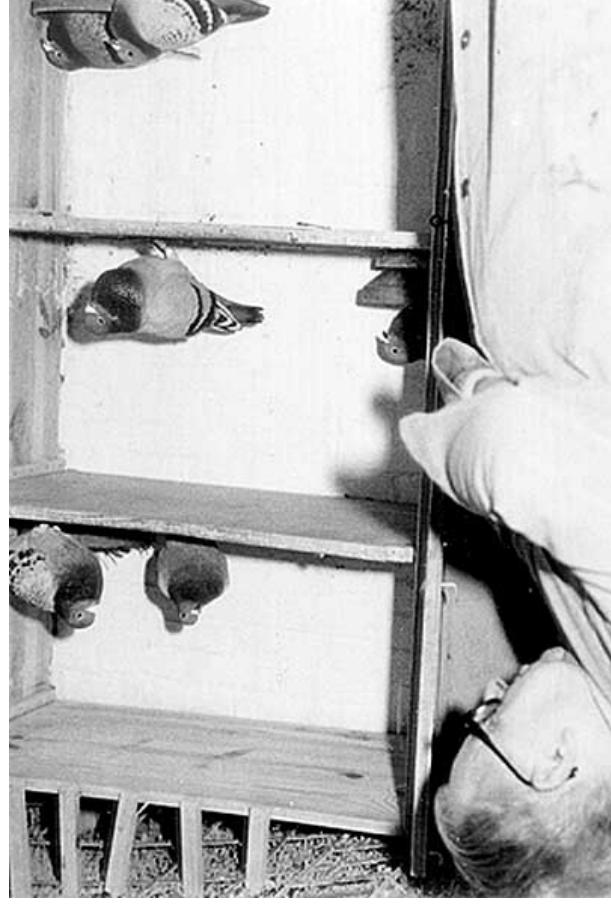
- February 12th - 14 widowhood pairs

Altogether the brothers have 35 pairs of oldbirds. The pairs stay almost nine months together, during the season they never change the pairs. End of October, they separate the birds.



Our next question was how have you increased the odds of breeding these types of birds? Louis and Charles tell us:

"At first comes good performances and pedigree. We like to do some inbreeding-nephew to niece seems the best mating. That's how we got the best results. The following things we tried never to do: Never mate two big birds together, otherwise you get chickens. Never mate small pigeons together, or pigeons both of whom have deep keels. Also, never mate pigeons together with so called white eyes. As far as we are concerned, the vitality and the colour must stay in the eyes, especially with pearl-eyed pigeons, one must provide to breed the colour out of the eyes."



with a full crop of grains that had been gathered by him in the field. "De Halve Fabry" won as youngbird, but nothing really special; still, in this his year of birth he changed enough so that the brothers decided to keep him. He had all the qualities to become a good bird. In his second year, he won three prizes in a row, the best one was a fifth. After that he missed and the brothers decided to keep him at home for one week. On Wednesday, he had a training toss and was shipped (driving his hen) to the race. He won first prize. Before he was used as a breeder, he was to win four firsts. As a breeder he was even better. His offspring were crossed into the Janssens.



Louis and Charel were very modest, indicating that they had a lot of luck. Yes, we agree that the good ones are rare. However, I think the Janssen Brothers also created their own luck. They were never satisfied with anything less than the best and they sought to achieve this in all that they did.

### The Mating

Before we go to this very important part of pigeon game, we asked the brothers what qualities they consider as important for a good pigeon to have. They say that the important things are:

- . The balance of a bird
- . A strong back
- . Silky feathers
- . Strong vents
- . A strong eye

This blue hen was mated with the "Schalieblauw". It was an extremely good pair. Birds bred from this pair were mostly light chequers with pearl eyes, as the "Oude Grote" and the "Jonge Witoger". The brothers said that these birds had beautiful bodies, silky feather, and a very tough character.

### "Jonge Witoger" x "Dochter van De Aap"

Later, Fons got himself a daughter from the famous "Aap" of Schoeters. She was mated to the "Jonge Witoger". The first two youngsters from this pair didn't show much potential for the future. One got lost from the roof and the other one was lost in training. But the youngbirds from the later rounds were all very good. They were all beautiful bodied chequers with beautiful pearl eyes. Their racing and breeding qualities, more importantly, were the deciding factors.

The Janssen pigeons nowadays are still descendants of these pigeons. They were crossed with the "Vossen", those from "Oude Vos" from Louis and off "Vos van '26", which was still direct from Ceulemans.

### "Wonder Voske van '45"

One of the most famous stockbirds, this hen was well-known because of her winning numerous first prizes. She was almost unbeatable. She was a daughter of "Vos van '39" and a daughter off the pair "Schalieblauw" x "Blauw Duij".

### "Bange van '51"

This crack is the offspring of the well-known "Vossenline". His father was "Vos van '49". The name "Bange" is not because he was shy, but because of the fact that when he got home from a race, he stayed for a couple of minutes on the landing board in order to have a nice view of the neighbourhood.

The "Bange van '51" is the keybird from which the pigeons descend that became famous in the later years. These pigeons were "De Scherpen", the "Oude Merckx", the "019", "Jonge Merckx", and the "Geeloger".

### The "Halve Fabry"

One day, Louis relates how Mr. Viktor Fabry came to their home to purchase a cock. The bird was called "De Trage", a son of "De Witoger". Fabry wanted to mate "De Trage" to a daughter off his famous "Portois". He promised us a youngbird from this pair. A little more than a year later we found a box in the kitchen with a little youngster in it. After some time, the brothers remembered the promise Mr. Fabry had made to send a youngbird from the crossed pair. It was a normal rather than an outstanding kind of youngbird, and after a few training tosses the brothers decided to send it to Quiévrain (100 km). The weather was not good and when all the birds were home the "Halve Fabry" was still missing. After a few hours, the brothers found him in the backyard

about their family of birds:

### **The "Oude Vos"**

In the year 1919, Fons got himself a blue cock from a man called Ceulemans from Berlaar. This man was already an old man at that time. The youngbirds out of that cock were doing very well. Louis, at that time a very young little fancier, got the "Oude Vos" for himself when the pigeon was three times as old as he was-the bird was already 19 years old. Louis made himself a nestbox that he placed on top of the toilet situated in the backyard. The "Oude Vos" was very happy in that box and Louis saw that a suitable young hen called "Jong Voske" was made available to him. This young hen was very much in love with his cock. The young hen had won the second prize the day before in the race and Louis tried to make her get into the nestbox on top of the toilet. After some time he succeeded and was already dreaming of the pair making love to each other in his own "loft". But when he looked a few hours later, he saw that the old cock didn't like the hen at all and he had pecked her head so that it was all covered with blood. You can understand how this gave him big problems with the rest of the family.

Around that time, Fons Janssen became friends with Mister Schoeters from Herenthout, and later got himself the so-called "Oude Duike van '25".

### **The "Tamme"**

In 1920, both Adriaan and Charrel were also very enthusiastic fanciers. They both had a small section for themselves; one that had been a former chicken-loft, Charles told me. Our Jaan had his "Tamme" that was sitting always on the hedge. Jaan only had to put his hand on the hedge and "De Tamme" immediately sat on it.

### **The "Lichte"**

After sitting together, they all agreed to put the "Tamme" together with the "Schoon Voske" from Charrel. He bred from this pair two beautiful light chequers with pearl eyes. The oldest brother, Frans, liked these youngbirds very much and was willing to pay five Belgium francs for them (approx 25 cents). Brother Fons saw the disappointment in Charrel's eyes and offered him 30 francs. Fons took them both to his home in Baarle-Hertog and was very successful with these birds. One of the two was lost in a race, but the other one became a real superbird. This cock won nine times first prize. At first, all the members of the Janssen family thought that Fons was saying this just to please Charrel, but when Fons brought the race-results as a proof, they all were convinced and could not believe what they were seeing. Charrel was as proud as anyone could be! Fons had his heart in the right place and gave the bird back

to his brothers. Later, when broken to the loft, the brothers raced him.

One day the "Lichte" was shipped again, as Adriaan believed him to be in super shape. That Sunday, the race was delayed because of bad weather. On Monday, they let the birds go and Fons decided to come and watch the birds together with his brothers because there was a strong headwind, and according to him this was the best weather for the "Lichte". The pigeons flew, according to Fons, longer than you might expect. After he saw his brothers clock a few other birds, he shouted, "None of mine home yet!" His brothers started laughing and said: "My dear Fons, you know nothing about pigeons, because you were late yourself and the bird was already clocked before you arrived." The "Lichte" that day won first prize, ten minutes ahead.

The next winter, the neighbours built a new wall. All of a sudden, a big shelf fell down and mother Pauline saw a bird that was scared and raced away. In the evening, the whole family was in a state of panic! The "Lichte" was gone. He was still sitting on the nest at 16.00 hours, Charrel said. Mother Pauline told them what she had seen. Two years later, the "Lichte" came back without his band. He probably strayed in another loft and was kept as a breeder. Also the "Blinde" of brother Frans, a full sister of the "Lichte", achieved top results.

Charrel at that time raced together for two years with his older brother. However, since Frans gave all the good ones away, Charrel quit as he wanted to seriously build a strong family of birds. The brothers told me that Frans kept on racing by himself and had extremely good results.

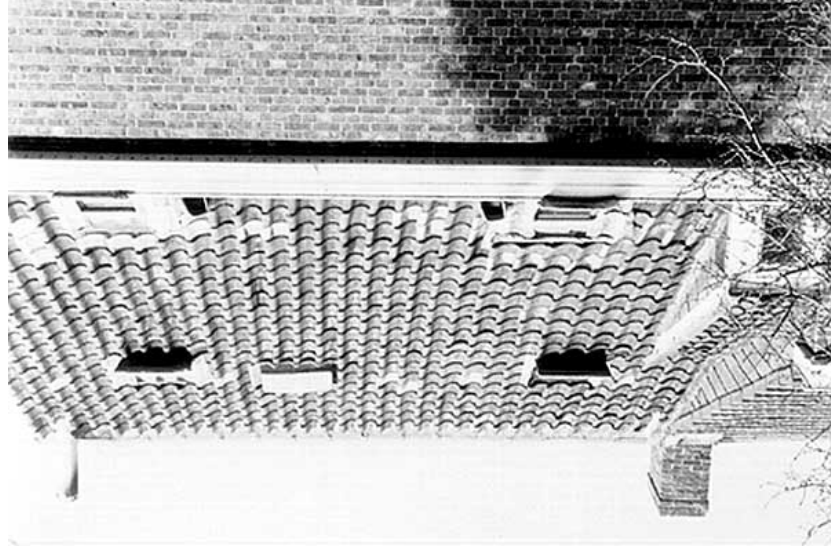
### **The "Schalieblauw" x "Blauw Duit"**

As has already been mentioned, Fons became very good friends with the brewer, Schoeters, from Berlaar, and he went together with his brother, Adriaan, to Herenthout. When they arrived, they also met Mr. Goossens, a friend of Mr. Schoeters. "What have you sitting there?" Adriaan asked, and pointed to a rabbit hutch. In it was sitting a very neglected pigeon with a lot of old feathers and a dirty tail. The brothers examined the bird carefully and discovered that it was the previous year's late-bred, still having three old primaries. They asked if they could buy the bird, but Schoeters said that this bird wasn't even worth keeping. Nevertheless, they bought the bird and Fons and Adriaan returned home satisfied. After moulting, he looked very different and was nicely built too; the "Schalieblauw" looked as if reborn. At an auction of Schoeters, Fons bought a few pigeons-amongst others, a blue hen with red around the eyes. She had raced very well and had won, amongst others, a first Noyon and a first Orleans. "As a youngbird, she was raced too many times," Louis remembers.

In the backyard you immediately notice a well and a pear tree. From this well is drawn the natural water to fill the drinkers of the famous pigeons. Their hospitality to visitors is well-known, as is also their appreciation of punctuality. Anyone that visits must be punctual, as well as respectful of their schedule; this would not change even for the King of Belgium.

### The Lofts

Their lofts are as unassuming as their own home-small but efficient! Everything has a use. No expensive or unwarranted materials. They are still the same as they were years ago-that is except for a very expensive alarm and security system. Charel mentioned that it was a shame that they had to use it nowadays.



There are four sections built on the attic. The youngbird section and the nest-bird section are below, and above are the two sections for the widowers. As soon as you enter the lofts, you notice how quiet it is. All the landing boards are on the southwest. There are also two lofts in the backyard. One of them is called "De Ren"; this is where the older birds are breeding. The other one is built with an aviary for the widowhood hens. Notice that all the race sections are situated directly under the tiles that cover the roof of the house. Several tiles made of glass take care of providing the light inside the sections. Because of the fact that between the shelves from which the sections are built and separated there is still a lot of room; you can say that the pigeons can take

advantage of all the air that is inside the whole attic. So fresh air is always there. Many times the brothers have to remove the snow out of the sections. There's no need to close or open the ceiling in order to get more or less air for the pigeons.



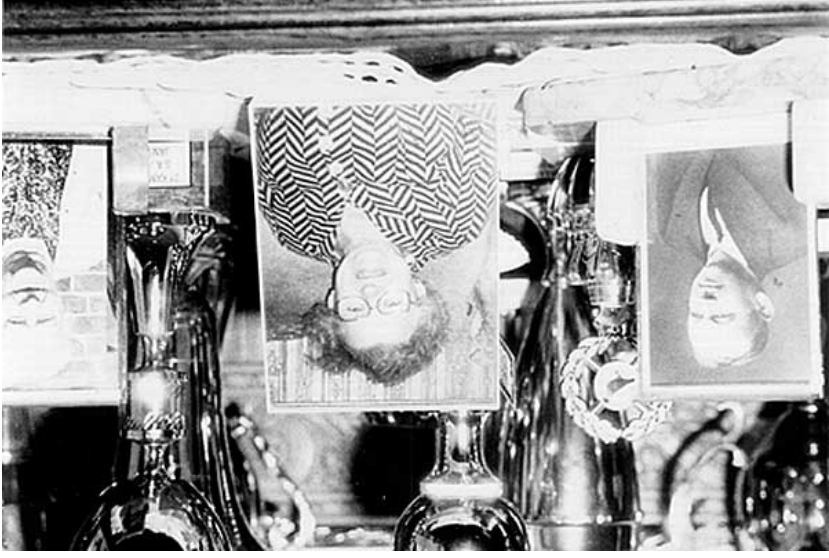
"Those sections stay the same as they are, day or night, winter or summer," the brothers tell us. The most important thing is to keep the sections as clean as possible. If that's done seriously it's no problem to keep the birds healthy. Every time you enter the lofts they are as clean as can be. No matter how many people visit in a day, they always clean once again before someone else is allowed into the lofts. The floors always look as if you could eat from them. Once per week they use the vacuum cleaner so that there's no dust in the lofts, and besides that, they regularly take broom and brush to disinfect the lofts. Once every year they have the big cleaning and they brush everything with water and chloride. After that, all the walls are painted white again.

### The Stockbirds of the Janssen Brothers

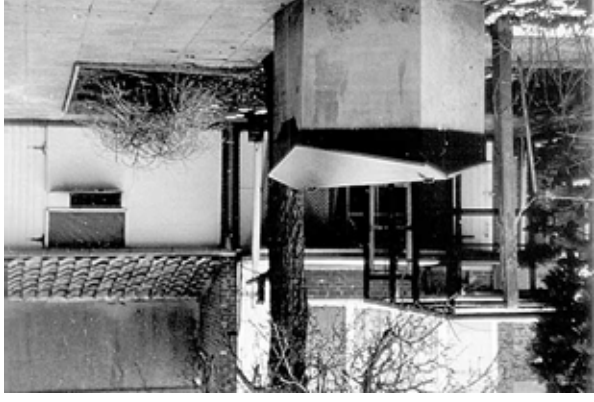
When we are sitting comfortably together having a drink, the Janssen Brothers start talking a bit more. Sitting in their well-known easy chairs they tell us



People that visit the Janssen house for the first time may be a little surprised at what they find. They may expect, as with most superstars in every kind of sport, a large imposing home. In this case, what you find is a very humble home that was built before the Second World War. As is the custom in Arendonk, the entrance to the Janssen home is a small door around the back.



The Janssen Brothers are down-to-earth, honest men that remained faithful to the fashion in which they had been brought up. These were people who worked hard in the cigar-factory until they could retire on a pension. Inside their home, everything is honest and down-to-earth; the pictures of their parents and of their brothers and sisters are all in their own places. They have a little dog that barks very loudly at every stranger who enters their home. This is not the average residence of famous men, but rather the residence of very good and unpretentious people.



knowledge, and with the help of the majority of his family he built his own family of birds.

All the children had to take part and share in their father's hobby. For instance, the cleaning of the lofts was done by the girls as well as the boys. Henri died in 1947. His wife Pauline was the head of the family until she passed away in 1967. She was known for her kindness and all the children loved her very much.

Henri, as I mentioned earlier, was only interested in racing the natural system, and in spite of the fact that the sons built a widowhood section, it was never used as long as he was alive. Henri was very much afraid that the use of the widowhood system would, after a few years, hurt the quality of his pigeon family due to the fact that he would not be able to test the race quality of the hens. You see many of his best birds were hens.

After Henri's death, the sons decided to continue the life's work of their father. In the meantime, some of the children were married. Those that remained divided the work amongst themselves. Adriaan took care of the nestbirds and the youngbirds, Louis took care of the breeders, Jef did the shipping, the cleaning of the nestbirds, the opening of the clocks, and the care of the dog. Mother Pauline and Irma did the household chores and took care of all the visitors.

It was finally decided that Charrel would take care of the widowers. Yes, you read well. After the death of their father the sons started very carefully trying the widowhood system. At first with only four cocks! These were the "Oude Donkere", the "Oude Lichte", the "Rode", and the "Lichte Vos". They had not forgotten the wise words of their father; they made sure that the natural system, as well as the breeding, was still first in line.

*The House at Schoolstraat 6 in Arendonk*



## **The Most Famous Pigeon Fanclers in the World: The Janssen Brothers of Arendonk, Belgium**

*by Henk van Limpt-De Prui of Reusel, Holland*

*translated by Joop Ekslijn and edited by Silvio Mattacchione*

Arendonk, a little village in the Belgium province of De Kempen, became famous for thousands of pigeon fanclers around the world. And perhaps the name Arendonk is still known by a few cyclist fans that remember the name of Rik van Steenbergen, a three-time world champion cyclist much admired by the Janssen Brothers. But we all know the difference between being world famous because of cycling and being world famous because of pigeons! Very few pigeon fanclers will remember Rik van Steenbergen the cyclist, but the Janssens will be remembered for generations.

The Janssens didn't only make history because of the performances of their pigeons in the races, but even more for what their birds achieved as breeders for the thousands of fanclers that could eventually acquire a few specimens of this family of birds. All over the world you will find their birds, and there is no other loft that has been as important for the development of the modern racing pigeon as the Janssen loft. Thanks are due to my kind and good friends, the Janssen Brothers, for allowing me to visit them so many times so that I would be able to prepare this exclusive report. The Janssen Brothers wish for all the fanclers reading this report a lot of joy and a sincere hope that they may garner some useful thoughts from it.

### **How It Began**

It began in the year 1872, the year that Henri Janssen was born. He founded the Janssen family of pigeons. Henri had his first pigeons in 1886. He was at that time better known under the name Driekske De Pauw. Henri married Pauline, who was born in 1877. They both worked very hard all their lives. Their marriage produced nine children, seven were boys and two were girls. Their names were Fons, Frans, Jef, Vic, Irma, Adriaan, Charel, Marie, and Louis. Henri was one of the original fanclers that founded the pigeon club in Arendonk. He was a top fancler right from the very beginning. In the period from 1908 until 1914, he had very famous Ace Pigeons such as "Het Blauwte" with twenty firsts. Already at that time he won some bicycles in the races.

Henri was a quiet man who loved nature, and everything that had to do with pigeons had to do with nature. Because of that, he was an enemy of winter breeding and also of the widowhood system. All these tricky things made him angry. With an endless amount of love and care, Henri used his eyes and his

**The Most Famous  
Pigeon Fanciers in the World:  
The Janssen Brothers  
of Arendonk, Belgium**

*by Henk van Limpt-De Fruit of Reusel, Holland*

La poste à Paris pendant le siège et sous la Commune  
Paris 1914  
Brunel  
La poste à Paris  
Amiens 1920  
Florange  
Etude sur les messageries et les postes  
Paris 1925  
Maincent  
Genèse de la poste aérienne du siège de Paris  
Rouen 1951  
Savelon  
La poste pendant le siège 1870-1871  
Paris 1961  
Fromaigat  
La poste par pigeons 1870-1871  
Paris 1966

the only method of communication. But never again were pigeons called upon to perform such a great public service as that which they had maintained during the siege of Paris.

### Bibliography

- De Lafollye  
 Recueil des dépêches privées  
 Bordeaux 1871  
 Dépêches par pigeons voyageurs pendant le siège de Paris  
 which contains:  
 Memoire sur la section photographique et administrative du service de ces  
 dépêches  
 Tours 1871  
 De Clerval  
 Les ballons pendant le siège de Paris  
 Paris 1871  
 De Fonville  
 Les ballons pendant le siège  
 Paris 1871  
 Enquête sur les actes du gouvernement de la défense nationale - Annales de  
 l'Assemblée Nationale  
 Paris 1875  
 Steenackers  
 Les Télégraphes et les Postes pendant la guerre de 1870-1871  
 Paris 1883  
 La Perre de Roo  
 Monographie des pigeons domestiques  
 Paris 1883  
 Chapuis  
 Le pigeon voyageur  
 Verviers 1886  
 Deneuve  
 Les pigeons voyageurs  
 Paris 1888  
 Maillet  
 Les aéronauts, les colombophiles du siège de Paris  
 Paris 1909  
 Chamboissier

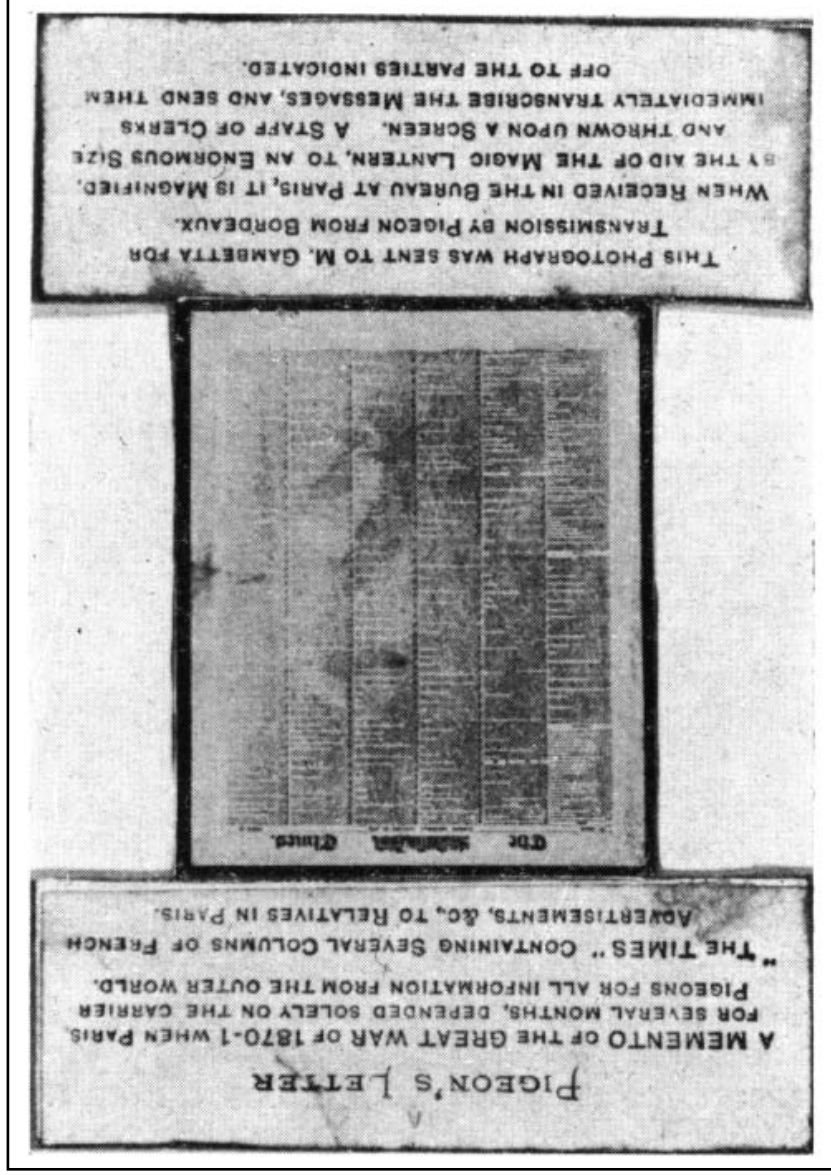


Fig 18. The London Stereoscopic & Photographic Company souvenir.

The success of the pigeon post, both for official and for private messages, did not pass unnoticed by the military forces of the European powers and in the years that followed the Franco-Prussian War pigeon sections were established in their armies. The advent of wireless communication led to a diminution of their employment although in certain particular applications Pigeons provided

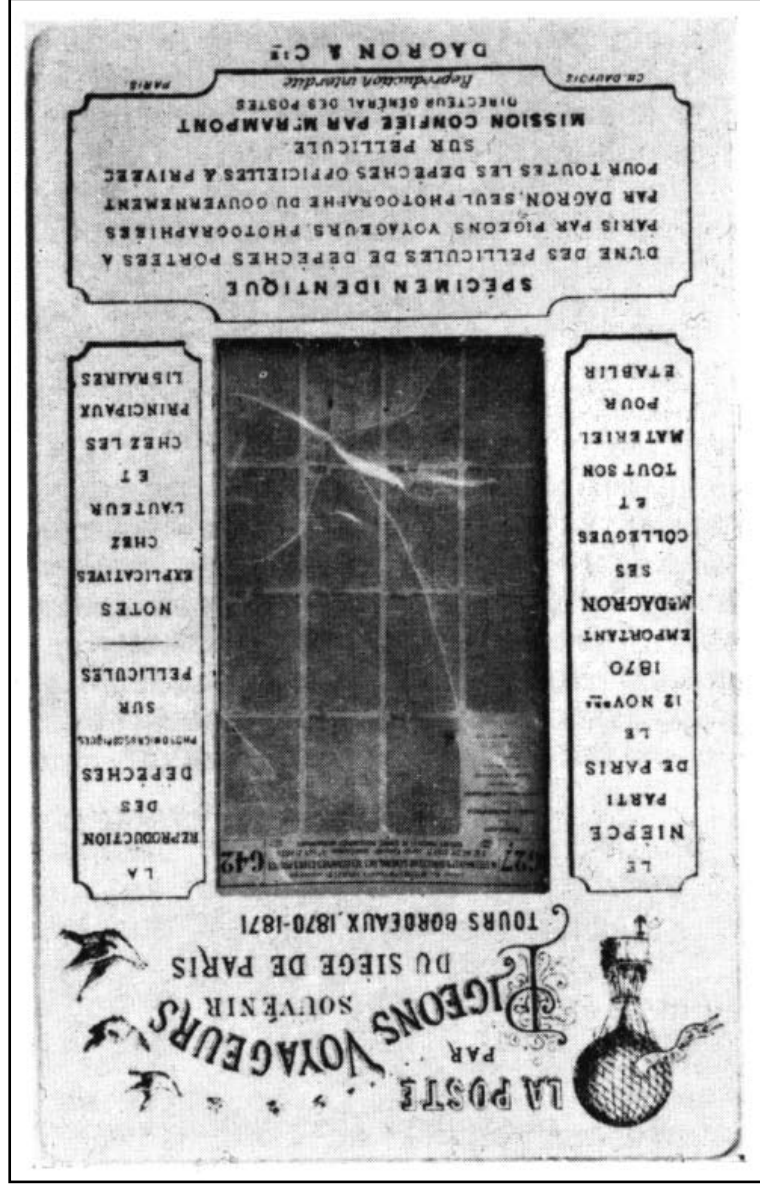
Envoi

It is not known whether Dagron fabricated other souvenir pellicules but the Photographic Journal of 14th December 1871 records in the Transactions of the Photographic Society in London that "The President proposed a vote of thanks to M. Dagron for his communication (On the preparation of micro-photographic despatches on film by M. Dagron's process) and the valuable specimens that accompanied it." These specimens could have been additional souvenir pellicules or microfilms which he had kept when the service at Bordeaux closed.

But it is exceedingly probable that others, less so entitled, produced simulacres since there are currently in existence far more so-called pigeons than could have come from dismembered copies of de Lafoleye's collection. The Parisian stamp dealer Maury is suspected of being one such producer and it is significant that his price list of 1894 offers microfilms at 1 franc 25 centimes each. Some of the glass photographic plates used either for the prints or for the microfilms could have been "borrowed" from official sources and more copies run off. There exist, for despatches originally printed on both sides of photographic paper, copies in which the despatches are separately printed on one side only, quite contrary to the purpose of this method. If an authentic pigeongram is defined as one produced during the war by the official service at Tours or Bordeaux, then a pigeongram can usually be certified as authentic only if it is still attached to a page from de Lafoleye's collection and preferably if that page is still bound inside the book.

One of the best known souvenirs (Fig 18) is that produced by the London Stereoscopic and Photographic Company which carries the front page of "The Times" of 19th January 1871. On 30th January 1871 "The Times" contained a report that this had been sent to Gambetta at Bordeaux and thence by pigeon to Paris. The report has since been widely quoted in histories of the siege of Paris, in histories of photography, and in the "History of the Times". Recently, it has been argued that the story is unlikely to be true and on 4th February 1970 "The Times" acknowledged that its report of 99 years before was probably false.

There is also a "Souvenir of the Franco-Prussian War - A pigeon despatch", 45 mm x 35 mm, reproducing on photographic paper extracts from columns of "The Times" in issues between 14th and 18th November 1870.



Bartholdi monument; donors of from 5 to 20 francs received a souvenir sheet 240 mm by 160 mm with the simulacre in the centre around which was the inscription "La poste par pigeons voyageurs - spécimen identique aux pellicules du siège contenant la valeur d'une page de journal". Donors of from 20 to 100 francs also received a copy, together with an engraving of the monument. This late reprint of his pellicule would have pleased Dagron who had died in Paris on 13th June 1900 at the age of 81.

Fig 17. The Dagron simulacre.

ministériel et ne puisse être l'objet d'aucun contrôle, il m'a semblé que des emprunter aux dépêches réelles et faire croire à une indiscretion. Dans ce but, je crois qu'il serait convenable que je simulacre que Mr Dagron serait autorisé à reproduire portait une attestation administrative indiquant qu'il ne contient aucune dépêche privée. Il devrait d'ailleurs être toujours accompagnée de la reproduction de ce rapport auquel Mr Dagron pourrait joindre la notice historique annexée au premier volume de la collection. Sous ces réserves, je pense, Monsieur le Directeur-Général, que la publication que desirer faire Mr Dagron peut avoir pour avantage de faire connaître au public un des incidents du siège de Paris les plus intéressants pour l'histoire contemporaine et de témoigner en même temps des efforts de votre administration pour accomplir sous votre direction la mission de conserver entre la France et Paris des relations si désirées et en même temps si difficiles. Si vous voulez bien approuver les dispositions de ce rapport, j'ai l'honneur de vous demander de le revêtir de votre signature."

Steenackers accepted the recommendation of de Lafoleye which ensured that their own names and deeds would be well publicised but Steenackers was soon to lose his post and Dagron was to have Rampont once again as his patron. He did produce a simulacre, with no reference to Steenackers and de Lafoleye, having the general appearance of the last that were sent by pigeon, that is to say: with the range of page numbers inserted at the top. He selected the page numbers 627 and 642, which were fictitious, and purported to have the sixteen pages on the microfilm. The content was, however, one title page which declared that this was a simulacre, and fifteen pages of which two numbers were twice repeated and the whole an invention of letter-press private messages. This simulacre was available to the public in three ways. It was bound between the centre pages of a booklet written by Dagron "La Poste par Pigeons Voyageurs - Notice sur le voyage du ballon Le Népce emportant M. Dagron et ses collaborateurs et détails sur la mission qu'ils avaient à remplir" printed in Paris by Typographie Labure. It was also sold as part of a souvenir card 105 mm by 64 mm (Fig 17) which could be bought either from Dagron's company or from bookshops. The card repeated what was on the cover of the booklet: that Dagron was the only official photographer of official and private despatches on microfilm. The third issue of the simulacre was from March 1903 to October 1905 when the Aero Club was collecting funds for the

la produite. Ce spécimen plein d'intérêt ne saurait manquer d'exciter un grand sentiment de curiosité dans le public s'il y était connu, et je viens vous demander, Monsieur le Directeur Général, de m'autoriser à en publier des simulacres contenant, comme une véritable pellicule, seize pages de texte. Les premières pages seraient précédées du titre réglementaire qui accompagnait toutes les dépêches et tel qu'il était, c'est-à-dire avec votre nom qui demeure attaché à la création de ce service. Elles contiendraient avec cette demande, les décrets traitant de la manière et les renseignements historiques qu'il pourrait être utile d'y joindre. Les autres pages seraient composées de dépêches supposées ne se rapportant à aucune de celles qui ont été véritablement transmises, de manière à en respecter complètement le secret et à ne froisser aucun intérêt.

Je pense, Monsieur le Directeur Général, que cette petite oeuvre pourrait être instructive non seulement au point de vue historique mais aussi en offrant au public et notamment aux élèves des écoles une occasion de faire usage de microscopes et d'instruments d'optique d'ordinaire insuffisamment employés. Je saisis cette occasion, Monsieur le Directeur Général, pour appeler votre attention sur ma pellicule dont la composition est bien supérieure à celle du papier. Là où le papier jaunit et se décompose, cette pellicule rebelle à l'humidité et que l'eau même ne détériore pas, reste inaltérable. Elle est en On 8th February 1871, de Lafoleye made his recommendation to Steenackers on Dagron's submission:

"Vous m'avez invité à vous adresser un rapport sur la demande que Mr Dagron photographie de l'Administration Télégraphique vous a soumise dans le but d'être autorisée à répandre dans le public des images photographiques ayant l'apparence des pellicules envoyées à Paris pendant son investissement au moyen des pigeons - voyageurs de l'Administration. Bien qu'en droit la forme spéciale qu'ont affectée les pellicules portant les dépêches confiées aux pigeons - voyageurs ne constitue pas un monopole ad-

# OPEN LETTERS for PARIS.



THE Director-General of the French Post Office has informed this Department that a special Despatch, by means of Carrier Pigeons, of correspondence addressed to Paris has been established at Tours, and that such Despatch may be made use of for brief letters, or notes, originating in the United Kingdom, and forwarded by post to Tours. Persons desirous of availing themselves of this mode of transmission must observe the following conditions:

Every letter must be posted open, that is, without any cover or envelope, and without any seal, and it must be registered.

No letter must contain more than twenty words, including the address and the signature of the sender, but the name of the

address, the place of his abode, and the name of the sender—although composed of more than one word will each be counted as one word only.

No figures must be used, the number of the house of the addresser must be given in words.

Combined words joined together by hyphens or apostrophes will be counted according to the number of words making up the combined word.

The letters must be written entirely in French, in clear, intelligible language. They must relate solely to private affairs and no political allusion or reference to the War will be permitted.

The charge for these letters is five pence for every word, and this charge must be prepaid, in addition to the postage of six pence for a single registered letter addressed to France.

The Director-General of the French Post Office, in notifying this Arrangement, has stated that his office cannot guarantee the safe delivery of this correspondence, and will not be in any way responsible for it.

By Command of the Postmaster-General,

GENERAL POST OFFICE,  
10th November, 1870.

Fig 14. Post Office Notice No. 64 of 1870.

On Her Majesty's Service.

Letters for despatch  
by Carrier Pigeons.

The  
DIRECTOR-GENERAL  
of Posts and Telegraphs,  
TOURS.

Weight of Letters  
om.  
credited to France under  
Art. 1, Table 2 of the Letter Bill.

GENERAL  
Post Office,  
LONDON.

Fig 15. Post Office envelope.

A LIST OF REGISTERED LETTERS addressed to PARIS  
intended for transmission from TOURS by Carrier Pigeons.

Note.—The total weight of these letters has been placed to the credit of the French Post Office,  
under Art. 1, Table 2, of the Letter Bill of this date.

GENERAL POST OFFICE, LONDON.

Despatch of the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ 187 \_\_\_\_\_

No.	To whom addressed	Business	From	Amount credited to the French Post Office for the same, calculated at 50 centimes per word.
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				

Fig 16. Post Office letter-bill.

The post-war souvenirs  
It has been seen that, no sooner was the armistice signed, de Lafollye commenced the publication of the records of his service by the issue of the collection of the copies of the despatches. He was quickly followed by Dagon who, on 7th February 1871, formally sought permission to publish a microfilm of the same size and having the appearance of those sent during the war. The text of his submission was:



*au Directeur Général des Télégraphes et des Postes à Tours par la voie postale avec la mention spéciale "Pigeons Voyageurs". A raison de l'inconvénient des lignes il est impossible de les accepter par le télégraphe..."*

On receiving this, the Submarine Telegraph Company agreed with the G.P.O. that it was for the latter to operate the service and a Post Office Notice, No 64 of 1870, was drafted. Although it was not approved by the Postmaster-General until 17th November, it was dated 16th November (Fig 14). At the same time, special envelopes (Fig 15) and letter-bills (Fig 16) were printed, and the service was opened to the British public but only for letters, a decision being taken on 9th December that dépêches-mandats could not be handled. When, in January, the French internal tariff was reduced, the G.P.O. sought confirmation that this applied also to messages from England; de Laflolys's affirmative reply was dated 30th January, the eve of the closure of the service. By then, the last English despatch had, on 28th January, left for France.

"The Times" had also publicised the service. Its issue of 19th November carried a report from its correspondent in Tours:

"It is said that the pigeon post is gone off, with sheets of photographed messages reduced to an invisible size, and which in Paris are to be magnified, written out, and transmitted to their addresses. They are limited to private affairs, politics and news of military operations being strictly excluded. But the Prussians, it is said, with their usual diabolical cunning and ingenuity, have set hawks and falcons flying round Paris to strike down the feathered messengers that bear under their wings healing for anxious souls."

In the records of the private messages is a group emanating from London on 22nd November and being set up in type at Bordeaux on 2nd January. There is an earlier message from London but with no date of origin but set up in type at Bordeaux on 30th November; the difficulties previously mentioned of putting messages in an accurate order preclude positive identification of this as the first message from England. There can be no doubt of the authenticity of these English messages since a balloon letter exists which reached England asking for questions to be answered in the form required of a dépêche-réponse. Nevertheless, this participation by the G.P.O. did not avert an accusation by de Fonville, writing in 1871, that the G.P.O. had openly declared its lack of confidence in the effectiveness of the service and he wondered whether this was due to jealousy or to its subversion by Prussian agents.

The opening of the service to the public by the decree of 4th November attracted messages not only from inside France but also from outside. The decree had been published in the *Moniteur* which Lord Lyons, the British Ambassador at Tours sent to the Foreign Office which, in turn, forwarded the appropriate extract to the G.P.O. on 10th November. Prior information must, however, already have reached England since, on 11th November Steenackers sent the following telegram to the "Directeur Général Postes et Télégraphes Londres"

"Il m'a été demandé de Londres d'admettre des dépêches de provenance Anglaise à la correspondance spéciale avec Paris par pigeon. J'avais refusé, craignant trop d'affluence en égard à l'insuffisance des moyens. L'expérience des premiers jours m'a fait reconnaître que je suis disposé à admettre les dépêches Anglaises que vous avertiez centralisées à la télégraphique Anglaise si vous êtes disposé vous même à le faire. Un compte spécial pour ces dépêches serait ouvert à Tours et à Londres mais à raison des difficultés du service télégraphique actuel votre office les transmettrait par la poste à Tours à mon adresse avec mention "pigeons voyageurs". Les départs pour Paris ne sont pas assez nombreux pour qu'il puisse y avoir inconvénient à écarter l'usage du télégraphe. Je vous serais reconnaissant de me faire savoir si nous sommes d'accord et dans ce cas de donner à cet accord la publicité nécessaire en Angleterre en expliquant au public les motifs de ce changement de décision".

"La réponse à votre dépêche No 5187, nous sommes disposés à faire des arrangements pour la réception des dépêches pour Paris par "Pigeons Voyageurs" de Tours et à ouvrir un compte spécial avec votre Administration pour ces dépêches. Veuillez m'informer de la taxe et des conditions auxquelles ces dépêches peuvent être transmises de Tours par pigeons voyageurs. Au reçu de cette information la taxe totale entre le Royaume Uni et Paris pourra être convenue entre nous, de même que la proportion à en créditer votre Administration et cette Compagnie respectivement".

Steenackers answered by telegram on 13th November, quoting the conditions of the decree of 4th November and emphasising that the messages had to be "en français intelligible". He went on to say:

"Adresses, si nous sommes d'accord, les dépêches destinées à ce service spécial



These pages were each 415 mm by 260 mm with the messages set out in three columns. It will be seen that the dates are not in strict concordance with the page numbering, an inconsistency which applies throughout and is explained by the fact that pages were made up in parallel and that the messages were inserted not always in the order in which they arrived at the printers. All these pages appear in despatches on photographic paper, with pages 15 and 16 and pages 17 and 18 as the first to be printed on both sides but fifty-four duplicates were subsequently sent on microfilm (Fig 11). The second volume opens with 56 pages set up in a way to permit Dagron to produce microdots (even though the experiment was not successful), each page being divided into twelve sub-pages each 80 mm by 112 mm ( Fig 12). The sub-pages have a heading of D.S. for dépêche du service, D.P. for dépêche privée, and so on. The first two sub-

pages contained de Lafolloy's announcement of the new service:

*Tours - 30 novembre 1870. Inspecteur des Télégraphes de Lafolloy à inspecteur général Pierrat (chiffre des inspecteurs). Nous commençons aujourd'hui une nouvelle série de dépêches qui seront réduites à Petal tout à fait microscopique par M.Dagron (here follow 85 blocks of numbers). Je les enverrai aussitôt qu'elles seront typographiées. Je vous adresserai aussi en duplicata la reproduction microscopique des dépêches privées photographiées depuis la page 11 dont nous n'avons pas reçu réception. Je ne m'explique pas que la page 6 ne vous soit pas parvenue. Elle doit se trouver sur une feuille qui contient quatre pages et au dos de la page 3. Néanmoins je vous en adresserai un duplicata. Pour ne pas confondre ces duplicata avec la série nouvelle, DUPPLICATA DE LA PAGE 6 POINT 1 ou 2, 3, ... 9. M.Dagron appelle 'point' une des petites images microscopiques d'un millimètre carré. Le nombre des points contenus dans une des pages photographiques précédentes sera de 9. J'aurai la précaution d'indiquer, à la fin des duplicata, que la série en est terminée.*

*Dans la nouvelle série, chaque feuille portera un numéro dont la suite sera indéfinie, et les points de chaque feuille, une série de numéros qui se renouvelera pour chaque feuille. Afin que, si pour la lecture vous séparez ces points, vous puissiez toujours recomposer les feuilles, chaque point portera le numéro de la feuille à laquelle il appartiendra. Cette inscription faite en plus gros caractère aura la forme =F.8=F.15=Cette indication sera suivie de celle de la nature des dépêches, sous la forme DP, DP, DM, ou DS; pour dépêches privées ordinaires, dépêches réponses, dépêches mandats ou dépêches de service.*

== F. 1 == P. 5 == D. P. == 13 XI ==

Annas. -- Watel, 11 bis, boulevard Bati-  
gnolles. Allons bien, Eugène Arras. -- Watel.  
J. Rauband, personnel postes. Santé bonne,  
Aime tel. | Hubeulle, 138, Lourdan. Victor  
travail, allons bien, maitre catéchisme, Tilloy,  
Lolotte cinq dents, Louis parle toi souvent. --  
Hunebelle. | Laroche, 72 bis, Honaparte. Mar-  
guerie Jourmay, Ludovic Anglerve, familles  
Laroche, Baveluy, Gustave, Hétel, Moisson-  
nière, Vartelle sainte, tranquilité. 12 novembre.  
--Laroche. | Dauchez, 12, Havre. Dudouit, Zec,  
famille Dauchez bonnes santes ; lettres reçues. |  
DIVONNE. -- Seligmann, 44, Richer. Baccac-  
rat prisonnier, valide. -- Henry. | Leloir, Mont-  
martre, 146. Employer ce qui est libre de mon  
compte personnel en rentes nominatives. --  
Acleque. |  
Bouges. -- Hersent, boulevard Mallesherbes.  
Lovilly télégraphie partitons New-York 10 de-  
cembre, tous bien, Chomeau guéri, écrivez-  
moi, Granville bien, voirier attendu. --Cécile. |  
FOURCIAMBAULT. -- Thébeau, rue Beaune,  
12. Bien portant, donnez nouvelles petit. --  
Bazin. |  
BLANZY-SUR-BOURNICE. -- Docteur Emond,  
Petit-Carreau, 14. Je vais bien. regrette absence.  
-- Amélie. |  
LA FÈRE. -- Eugénie Delaire, cite Waxhall,  
O. Courage, Eugénie, je vis pour t'aimer tou-  
jours et bébé. -- Bibaut. |

Fig 12. Private despatches - a sub-page from the printed records

The collection of the letterpress of the private despatches well illustrates how this section of the service developed. The first two pages (which formed the first despatch) (Fig 11) were headed 'Dépêches Privées Tours 8 Novembre', 'Feuille No 1' and 'Feuille No 2' but the ones that followed were headed 'Dépêches Privées à distribuer aux destinataires', 'N.3', 'N.4' up to 'N.64' dated at Tours from 9th November to 18th November, with the first volume completed by 'No 1 bis' to 'No 14 bis' dated at Tours from 15th November to 22nd November.

so abridged, representing about one-quarter of all the private messages. Also included in the private despatches were messages under the heading 'Services et Autorisations' which were intended to be official messages not sufficiently important to warrant their inclusion in an official despatch but enough to demand a priority of treatment on their arrival in Paris. There were many abuses and numerous messages which were so sent were personal messages from officials with access to the service. Dagonn himself sent many messages on behalf of others; these can be recognised by the real sender's name being followed by that of Dagonn.

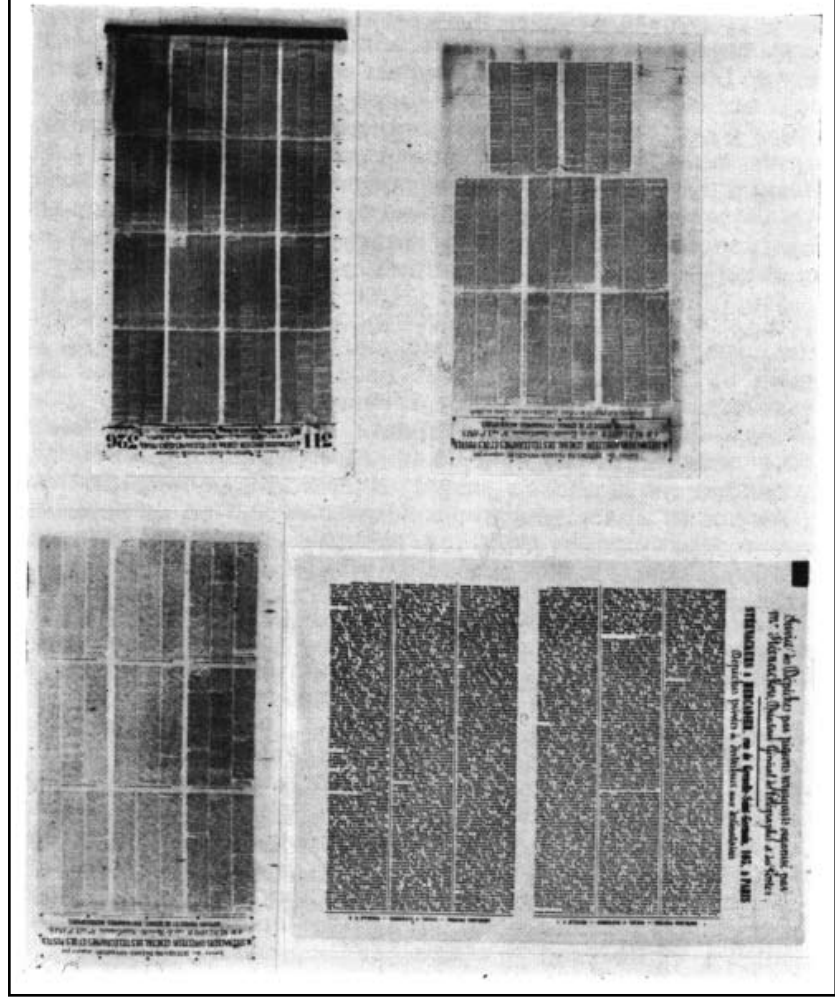


Fig 11. Private despatches, the first (on photographic paper); 3 x 3 pages in manuscript; The first microfilm; Headed by page numbers 311 & 326.

the armies. The situation became worse with the move of the Delegation to Bordeaux and, although a contingent of Mame staff had been transferred with the Delegation, the backlog demanded the use of other printers: Lanetranguet and Metreau at Bordeaux and Sirven at Toulouse. Still the printing bottleneck was not cleared and 18 pages had to be written out in manuscript. Towards the end of January the service had regained control and was geared to the demand of the public. On 14th January, the cost of a private message was reduced to 20 centimes per word.

Whilst the Delegation had taken the initiative in opening the service to the public, the Government in Paris was also demonstrating its interest in helping the public. On 10th November, the eve of its contract with Dagonn, it passed a decree introducing three new facilities associated with the pigeon post. One of letter-messages of up to 40 words at 50 centimes per word, was so similar to that started by the Delegation that it never had a separate existence. The two others were acceptable to the Delegation which authorised them in its own decree on 25th November. The second facility permitted the transmission of postal orders with a maximum value of 300 francs each subject to a supplementary fee of 3 francs; during its currency 1,370 orders to a total value of 190,000 francs were sent by pigeon. The third facility was the use of dépêches réponses. The method of operation was announced to the public inside and outside Paris in a special supplement to No. 7 of the Gazette des Absents (one of the miniature newspapers published for carriage out of Paris by balloon) and again in No. 8. In a letter written in Paris and addressed outside, a Correspondent could ask four questions, each capable of being answered 'yes' or 'no'. With the letter would go a card purchased at a post office for the price of the 5 centimes postage stamp affixed to it. The recipient of the letter then entered in four columns his answers as oui or non on the card, taking care to get the order right, affixed a 1 franc postage stamp to the card, and sent it to the designated post office. Since this facility was introduced contemporarily with the appearance of Dagonn, the authorities in Paris designated Clermont Ferrand as the destination of the completed card, but, in the event, it was to Tours, and later to Bordeaux, that Dagonn - and the cards - went. The message, consisting of the address, the oui's and non's transcribed as o's and n's, and the replier's name, was included in a page among messages in clear language, and the whole photographed and, in due course, formed part of a despatch. Once the content of a card had been set up in type, the card was, in theory, destroyed but, in fact, a few escaped and are still in existence, although most apparently used cards that are exhibited are forgeries. There were about 30,000 messages

lar terms arrived addressed to the Editor of Figaro. These messages were tied to the pigeons with ordinary thread, whereas the French always used waxed thread: further evidence of the attempt at deception. The conclusion that the message had come from the enemy was, however, scant consolation for the bitterness of learning almost immediately that they were partly true: Rouen and Orleans were in Prussian hands.

### The private despatches

The success that Blaise was having in the photography of official despatches prompted Steenackers and de Lafollye to propose the extension of the service to the public. On 4th November, there was a decree that the Delegation

"Considérant que depuis l'investissement de Paris, il a été établi par les soins du double service des Télégraphes et des Postes, au moyen de ballons par-tant de Paris et de pigeon-voyageurs partant de Tours, un échange special de correspondances, destiné à suppléer, entre Tours et Paris, aux moyens de correspondance ordinaire momentanément suspendus; Considérant que cet échange, jusqu'à présent réservé aux communications du Gouvernement, se trouve aujourd'hui suffisamment assuré pour qu'il soit possible d'en faire profiter les particuliers pour leurs relations avec la Capitale, sans en garantir cependant la parfaite régularité; Considérant, toutefois, que ce mode extraor-dinaire de correspondance, d'ailleurs coûteux, n'offre encore que des facilités très restreintes, et que les exigences de la défense nationale ne permettent d'en accorder l'usage public que dans d'étroites limites et à conditions de taxe relativement élevées sur la proposition du Directeur général des Télégraphes et des Postes, Décrète

Art. 1er Il est permis à toute personne résidant sur le territoire de la République de correspondre avec Paris par les Pigeons-voyageurs de l'Administration des Télégraphes et des Postes, moyennant une taxe de cinquante centimes (0,50c) par mot à percevoir au départ et dans les limites qui seront déterminées par des arrêtés du Directeur général de cette Administration.

Art. 2 Les télégrammes destinés à cette transmission spéciale seront reçus dans les bureaux de Télégraphie et de Poste qui seront désignés par l'Administration et transmis au point de départ des pigeons-voyageurs par la Poste, ou par le Télégraphe lorsque les exigences du service général le permettront. Il ne sera perçu aucune taxe complémentaire à raison de la transmission postale ou télégraphique, ni à raison de la distribution des télégrammes à domicile à Paris.

Art. 3 L'Etat ne sera soumis à aucune responsabilité à raison de ce service spécial. La taxe perçue ne sera remboursée dans aucun cas.

Art. 4 Le Directeur général des Télégraphes et des Postes est chargé de l'exécution du présent décret."

On the same day, Steenackers issued his regulations:

" ... Art. 2 Ces dépêches devront être rédigées en français, en langage clair et intelligible, sans aucun chiffre ou signe conventionnel. Elles ne devront contenir que des communications d'intérêt privé, à l'exclusion absolue de tout renseignement ou appréciation de politique ou de guerre.

Art. 3 Le nombre maximum des mots de chaque dépêche est fixé à vingt.

Les expressions réunies par un trait d'union ou séparées par une apostrophe seront comptées pour le nombre de mots servant à les former.

Par exception, dans l'adresse, la désignation du destinataire, celle du lieu et du domicile, ne compteront chacune que pour un seul mot, bien que formées d'expressions composées. Il en sera de même de la signature de l'expéditeur.

Toute lettre isolée comptera pour un mot.

Les nombres devront être écrits en toutes lettres et seront comptés d'après la règle ci-dessus.

... Art 6 Les bureaux, soit de Télégraphie, soit de Poste, réuniront sous une même enveloppe, toutes les dépêches qu'ils auront reçues dans la journée et les adresseront au Directeur général des Télégraphes et des Postes à Tours, avec la mention spéciale "pigeons-voyageurs" inscrite au coin supérieur droit de l'enveloppe.

... Art. 11 Les dispositions du présent arrêté sont applicables à partir du 8 de ce mois."

The conditions of the service were published in the *Moniteur* on 7th November and were reported to Paris in an official despatch (2nd series No. 37). The response of the public was immediate and the first messages were dated 8th November. The very first was addressed to Monsieur Berger at 6, rue Ménars: "Albert (Rouen), Tous autres votres (Agen), Delorme (Laval), Faure (Loire), partaite sante. Aussi tous les miens - Paul." Soon the service was inundated. Mame could not cope with the printing and had to be assisted by Joliot, and, even then, soldiers who were skilled in typesetting had to be recalled from

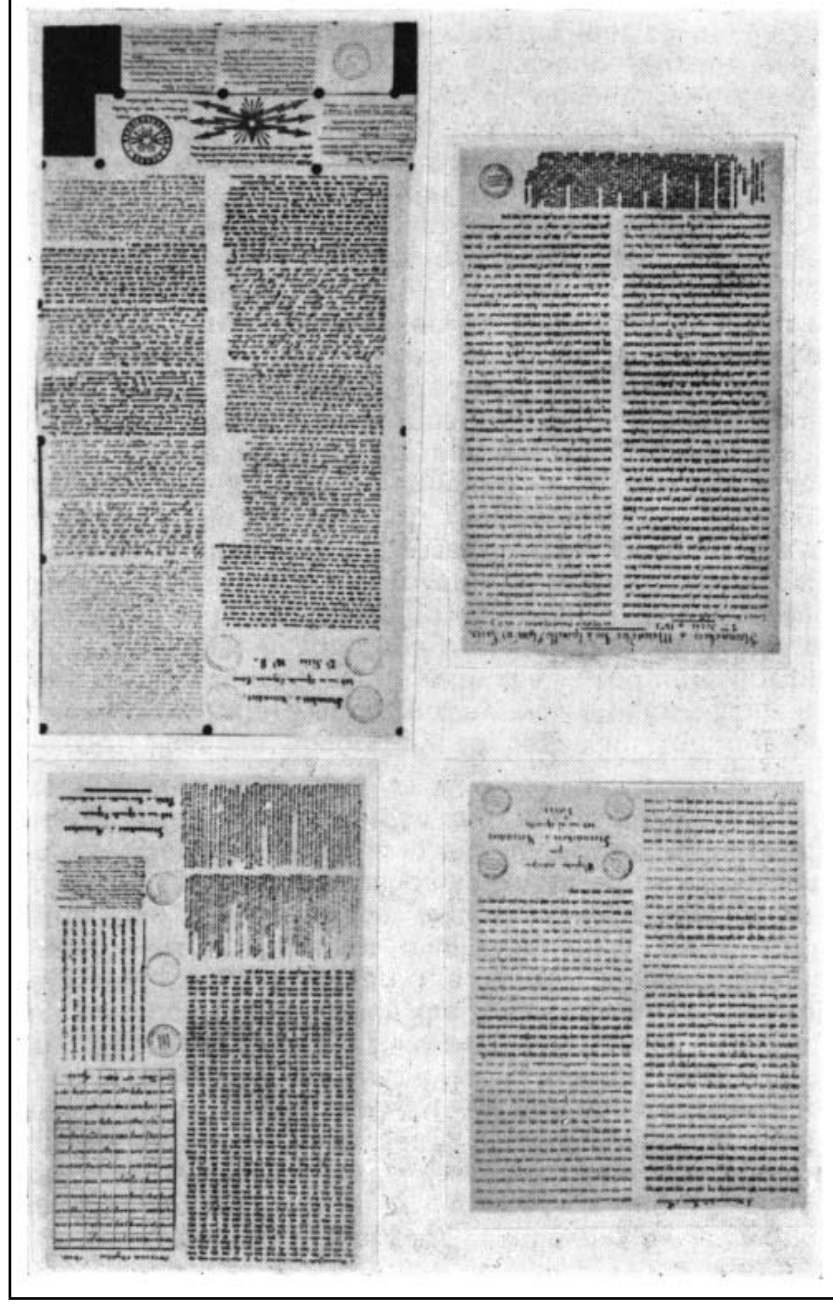
dated nor, for the first 17 according to de Laflolye, but probably 18, numbered. These first 18 can only be approximately ordered by reference to the dated messages they contain; the order in Table III follows that of the Musée Postal copy of de Laflolye's book. At the beginning of November, a second series of despatches was begun and the despatches were thereafter numbered, sometimes using recto and verso to denote each side of those printed on both sides of the paper. Despatch No. 8 of this series contains a message dated 10th November from Steenackers to Mercadier "La tourmente de ces jours passés a perdu tous nos pigeons. Je vous envoie beaucoup de pigeons. Les recevez vous. Je n'ai aujourd'hui que 25 pigeons en cages. Vos aéronautes n'en amment pas assez. Chacun d'eux devrait en apporter au moins vingt. Tenez la main ferme à cela et expédiez à moi par des hommes sûrs." Despatch No. 10 was the first to carry a printed heading which was subsequently used on all despatches, official and private; it, too, sought pigeons: "Presque plus de pigeons. Envoyez en." Despatch No. 34 was the last to be on photographic paper and contained a message "Crémieux aux membres du Gouvernement. Vous voyez, mes bons amis, que nous sommes à Bordeaux."

Despatch No. 35, the first on film, has a message to Favre dated 21st December from Bordeaux. The last despatch, No. 47, consisted of a message to Favre from Simon, who had been sent to Bordeaux to convert the Delegation to an acceptance of the terms of the armistice, reporting that the Delegation had decreed (as recorded in Despatch No. 46) the exclusion from the new Assemblée Nationale of all who had held office under Napoleon III, a political move which foreshadowed the further tragedy about to descend on France with the civil war between the Commune of Paris and the Government at Versailles.

Before leaving the official despatches, it is appropriate to mention two bogus official despatches sent by the Prussians. When the Daguerre fell inside the enemy lines on 12th November, 6 pigeons were saved from the Prussians and used to notify Paris of the loss of the balloon. The remaining pigeons were caught by the Prussians who later released 6 of them with messages calculated to dismay Paris. One message was: "Rouen 7 décembre. A gouvernement Paris - Rouen occupé par Prussiens, qui marchent sur Cherbouurg. Population rurale les acclame; delibérez. Orléans repris par ces diables. Bourges et Tours menacés. Armée de la Loire complètement défaite. Résistance n'offre plus aucune chance de salut. A. Lavertujon." The pigeons reached Paris on 9th December going to the loft of Nobécourt, whose father carried the message to Rampont. The fraud was apparent; it was known that Nobécourt had been captured and Lavertujon, a French official, was actually in Paris. Another message in simi-

It is not possible accurately to ascertain the number of despatches sent before photography was employed but it was probably in the region of ten. With the introduction of photography, the official despatches were neither explicitly

Fig 10. Official despatches on photographic paper.



With the advent of photographic methods, the number of messages that could be contained in a single despatch increased considerably and the opportunity was taken of adding personal messages from officials to their friends in Paris. On several occasions, messages were addressed to the British Embassy in Paris as, for instance, one (Fig 10) in late October in a numerical cipher and concluding with 'Tours 23rd October Lyons'; Lord Lyons the British Ambassador to France had left Paris for Tours on 18th September. The French civil servants transmitted their departmental instructions, for example (Fig 10) that in the middle of November which laid down the uniform and insignia of workers on the telegraph lines (in order that the workers should be protected against accusations by the Prussians that they were francs-tireurs). There were many trivial messages which contrast strongly with the importance of the ministerial messages for which the service had been intended as a reliable means of communication between the Delegation and the Government in Paris. In a message of 24th October, the numerical part is followed by 'Je vous prie de faire tous vos efforts pour arriver me faire connaître l'opinion du gouvernement sur la présente dépêche - Leon Gambetta!' The service also provided a means of informing Paris what was happening outside Paris and the Government released to the Paris newspapers whatever news it thought appropriate to publish. There was Gambetta's proclamation of 31st October to the French people in which the fall of Metz was announced and Marshal Bazaine declared a traitor. This proclamation was written in manuscript even though a week earlier a despatch had contained in letterpress extracts from the *Moniteur*. In fact, the greater part of all the official despatches was in manuscript; messages in manuscript could be produced more quickly than in letterpress and, in theory at least, official despatches were urgent.

September which reached Paris on 1st October (Figs 8 and 9). These messages, and most that followed, were in a mixture of numerical cipher and clear language, but their texts, when of sufficient importance, were tabled before the Enquête and are of major interest in a study of the conduct of the war. In the present context may be recalled the messages about the journey of Gambetta who left Paris on 7th October accompanied by pigeons who were to signal his safe arrival. On the same day, Favre was told 'Pigeon de Gambetta arrive mais plume avec dépêche disparue, les autres pigeons arrivèrent surment demain matin' but it was not until about 10th October that there did arrive a repeated message from Tours dated 10th October 'Gambetta arrive à bon port. Excellentes nouvelles!'



Fig 8. Official despatch in manuscript on thin paper carried by a pigeon.

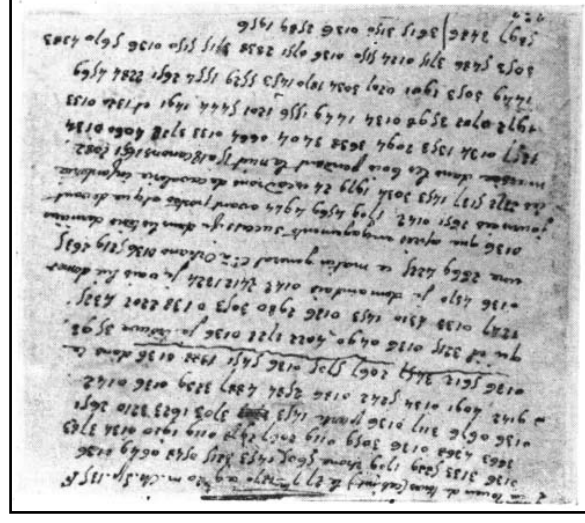


Fig 9. Official despatch in manuscript on thin paper carried by pigeon.

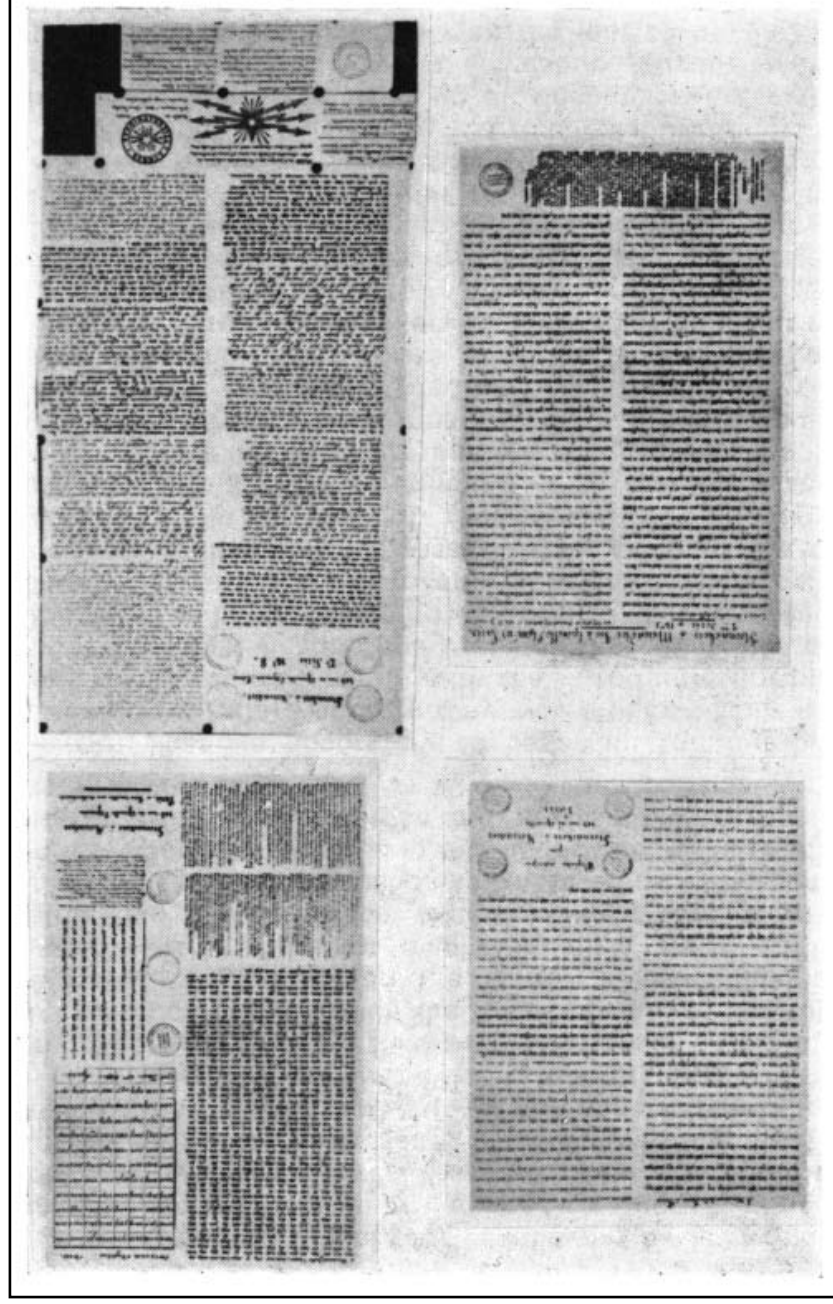
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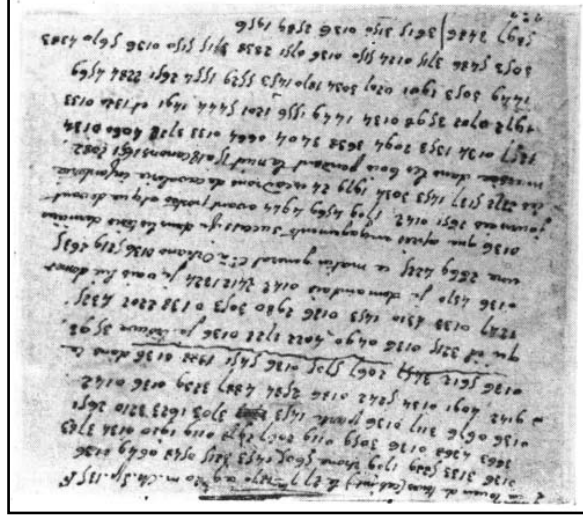


Fig 9. Official despatch in manuscript on thin paper carried by pigeon.

"Le recueil suivant contient, à l'exception des dépêches manuscrites et des premières épreuves photographiques et en petit nombre qui n'ont pas été conservées, toutes les communications officielles et privées adressées à Paris, pendant le siège, par pigeons voyageurs. Les numéros manquant dans la deuxième série sont ceux de quelques dépêches manuscrites ajoutées aux envois au moment du départ des courriers. Ce recueil, qui n'est tiré qu'à un très-petit nombre d'exemplaires numérotés, est exclusivement destiné aux Archives, à la Bibliothèque nationale, et à quelques établissements du même genre. Cette publication restreinte à d'autant moins d'inconvénient qu'une très-grande quantité de ces dépêches ont été dispersées en France par les nombreux messagers qui les portaient, et qui se sont égarées sans jamais arriver à Paris: tandis qu'elle pourra avoir un notable intérêt pour l'étude de l'histoire contemporaine de notre pays..."

...DE LAFOLLYE"

Copies of this book are still extant, one in the Musée Postal and others in private hands, but the rest have probably been broken down and the pigeongrams they contained disposed of separately. The copy in the Musée Postal is in its original binding and appears to be just as it was when it was first published. Nevertheless, there are missing more despatches than would appear from de Lafollye's note. In particular, several of the numbered official despatches comprised more than one sheet but de Lafollye included only the first sheet; private messages subsequent to the last in his book may have been sent by pigeon; and he omitted the composite private despatches, made up of previous messages which either had never reached Paris or had become distorted or illegible in transit. These last are unevenly assembled as distinct from the uniformly assembled duplicates which are in the book. The foreword to the book later became de Lafollye's formal report and is repeated, together with a detailed account by Blay of the releases of pigeons for their return flights to Paris in "Les Télégraphes et Les Postes 1870-71" published in 1883 by Steenackers, himself an amateur historian of some repute.

### The official despatches

The official despatches can be divided into three groups: the manuscript despatches sent between 27th September 1870 and 15th October, those on photographic paper sent between 16th October and 13th December, and the subsequent microfilms up to 3rd February 1871. Survivors of the first group are in the archives of the French Army and commence with the despatch of 27th

photographic paper or on film. It is highly improbable that any despatch, and particularly one on microfilm, now in private hands was ever carried by a pigeon. Remembering their delicacy and the handling they would receive before and during their projection at the Central Telegraph Office, the originals were probably so damaged that it is unlikely that any survived. But, as will be recalled, it was possible to make numerous copies, some of which were sent off by pigeons both of the same and succeeding launches. The remaining copies were retained by de Lafollye and many were bound together as a collection in a book published by Mame, with a foreword by de Lafollye again in dated February 1871 and with an introductory note:

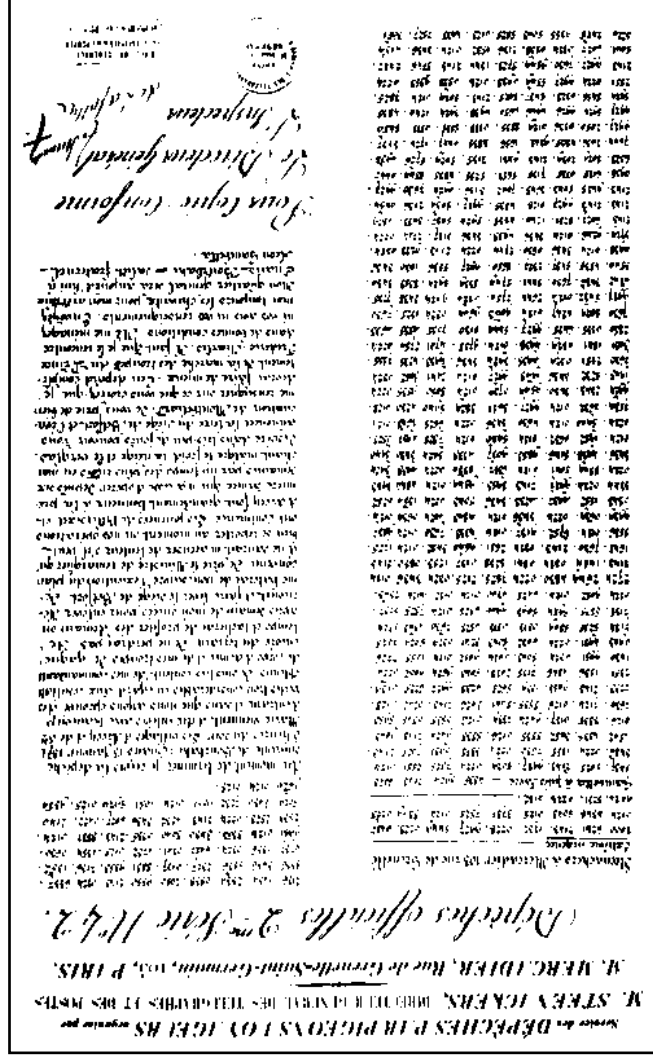


Fig 7. Official despatch written on sheet of card to be photographed.

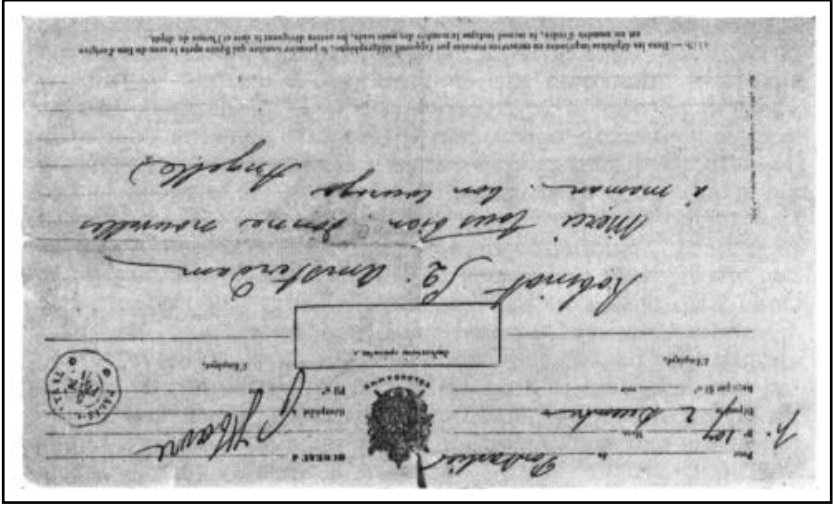


Fig 6. Message form Pontartier delivered by telegram in Paris on 5th February 1871, showing

page 107 in top left hand corner.

### The despatches

The content of nearly every despatch, official and private, which was photographed is known today. As has already been said, the letterpress of each set of private despatches was used to provide a permanent printed record and a total of 580 pages were bound together in six volumes, a set of which is in the Musée Postal. A foreword dated 3rd February 1871 by de Lafollye gives a succinct account of the service even though it is a partisan statement which puts the name of de Lafollye in print larger than that used for the name of Dagon. In a footnote to this foreword, it is stated that a formal report would be prepared by Feillet, the professional historian, but tragedy intervened. At the end of February, Feillet carried a complete set of the documents relating to the pigeon post and to other war-time postal services to his house at Neuilly. During the fighting at the time of the Commune between March and May 1871 the house was shelled and, with its contents, totally destroyed. Feillet died a year later, reputedly of a broken heart. The official messages survive in the Report of an Enquiry by the Assemblée Nationale "Enquête sur les actes du gouvernement de la défense nationale" published twice, once in 1875 and again in 1876. For many of the later official despatches, the original sheets of card on which the messages were written in manuscript and then photographed have also survived and are in the Musée Postal; Fig 7 is a modern photograph of a convenient size of one such sheet. A further source of information on the content of the despatches comes from their microphotography whether on

December which passed through Bordeaux on 9th December and did not reach Paris until 5th February (Fig 6). The popular impression that it was an instantaneous service is false; what really occurred was that the first private messages got to their destinations fairly quickly, but with the increasing volume of traffic during and after November and the deterioration of the weather from mid-December, from handing in to delivery could easily span two months. There were exceptions: Dagon himself records that he was running short of photographic materials in mid-January; he sent on 18th January a message to Paris asking for fresh supplies, the message reached Paris on 20th January, the supplies were flown out by balloon (probably the General Daumesnil) and reached Bordeaux on 27th January. Such a performance was rare.



Fig 5. Letterpress (2nd series, page 107) of message handed in at Pontartier, 2nd December 1870.

who, whilst paying tribute to their excellence, continued to object to the fee Dagon was demanding. A new contract was negotiated in which the original 15 francs per 1000 characters was recognised as equivalent to 180 francs per page of letter-press, which was retrospectively reduced to 150 francs payable for work done in December, to 90 francs for work to be done in the first half of January, and to 60 francs for work done thereafter. Even so, it was calculated that Dagon received a total payment of 52,000 francs of which one-tenth went to Fernique. This was much more than would have cost a service such as was being provided by Blaise, but, whilst Blaise contained a page of letter-press in about 37 by 23 mm, Dagon put the same information in about 11 by 6 mm, a better than three-fold improvement in lineal measure.

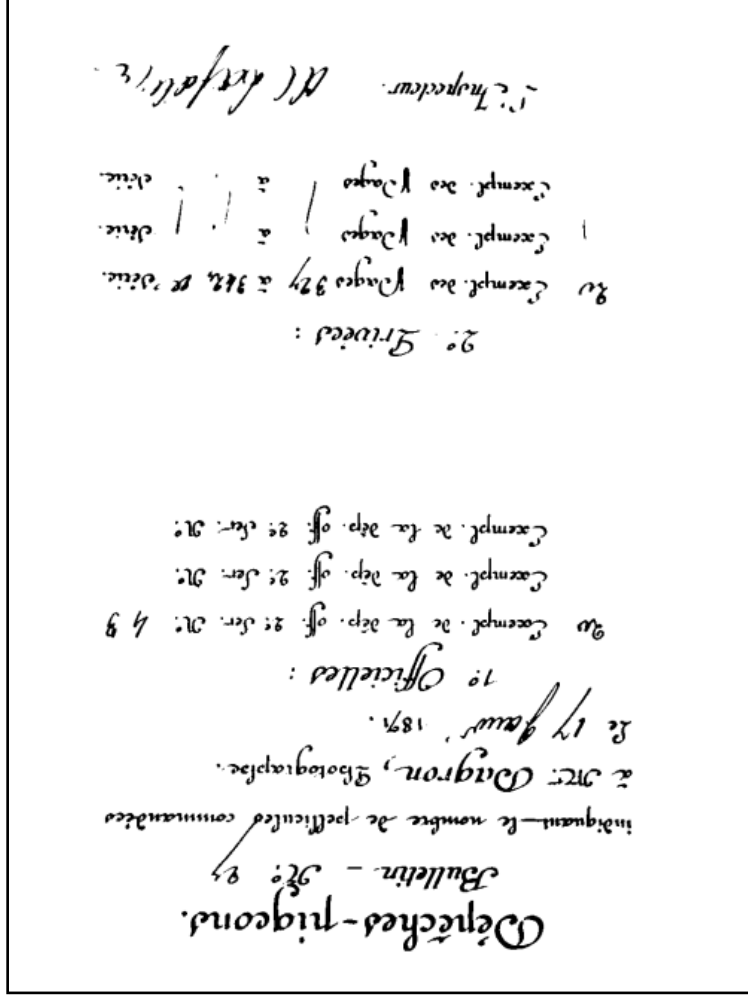


Fig 4. Order by De Lafollye on Dagon for microfilms.

### The carriage of despatches

The pigeons carried two kinds of despatch: official and private, both of which are later described in detail. As has already been mentioned, the service was put into operation for the transmission of information from the Delegation to Paris and was opened to the public in early November. The private despatches were sent only when an official despatch was being sent, since the latter would have absolute priority. However, the introduction of the Dagon microfilms eased any problems there might have been in claims for transport since their volumetric requirements were very small. For example: one tube sent during January contained 21 microfilms, of which 6 were official despatches and 15 were private, whilst a later tube contained 16 private despatches and 2 official ones. In order to improve the chances of the despatches successfully reaching Paris, the same despatch was sent by several pigeons, one official despatch was repeated 35 times and the later private despatches were repeated on average 22 times. The records show that from 7th January to the end, 61 tubes were sent off, containing 246 official and 671 private despatches. The practice was to send off the despatches not only by pigeons of the same release but also of successive releases until Paris signalled the arrival of those despatches. When the pigeon reached its particular loft in Paris, its arrival was announced by a bell in the loft. Immediately, a watchman relieved it of its tube which was taken to the Central Telegraph Office where the content was carefully unpacked and placed between two thin sheets of glass. The photographs are said to have been projected by magic lantern on to a screen where the enlargement could be easily read and written down by a team of clerks. This should certainly be true for the microfilms but the earlier despatches on photographic paper were read through microscopes. The transcribed messages were written out on forms (telegraph forms for private messages, with or without the special annotation "pigeon") and so delivered. The interval between sending a private message and its receipt by the addressee depended on many factors: the density of telegraphic traffic to and from the sender's town, the time taken to register the message, to pass it to the printers where it was assembled with its 3000 companions into a single page and then to assemble the pages into mines or twelves or sixteens. De Lafollye observed that these stages rarely took less than a fortnight and only then could photography begin. It was then necessary to wait for a pigeon launch and final success hinged upon a safe arrival of a pigeon in Paris. There was one message handed in at Blois on 14th November, passing through Tours the same day and reaching Paris on 26th November. But there was also a message (Fig 5) handed in at Pontarlier on 2nd

Paris but Rampont could not miss an opportunity of challenging Steenackers. Dagon was instructed to operate at Clermont Ferrand, thereby underlining his independence of any organisation at Tours. Arrangements were made for him to leave Paris by balloon, accompanied by two colleagues, Fernique and Poiset, the latter being his son-in-law. For making the journey by balloon, Dagon was to receive 25,000 francs (to be paid by the Delegation at Tours) and Fernique 15,000 francs (to be paid before he left Paris). In the event of their deaths during the journey, their widows would each have an annual pension of 3,000 francs for life. They departed on 12th November in the appropriately named balloons Niepce and Daguerre, but the latter, with the equipment and pigeons in it, was shot down, fell within the Prussian lines and was lost. The Niepce was also shot down and landed in Prussian-held territory, but Dagon and his companions just escaped capture, losing still more of their equipment and becoming separated. It was Fernique who first reached Tours on 18th November; on his arrival he reported to Gambetta who sent him to Steenackers. Steenackers refused to recognise the authority coming from Rampont and told Fernique to keep away from the pigeon service with the threat of a court-martial and being shot if he disobeyed. On 21st November, Dagon reached Tours, the provincial authorities having been ordered to send him there and not to allow him to go to Clermont Ferrand. He too saw Gambetta and Steenackers and it took eight days to work out a compromise. Dagon and his companions were to serve under de LaFolloye, using Dagon's superior technique, if it were found to be practical, and the financial conditions of his contract were to be reviewed. Shorn of his equipment and finding unsatisfactory replacements at Tours, Dagon failed to achieve what he had promised by way of what de LaFolloye described as images "prenant le nom du point", in other words: micro-dots. Dagon had sought to reproduce a page of the *Moniteur* in 1 sq mm; to do so required laboratory equipment and processes and these were unobtainable at Tours. He therefore lowered his sights and settled for the level of micro-photography which was subsequently used. By 4th December he was able to offer results to Steenackers who praised but was not fully satisfied. Dagon finally attained success on 11th December, but by that time, the Delegation was moving to Bordeaux, where, on 15th December, he was able to start work in earnest. Thereafter, all the despatches were on microfilm, with a reduction of rather more than 40 diameters, a performance that even today evokes admiration and yet he was achieving it a century ago. These later microfilms weighed about 0.05 gm and a pigeon would carry up to 20 of them. All his products were ordered by (Fig 4) and subject to the inspection of de LaFolloye.

was de LaFolloye, Inspecteur des lignes télégraphiques in the department of Indre et Loire, an amateur photographer himself, and assisted by Blaise, a professional photographer of Tours. The messages were written, still by hand, but in big characters on large sheets of card which were pinned side by side and photographically reduced. The prints were on photographic paper and varied in size, but with one side not significantly exceeding 40 mm to permit insertion in the quill; there were minor differences depending on the way in which a particular print was trimmed. A further improvement occurred when Blaise succeeded in printing messages on both sides of the photographic paper, thereby doubling the potential content of each quill or tube; the first despatch so produced appearing about 8th November followed by those up to 18th December. Blaise was responsible for the first 13 of these double-sided prints but the last 4 were produced by Terpereau at Bordeaux after the Delegation had moved there. Yet another improvement was the introduction of letter-press as a partial replacement of manuscript. Blaise had inserted in his earlier photographs extracts from the *Moniteur*, printed by the Mame company at Tours, which served as the official newspaper of the Delegation. It was noticeable how much clearer in the reduced size letter-press was, compared with manuscript, and, when, later, the service was opened to the public, it was intended that all private messages should be in letter-press. The full-scale message was printed on one side only of paper for its eventual photography but, at the same time, copies were made for record purposes, being printed on both sides of the paper; a set of these records is in the Musée Postal. The service flourished and the demands of the public nearly overwhelmed it by the quantity of messages that were handed in for transmission. De LaFolloye was extremely proud of its success and foresaw further triumphs. He was unaware that in Paris the Government was negotiating for a competitive - and better - system.

At the Exposition Universelle of 1867 in Paris, a photographer, Dagon, had demonstrated a remarkable standard of microphotography which he had described in "Traité de Photographie Microscopique" published in Paris in 1864. He now proposed to Rampont that his process should be applied to pigeon messages and a contract was concluded on 11th November. By the terms of this contract, Dagon was to receive 15 francs for every 1000 characters he photographed; not only was he to be paid so generously but a clause signed by Picard himself declared "M. Dagon a le titre de chef de service des correspondances postales photomicroscopiques. Il relève directement du Directeur Général des Postes." It must be remembered that at this time microphotographs produced by Blaise and of a good standard were already reaching

government was less emotional. During 1871, those whose pigeons had been acquired sought recompense at the rate of 100 francs per pigeon. Rampont finally agreed a total sum of 36,000 francs. The pigeons that were still alive were now official property and were sold at the Depot du Mobilier de l'Etat. Their value as racing pigeons was reflected by the average price of only 1 franc 50 centimes, but two pigeons, reported to have made three journeys, were purchased by an enthusiast for 26 francs. At this period, there were about 25 francs to the £ sterling, i.e. one franc was worth just under 5p.

The very last pigeon to complete its return to Paris must, if La Perre de Roo can be believed, have been one from Niepce captured in November 1870 by the Prussians and which was presented to Prince Frederick Charles of Prussia, the commander of the Second Army. He sent it home to his mother Princess Charles of Prussia who placed it in the royal pigeon cote. Two years later, tired of its Prussian lodging, it escaped and flew back to Paris.

### The photographic reproduction of messages

The first pigeons each carried a single despatch which was tightly rolled and tied with a thread, and then attached to a tail feather of the pigeon, care being taken to avoid old feathers which the bird might lose when in moult. From 19th October, the despatch was protected by being inserted in the quill of a goose or crow, and it was the quill which was then attached to the tail feather. Although a pigeon could have carried more, the maximum weight it was asked to carry was about 1 gm, and, as the service developed, the aim was to get the greatest possible number of messages inside this weight. Initially, the messages were written out by hand in small characters on very thin paper, a traditional but laborious method which had the danger of the messages being distorted and incorrectly read.

A great step forward was taken in early October from the idea of Barreswill (or Barreswill) a chemist of Tours who had been the co-author in 1854 with Davanne of "La chimie photographique". He proposed the application of photographic methods with prints of a much reduced size and of which an unlimited number of copies could be taken. His death in late November robbed him of the satisfaction of seeing his proposals accepted and extensively applied. There was already at Tours an official organisation under Godeaux, chef de service de correspondences extraordinaires, who as an ex-protegé of Napoleon III was soon displaced by Feillet, a friend of Steenackers and normally a history teacher, who had found himself in the provinces cut off from Paris by the siege. Within this group, the officer directly charged with the pigeon service

dates in an official report. The incompleteness of the evidence is very apparent; moreover, the release and arrival dates of any particular pigeon can rarely be correlated with confidence. Whilst two pigeons made their 150 km journey in some two hours (a performance to be expected in good weather of a trained pigeon), one that arrived on 6th February 1871 had been released on 18th November 1870. Some of the pigeons became seasoned travellers, both Cassiers and Van Roosebeke claiming that two of their pigeons had made three or four journeys each, and Derouard claiming that one of his had made six journeys. One of Cassiers' pigeons was, since it had been carried with Gambetta in the Armand Barbès, given the name Gambetta after reaching Paris with news of that successful flight. In the Musée Postal is a preserved pigeon; it too had belonged to Cassiers and had made at least two journeys. On its wing can be seen the postmark of Orleans, 23rd November 1870. Its photograph is on the cover of this book.



Fig. 3. Medals commemorating arrivals of pigeons in Paris.

The service was formally terminated on 1st February 1871 by Steenackers "en raison des conventions qui rétablissent les communications par lettres ouvertes transitant par Versailles pendant la durée de l'armistice." In fact, the last pigeons were released on 1st and 3rd February.

If, on 59 occasions, pigeons did bring despatches into Paris and if several made repeated journeys then the successful operations must have been performed by about 50 birds only. These 50 pigeons served France well; they carried official despatches of great importance as well as an estimated 95,000 private messages which went far to keep up the morale of the besieged Parisians. The public regarded them with affection, purchasing the commemorative medals and later subscribing to the monument that has just been described. The French

by balloons falling into Prussian hands or landing where it would be quite impracticable to transport the pigeons thence to Tours or Poitiers the number supplied in this way to Steenackers could not have exceeded 300. Thus, when Steenackers referred to 363 pigeons he must have been including those brought by land before 18th September. It is probable, therefore, that Steenackers had a total of 363 pigeons available from the beginning to the end of the siege and that he used 302. Subtracting the 248 pigeons that Blay released, there must have been 54 released between 27th September and 15th October, a figure which seems plausible since Blay released 51 between 16th October and the end of the month. During November he released 83 and in December 49, most in the first part of the month. The weather was then deteriorating rapidly and, although 65 were subsequently released, 28 of them were launched in an extravagant fashion after the armistice. The severity of the weather can be judged by the fact that, of the last 61 pigeons released, only 3 ever reached Paris. Savelon has deduced the monthly statistics as:

Date	Released	Arrived
September & October 1870	105	22
November 1870	83	19
December 1870	49	12
January 1871	43	3
February 1871	22	3

The weather was not the only hazard facing the pigeons: there were their natural enemies the hawks and there were countrymen with their shotguns seeking food for their families. It is often said that the noise of cannonfire disturbed the pigeon's homing sense but this is false; what did happen was that the best pigeons would have been the first to be used and as time passed the birds would have been less trained and so less likely to return safely to Paris. It was therefore no mean achievement that, on 59 occasions, they did succeed in getting back to their lofts. Their achievement was commemorated in the monument by Bartholdi and Rubin at the Porte des Terres in Paris which was unveiled on 28th January 1906 and melted down by the Germans in 1944; around the central representation of a balloon were four pedestals each bearing a pair of bronze pigeons. An earlier tribute was paid by the striking of medals (Fig 3) including the set listed in Table I. Table II tabulates the numbers of pigeons carried out of Paris by the balloons, those released by Blay, the arrival dates given by this set of medals, the arrival dates as collated by Savelon (who has commented that his dates may be varied by up to two days), and the arrival

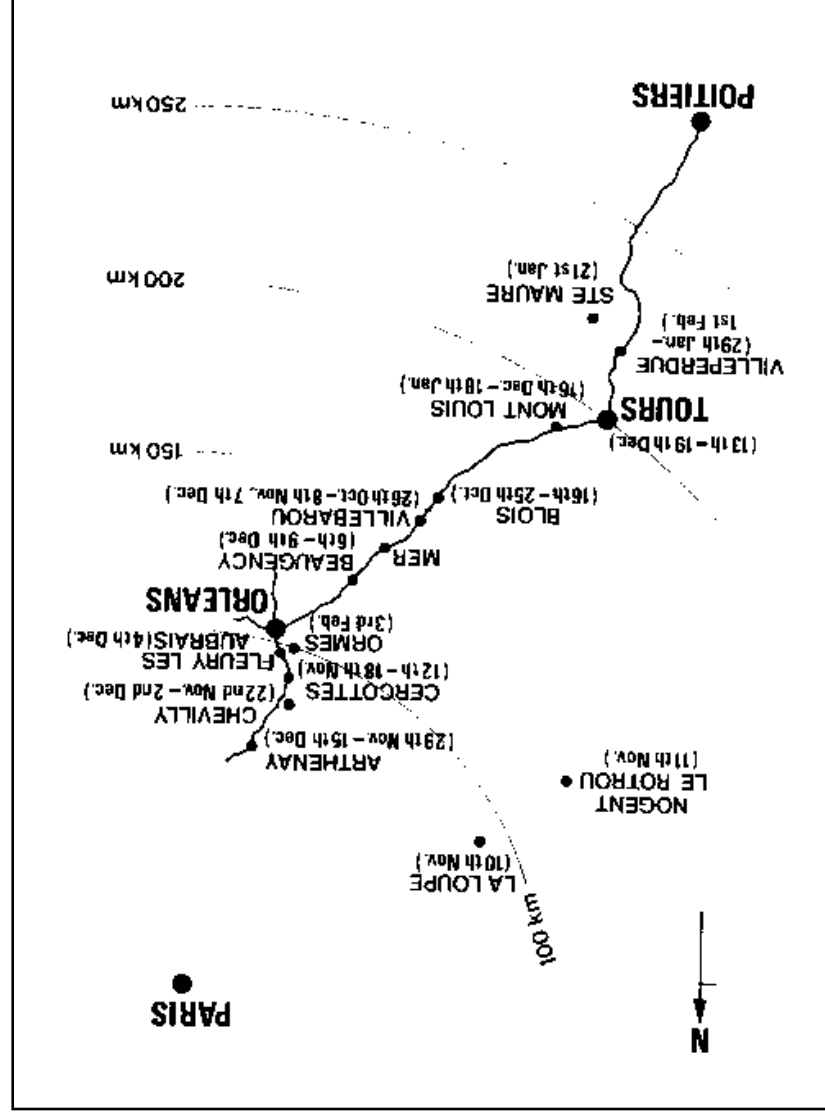


Fig 2. Map showing where pigeons were released.

Blay reported the release of 248 pigeons whereas, according to Steenackers, 302 were released. The various statements of the numbers of pigeons employed by the service are not consistent. Steenackers said 363 pigeons were brought safely out of Paris by balloon, of which 61 either were used by the aircrews to announce their landing or died or were unfit for a return flight to Paris, but, the Mangin brothers accounted for 407 pigeons leaving Paris by balloon. Taking the Mangin's total and deducting those lost to the service

tober by Cassiers with 23 or 24 in the Vauban. Derouard remained in Paris to continue the recruitment of pigeons (Fig 1) and to organise their reception on their return to the city. Thomas, a member of L'Espérance left in the General Ulrich with 34 pigeons on 1 8th November escaping the fate of his fellow-member Nobécourt who had just been captured with the Daguerre. After being interrogated at the Prussian headquarters at Versailles, he was sent to Glatz in Silesia, where he spent five months in captivity.

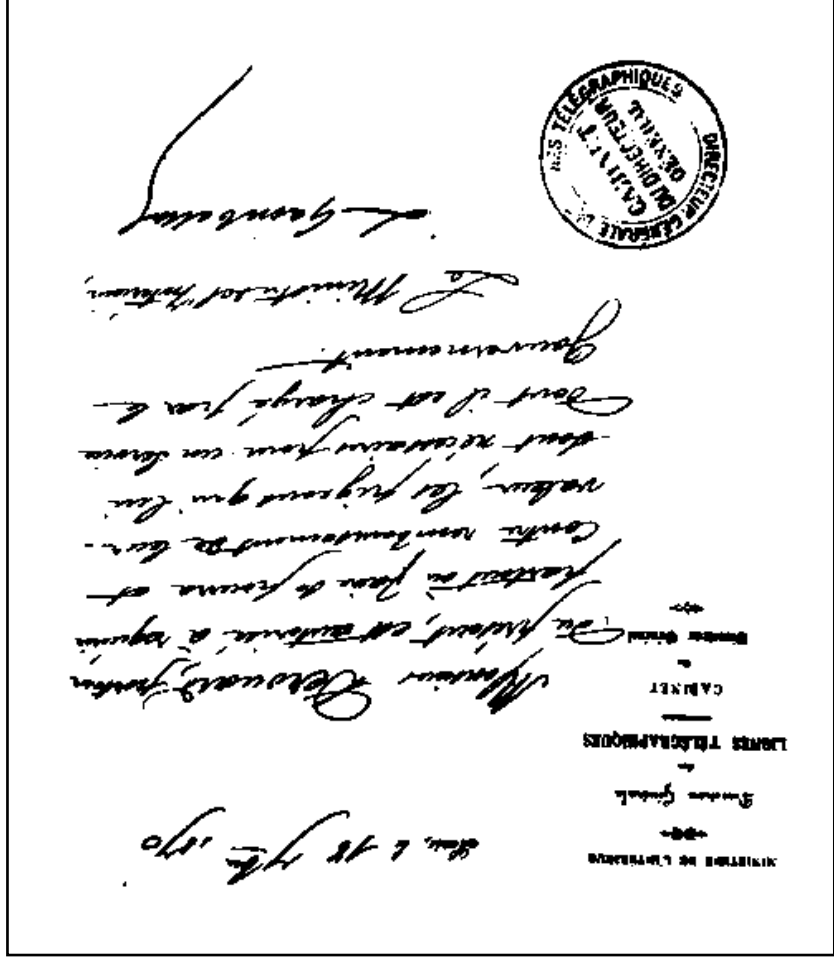


Fig 1. Derouard's authority to recruit pigeons.

During the course of the siege, pigeons were regularly taken out of Paris by balloon. Initially, the pigeons carried by a balloon were released as soon as the balloon landed so that Paris could be apprised of its safe passage above the

Prussian lines. This was on Rampont's instructions but Steenackers issued a counter-order, arguing that the pigeons would serve a better purpose by carrying official messages from the Delegation and soon a regular service was in operation, based first at Tours and later, when the Delegation had moved to Bordeaux, at Poitiers. The pigeons were taken to their base after their arrival from Paris and when they had preened themselves, been fed and rested, they were ready for the return journey. Tours lies some 200 km from Paris and Poitiers some 300 km (distances as the crow - or pigeon - flies); to reduce the flight distance the pigeons were taken by train as far forward towards Paris as was safe from Prussian intervention. Before release, they were loaded with their despatches. The first despatch was dated 27th September and reached Paris on 1st October, but it was only from 16th October, when an official control was introduced, that a complete record was kept by Blay, a cousin of Steenackers, charged with the task of launching the pigeons on their return flight. At the launching he was assisted by one or more of the officers of L'Espérance who had come out of Paris by balloon. The party wore uniform, partly to permit an easier movement in the French military areas and partly to establish their beliefigerent status should they be captured by the Prussians. Blay's records show that between 16th October 1870 and 3rd February 1871 he released pigeons on 47 occasions. The map (Fig 2) shows the places from which the pigeons were released; the places became increasingly distant from Paris as the Prussians advanced during December 1870 and January 1871. Only after the armistice could he go forward to Ormes near Orleans for a final launching of a series including many when the Prussians were only narrowly evaded.



The Parisian pigeon-fanciers' club L'Espérance approached the new government but its president, Cassiers, met only derision from an officer on Trochu's staff. Its secretary, Derouard, later said that its treasurer, Tractel, was the one who really succeeded in attracting serious official interest but the more influential Parisian lawyer Segalas had already reached the higher levels of the administration. At the end of August he had had a sympathetic hearing from de Vougy, Directeur des Télégraphes until 4th September, who had agreed that a pigeon loft should be installed at the Central Telegraph Office at 103, rue de Grenelle. When Steenackers came into office, he expressed his approval with what was being done, saying that he would have suggested it himself. The loft was erected, but it could only have served as a staging post for pigeons being taken out of Paris and not one to which they would return since there would have been no opportunity to train pigeons to operate from it.

The first pigeons to leave Paris went with Segalas who accompanied Steenackers to Tours on 10th September, and the collection of pigeons began in Paris. On 15th September, an official message from Paris to Tours reported "la famille Segalas augmente" showing that in official circles Segalas was being credited as the originator of the service. The recruitment and organisation of the pigeons were entrusted to L'Espérance. There was in Paris a limited number of homing pigeons; at that time, pigeon racing attracted far less interest there than in the northern areas of France which were adjacent to Belgium, the real home of pigeon racing. There were a few enthusiasts who had well trained birds but the majority of the birds that were recruited had not had a complete training. Each racing pigeon would have carried, imprinted on its wing, its owner's name and a serial number and this identification was used in the official register. The principal supplier of pigeons was Cassiers himself; of the 52 pigeons from his loft at 92, boulevard Montparnasse, only 2 survived the war. On 18th September, Cassiers, Derouard, and Tractel arrived at the Gare Montparnasse with 108 pigeons which they loaded on to a train but the stationmaster refused to let them depart without Gambetta's authority, suspecting that they might be spies. They had to unload the pigeons and, by the time they had received the correct papers, the last train had gone and the Prussians had cut the railway lines out of Paris.

Van Roosebeke, the vice-president of L'Espérance, suggested that pigeons should go out with the balloons and three were carried in the Ville de Florence on 25th September. The officers of L'Espérance now demonstrated their personal courage. Tractel left in the Louis Blanc with 8 pigeons, Van Roosebeke in the Washington with 25, both on 12th October, to be followed on 27th Oc-

Seine was located and cut on 27th September. Although a number of postmen succeeded in passing through the Prussian lines in the earliest days of the siege, others were captured and shot, and there is no proof of any post, certainly after October, reaching Paris from the outside, apart from private letters carried by unofficial individuals. Five shepdogs experienced in driving cattle into Paris were flown out by balloon with the intention of their returning carrying mail; after release they were never again seen. Equally a failure was the use of zinc balls (the boules de Moulins) filled with letters and floated down the Seine; not one of these balls was recovered during the siege. As was later said "Pas qu'une souris put franchir les lignes prussiennes sans être vue." The Prussians did permit authorised emissaries from Tours and Bordeaux to pass into Paris during peace negotiations but they were forbidden to bring in private letters. Foreign legations continued to receive and send out diplomatic bags but always under strict Prussian supervision, although the American Embassy, with Washburne as Minister, was permitted to use sealed bags. Millions of letters were carried outwards from Paris by balloon but free balloons could not offer a reliable means of inwards communication since they were at the mercy of the wind and could not be directed to a pre-determined destination. The only balloon which made even a start of a return flight to Paris was the Jean Bart 1 which left Rouen on 7th November but, after a first hop which took it 20 km towards Paris, the wind changed and further attempts were abandoned. During January 1871, a fleet of free balloons was being assembled at Lille but the armistice prevented it being put into operation. Self-propelled dirigible balloons were then in their infancy and whilst, on 9th January, the Duquesne, fitted with two propellers, left Paris bound for Besancon and Switzerland, it got only as far as Reims. For an assured communication into Paris, the only successful method was by the time-honoured carrier-pigeon, and thousands of messages, official and private, were thus taken into the besieged city.

**The organisation of the pigeon service**

The honour of being the first advocate of the pigeon service has several claimants. La Perre de Roo wrote to Napoleon III's Minister of War Count Palikao on 2nd September 1870 suggesting that all pigeons then in Paris should be sent away to be ready to bring messages back into Paris, and that pigeons should be brought into Paris from the North of France to be ready to carry messages out of Paris. Palikao fell with the Second Empire and no government action emerged from this proposal but about 1000 pigeons were privately transferred to Paris from the area around Lille, Tourcoing, and Roubaix.

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### **The historical background**

The purpose of this study is to describe the pigeon post which was in operation while Paris was besieged during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871. Both the siege and the war have been the subjects of a vast literature which is said to exceed that of any other historical event, and to which is referred those who wish to read of the wider scene. In the present and narrower context, it is sufficient to recall that barely six weeks after the outbreak of hostilities, the Emperor Napoleon III and the French Army of Chalons surrendered at Sedan on 2nd September 1870. There were two immediate consequences: the fall of the Second Empire and the swift Prussian advance on Paris. Within days of the proclamation on 4th September of the Third Republic, it became evident to the newly formed Government of National Defence under the presidency of General Trochu that Paris was in dire peril and, on 12th September, a Delegation of the government was established at Tours under Isaac Crémieux, comprising representatives of the ministries in Paris. Among these representatives was Steenackers, Directeur-Général des Télégraphes since 4th September, who was to act both in his own right and as agent for Rampont, Directeur-Général des Postes, who remained in Paris. The double function resulted from the then separation of the Postes and the Télégraphes. Steenackers, born in Belgium in 1831, had become a naturalised French citizen in 1869 and was one of the deputies from the Haute-Marne in the Corps Législatif, the lower house of the parliament of the Second Empire; he had played a prominent part in the expulsion of the Bonapartists. The authorities gave much thought to the maintenance of communications between Tours and Paris should the latter be besieged and a telegraph cable was hastily procured from England and secretly laid along the bed of the Seine between Paris and Rouen. As a further precaution, Steenackers took with him to Tours a number of carrier-pigeons. By 20th September, the Prussians had encircled Paris and had cut the normal channels of communications. Thereafter, the government of France and the conduct of the war fell increasingly to the Delegation, reinforced by the arrival of Gambetta, Minister of War and of the Interior, who had left Paris by

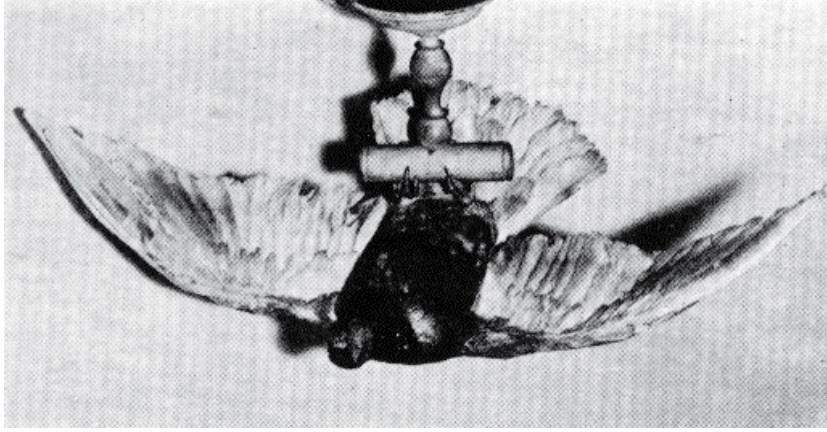
the balloon Armand Barbès on 7th October. A rivalry between the Government and the Delegation grew steadily, with Favre, Minister of Foreign Affairs in Paris, seeking an accommodation with the Prussians and with Gambetta striving to organise their military defeat. This rivalry extended to the Postes and the Télégraphes. Rampont had been nominated to his post on 12th September, some days after the appointment of Steenackers who had little time for him; he never named him as the addressee of any of his messages, directing them instead to Mercadier, his own subordinate as Directeur des Télégraphes in Paris, or, if he was aiming at higher levels, either to Favre or to Picard. Ministers of Finance, or even to Trochu himself. On 14th October, Gambetta told the Government in Paris "Service des postes désorganisé et très-mal fait; plaintes longtempes prévues de réunir dans la main ferme de Steenackers les deux administrations. Nous avons nommé Steenackers directeur-général des lignes et des postes. Avertissez Rampont devenu impuissant et prévenez Picard afin que Steenackers ait tout pouvoir nécessaire." In his new appointment, which dated from 12th October (although Gambetta's report did not reach Paris until 18th November), Steenackers promulgated regulations independently of Rampont who was left to issue parallel ones subsequently. If Rampont took any initiative, Steenackers contained its effects within his own jurisdiction when he so wished; in other cases he just flatly countermanded Rampont's orders. In the meantime, throughout October and November, the Prussian armies extended their areas of operations, capturing Orléans and threatening Tours, so that on 10th December the Delegation moved to Bordeaux where it remained until just after the armistice of 28th January 1871, concluded by Favre to the great chagrin of Gambetta who resigned on 6th February. In the general election of 8th February Steenackers failed to obtain a seat in the new Assemblée Nationale and on 20th February he resigned his post of Directeur-Général des Télégraphes (and des Postes, if he was in fact still that). His rival Rampont, remained Directeur-Général des Postes until August 1873.

### **Communication between besieged Paris and the rest of France**

As had been expected, the normal channels of communication into and out of Paris were interrupted during the four-and-a-half months of the siege, and, indeed, it was not until the middle of February 1871 that the Prussians relaxed their control of the postal and telegraph services. With the encirclement of the city on 18th September, the last overhead telegraph wires were cut on the morning of 19th September, and the secret telegraph cable in the bed of the

**The Pigeon Post into Paris 1870-1871**  
by J.D. Hayhurst O.B.E.

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**PREFACE**

The postal history of the siege of Paris has long been a subject of intensive study; much has been written, much remains to be written. The research is mainly directed at the balloon post, occasionally at the boules de Moulins. In modern literature, references to the pigeon post are not rare but tend to include semi-fictional anecdotes or confusions of one feature of the service with another. Such distortions do not do justice to the efforts of those who were involved: the professional administrators and engineers, the pigeon fanciers who accepted the perils of flying by balloon from Paris over the Prussian lines and then of releasing the pigeons within range of the Prussian troops, the photographers with their remarkable technology. At the centenary of the siege of Paris, it is appropriate that there should be a better recognition of their performance. This account is based largely on the earlier literature and owes much to the libraries of the Assemblée Nationale and the Aero Club in Paris and to the records of the Post Office in London. Appreciation is most gratefully acknowledged of the advice of Mr. C. A. E. Osman of "The Racing Pigeon" on the handling and capabilities of pigeons. But this book could not have been prepared without the warm co-operation and assistance of the Musée Postal in Paris, and it is sincerely dedicated to that museum, to its Conservateur, Monsieur Georges Rigol, and to his staff.

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