

Pigeons that have won the Dickin Medal for Bravery



The PDSA Dickin Medal is the highest award any animal can receive whilst serving in military conflict. It is recognised worldwide as the animals' Victoria Cross. Instituted in 1943 by PDSA's founder Maria Dickin CBE, it acknowledges outstanding acts of bravery or devotion to duty displayed by animals serving with the Armed Forces or Civil Defence units in any theatre of war throughout the world.

White Vision

Pigeon – SURP.41.L.3089

Date of Award: 2 December 1943

“For delivering a message under exceptionally difficult conditions and so contributing to the rescue of an Air Crew while serving with the RAF in October 1943.”

White Vision, also known by her service number **SURP.41.L.3089**, was a female Second World War homing pigeon who served with the National Pigeon Service and was posted to No. 190 Squadron RAF. She was awarded the Dickin Medal for gallantry in 1943 for delivering a message from a flying boat forced to ditch off the coast of Scotland.

White Vision was bred by the Fleming brothers of Motherwell, Lanarkshire, Scotland. During the Second World War she was lent to the National Pigeon Service, and was stationed at Sullom Voe in the Shetland Islands with No. 190 Squadron RAF.

On 11 October 1943, White Vision was aboard a Consolidated PBY Catalina flying boat when it was forced to ditch in the North Sea near the Hebrides off the coast of Scotland. With the plane's radio out of action, she was released to indicate where the plane had gone down, as bad weather conditions were preventing it from being found by other planes. She flew some 60 miles (97 km) against a strong headwind, arriving back at her pigeon loft. The search was resumed and the plane was subsequently found, with all eleven members of the air crew saved after they had spent some eighteen hours in the sea.

She was awarded the Dickin Medal on 2 December 1943; her medal citation reads "For delivering a message under exceptionally difficult conditions and so contributing to the rescue of an Air Crew while serving with the RAF in October 1943." The medal is referred to as the animal's Victoria Cross, and White Vision was one of the first pigeons to be awarded it.



Winkie

Pigeon – NEHU.40.NSL

Date of Award: 2 December 1943

“For delivering a message under exceptionally difficult conditions and so contributing to the rescue of an Air Crew while serving with the RAF in February, 1942.”

During World War II, Winkie was aboard a British Bristol Beaufort when it crashed in the North Sea on 23 February 1942 as a result of being badly damaged by enemy fire following a mission to Norway.

Struggling in the freezing waters, the crew remembered one piece of vital equipment, a blue chequered hen, number NEHU 40 NSL. It was a long shot, but she was their only chance as the crew did not have time to radio an accurate position before ditching.

Winkie was set free and flew 120 miles home to Broughty Ferry, where her owner, George Ross discovered the exhausted pigeon. He alerted the airbase at RAF Leuchars in Fife, and a search and rescue mission was launched.^[3]

Using the time difference from the plane ditching to the arrival of the pigeon in the loft, and taking into account the wind direction and the inhibition to her flight speed caused by oil spoilage to her feathers, the RAF were able to approximate where the plane ditched. Within 15 minutes the crew’s position had been located and a rescue vessel dispatched.

On 2 December 1943, Winkie was awarded the Dickin Medal. The citation read "for delivering a message under exceptional difficulties and so contributing to the rescue of an Air Crew while serving with the RAF in February 1942." Winkie received her medal from Maria Dickin in March 1943.

The crew were rescued and later held a dinner for Winkie, who basked in her cage as she was toasted by the officers.

When Winkie died, Ross donated her and her Dickin Medal to Dundee Art Galleries and Museums.

Tyke (also known as George)

Pigeon – Number 1263 MEPS 43

Date of Award: 2 December 1943

“For delivering a message under exceptionally difficult conditions and so contributing to the rescue of an Air Crew, while serving with the RAF in the Mediterranean in June, 1943.”

Tyke was hatched in Cairo, Egypt, from British and South African parents, and was seconded into military service. Bomber crews would carry homing pigeons in order to get word of their location back to home base should they be shot down. In June 1943 the American bomber he was stationed on was shot down, and Tyke was released in order to get help. He flew over a hundred miles in poor visibility, passing on the crew's call for help to friendly forces. The bomber crew credited the pigeon with saving their lives.

Tyke was awarded the Dickin Medal for his actions, an animal-only medal issued by the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals. Tyke's citation reads, "For delivering a message under exceptionally difficult conditions and so contributing to the rescue of an Air Crew, while serving with the RAF in the Mediterranean in June, 1943." He was one of the first pigeons to be awarded the Dickin Medal, along with White Vision and Winkie, who each received the award on 2 December 1943.

Beach Comber

Pigeon – NPS.41.NS.4230

Date of Award: 6 March 1944

“For bringing the first news to this country of the landing at Dieppe, under hazardous conditions in September, 1942, while serving with the Canadian Army.”

Beach Comber (designated as "Pigeon – **NPS.41.NS.4230**") was a Canadian war pigeon who received the Dickin Medal for bravery in service during the Second World War.

On 19 August 1942, Beach Comber arrived in Britain, despite hazardous conditions, from Dieppe, France carrying a message from the Canadian Army alerting commanders of their landing there, marking the start of the Dieppe Raid. As a result, on 6 March 1944, the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals awarded Beach Comber the Dickin Medal. Beach Comber remains the **only Canadian war pigeon** ever to be awarded a Dickin Medal, and one of only three Canadian animals ever to be so honoured.



Gustav

Pigeon – NPS.42.31066

Date of Award: 1 September 1944

“For delivering the first message from the Normandy Beaches from a ship off the beach-head while serving with the RAF on 6 June 1944.”

Gustav was a grizzle colored cock pigeon trained by Frederick Jackson of Cosham, Hampshire. In his military service, he was also known by his service number NPS.42.31066. His early missions saw him carrying messages out of occupied Belgium for the resistance.

On 6 June 1944 Gustav was on-board an Allied Landing Ship Tank (LST), having become one of six pigeons given by the RAF to Reuters news correspondent Montague Taylor. Following the Normandy landings, Gustav was released by Taylor to send news back to the UK with the message, "We are just 20 miles or so off the beaches. First assault troops landed 0750. Signal says no interference from enemy gunfire on beach... Steaming steadily in formation. Lightnings, Typhoons, Fortresses crossing since 0545. No enemy aircraft seen."

Gustav traveled the 150 miles (240 km) to his loft at RAF Thorney Island in five hours and sixteen minutes, while facing a headwind of up to 30 mph (48 km/h), where his handler Sgt Harry Halsey received him. Gustav's message was the first word of the invasion to reach the British mainland, due to the fleet undergoing radio silence at the time. Later that day, fellow pigeon Paddy became the first pigeon released to return to the British mainland with news of success of the landings.

For this act, he was awarded the Dickin Medal for bravery, considered to be the animal equivalent of the Victoria Cross. He was presented with his medal on 27 November 1944, by Mrs A. V. Alexander, the wife of the First Lord of the Admiralty. The citation for his Dickin Medal read, "For delivering the first message from the Normandy beaches from a ship off the beachhead while

serving with the RAF on June 6 1944." He was one of thirty two pigeons awarded the medal who carried messages during the Second World War.

After the war, Gustav was given back to Fred Jackson, his original trainer, together with his Dickin Medal. This medal was later donated to the Portsmouth D-Day Museum.

Gustav died after the war in an accident, when someone cleaning his pigeon loft accidentally stepped on him. The story of wartime messenger pigeons such as Gustav were made into the 2005 animated film *Valiant*, the same year that Gustav's Dickin Medal went on display at the D-Day Museum in Portsmouth, Hampshire.



Paddy

Pigeon – NPS.43.9451

Date of Award: 1 September 1944

“For the best recorded time with a message from the Normandy Operations, while serving with the RAF in June, 1944.”

Paddy, an Irish carrier pigeon, was awarded the Dickin Medal after being the fastest pigeon to arrive back in England with news of the success of the D-Day invasion, out of hundreds dispatched. He flew 230 miles across the English Channel in four hours and fifty minutes, the fastest recorded crossing, and was awarded the medal on 1 September 1944, just under three months after the crossing. Paddy was trained by Andrew Hughes of Carnlough and is the only animal in Ireland to be awarded this medal.

Kenley Lass

Pigeon – NURP.36.JH.190

Date of Award: March 1945

“For being the first pigeon to be used with success for secret communications from an Agent in enemy-occupied France while serving with the NPS in October 1940.”

KENLEY LASS was dropped into France with an agent codenamed Phillippe who was parachuted behind enemy lines. In October 1940 Kenley Lass flew back to her loft, the first successful receipt of secret communications from an agent working in occupied Europe. She received her Dickin Medal in March 1945.

Navy Blue

Pigeon – NPS.41.NS.2862

Date of Award: March 1945

“For delivering an important message from a Raiding Party on the West Coast of France, although injured, while serving with the RAF in June, 1944.

Flying Dutchman

Pigeon – NPS.42.NS.44802

Date of Award: March 1945

“For successfully delivering messages from Agents in Holland on three occasions. Missing on fourth mission, while serving with the RAF in 1944.”

Dutch Coast

Pigeon – NURP.41. A.2164

Date of Award: March 1945

“For delivering an SOS from a ditched Air Crew close to the enemy coast 288 miles distance in 7½ hours, under unfavourable conditions, while serving with the RAF in April 1942.”



Commando

Pigeon – NURP.38.EGU.242

Date of Award: March 1945

“For successfully delivering messages from Agents in Occupied France on three occasions: twice under exceptionally adverse conditions, while serving with the NPS in 1942.”

Commando worked with the British armed forces to carry "crucial intelligence." Performing in more than ninety missions, he received the Dickin Medal on 12 April 1945, particularly because of missions where he delivered messages with locations of German troops and industrial sites in France, as well as injured British soldiers.

Commando, a red chequer bird, was bred in Haywards Heath, Sussex in the United Kingdom by Sid Moon. Moon was a pigeon fancier who had served with the Army Pigeon Service during the First World War. With the outbreak of the Second World War, Moon offered the service of his pigeons to the war effort in 1939. Commando was one of the pigeons taken into military service.

Serving with the National Pigeon Service (NPS) during the Second World War, Commando had been given the identification code *N.U.R.P.38.EGU.242*. During his career, Commando made more than ninety trips into and out of German occupied France, carrying confidential messages. Messenger pigeons were carried into the war zones by British paratroopers, and released as needed with messages attached to fly home. He was noted for three particular missions carried out in 1942—one in June, another in August, and the third in September—in which he carried crucial intelligence to Britain from agents in France. This vital information included the location of German troops, industrial sites and injured British soldiers.

Royal Blue

Pigeon – NURP.40.GVIS.453

Date of award: March 1945

“For being the first pigeon in this war to deliver a message from a forced landed aircraft on the Continent while serving with the RAF in October, 1940.”

Ruhr Express

Pigeon – NPS.43.29018

Date of Award: May 1945

“For carrying an important message from the Ruhr Pocket in excellent time, while serving with the RAF in April, 1945.”



William of Orange

Pigeon – NPS.42.NS.15125

Date of Award: May 1945

“For delivering a message from the Arnheim Airborne Operation in record time for any single pigeon, while serving with the APS in September 1944.”

Working with the British secret service MI14, William received the Dickin Medal in May 1945 for successfully delivering a message that saved over 2000 soldiers' lives during the Battle of Arnhem. To do so, he flew more than 250 miles. Also, he was later the "grandfather of many outstanding racing pigeons."

William of Orange was a male war pigeon of British military intelligence service MI14. He was awarded the 21st Dickin Medal for delivering a message from the Arnheim Airborne Operation. This message saved more than 2000 soldiers at the time of the Battle of Arnhem in September 1944.

Communications in that battle were a problem for the Allied units; German troops had surrounded the airborne forces and the few radio sets present malfunctioned. William of Orange was released by British soldiers at 10:30 on 19 September 1944 and arrived at his nest box in England at 14:55. He flew over 400 km (250 mi) and the message he carried was one of few to make their way back to the United Kingdom.

William of Orange was bred by Sir William Proctor Smith of Cheshire and trained by the Army Pigeon Service of the Royal Signals. Smith bought him out of service for £185 and ten years later reported that William was "the grandfather of many outstanding racing pigeons".

Scotch Lass

Pigeon – NPS.42.21610

Date of Award: June 1945

“For bringing 38 microphotographs across the North Sea in good time although injured, while serving with the RAF in Holland in September 1944.”

Billy

Pigeon – NU.41.HQ.4373

Date of Award: August 1945

“For delivering a message from a force-landed bomber, while in a state of complete collapse and under exceptionally bad weather conditions, while serving with the RAF in 1942.”

Broad Arrow

Pigeon – 41.BA.2793

Date of Award: October 1945

“For bringing important messages three times from enemy occupied country, viz: May 1943, June 1943 and August 1943, while serving with the Special Service from the Continent.”

Pigeon – NPS.42.NS.2780

Date of Award: October 1945

“For bringing important messages three times from enemy occupied country, viz: July 1942, August 1942 and April 1943, while serving with the Special Service from the Continent.”

Pigeon – NPS.42.NS.7524

Date of Award: October 1945

“For bringing important messages three times from enemy-occupied country, viz: July 1942, May 1943 and July 1943, while serving with the Special Service from the continent.”

Maquis

Pigeon – NPSNS.42.36392

Date of Award: October 1945

“For bringing important messages three times from enemy occupied country, viz: May 1943 (Amiens) February, 1944 (Combined Operations) and June, 1944 (French Maquis) while serving with the Special Service from the Continent.”



Mary's grave at the Ilford Animal Cemetery

Mary of Exeter

Pigeon – NURP.40.WCE.249

Date of Award: November 1945

“For outstanding endurance on War Service in spite of wounds.

Mary, a member of the National Pigeon Service during WWII, received the Dickin Medal in November 1945 for performing valiantly despite numerous battle wounds. These included being attacked by German hawks, being flanked by shrapnel, and having part of her wing shot off. She completed all her missions successfully, despite these injuries and requiring 22 stitches.

Mary of Exeter was a carrier pigeon who flew many military missions with the National Pigeon Service during World War II, transporting important messages across the English Channel back to her loft in Exeter, England. She was awarded the Dickin Medal in November 1945 for showing endurance on war service despite being injured on three occasions and emerging uninjured when her loft was bombed.

Mary of Exeter was owned by Charlie Brewer, a bootmaker from Exeter. She served with the National Pigeon Service between 1940 and 1945 carrying top secret messages. Mary made four trips from France to England.

Mary completed many missions, including three in which she was wounded by enemy attacks, requiring a total of 22 stitches. In addition, she survived a Luftwaffe bomber attack on her Exeter pigeon loft.

On one occasion she was attacked by German-kept hawks stationed in Pas-de-Calais returning home with wounds to her neck and right breast. She recovered sufficiently and was put back in service two months later.

On another occasion, Mary returned with the tip of one wing shot off and three pellets were removed from her body. She recovered, passed flight tests, and was returned to service despite the shortened wing.

Mary's loft, located at the Exeter home of a shoemaker named Charlie Brewer who had become a loft keeper and intelligence agent during the war, was damaged during the Luftwaffe's 1942 raids on Exeter, killing many of the pigeons housed there. Mary, however, survived.

She died in 1950 and is buried in Ilford Animal Cemetery.

Tommy

Pigeon – NURP.41.DHZ56

Date of Award: February 1946

“For delivering a valuable message from Holland to Lancashire under difficult conditions, while serving with NPS in July 1942.”

All Alone

Pigeon – NURP.39.SDS.39

Date of Award: February 1946

“For delivering an important message in one day over a distance of 400 miles, while serving with the NPS in August, 1943.”

Princess

Pigeon – 42WD593

Date of Award: May 1946

“Sent on special mission to Crete, this pigeon returned to her loft (RAF Alexandria) having travelled about 500 miles mostly over sea, with most valuable information. One of the finest performances in the war record of the Pigeon Service.”



Mercury

Pigeon – NURP.37.CEN.335

Date of Award: August 1946

“For carrying out a special task involving a flight of 480 miles from Northern Denmark while serving with the Special Section Army Pigeon Service in July 1942.”

Pigeon – NURP.38.BPC.6.

Date of Award: August 1946

“For three outstanding flights from France while serving with the Special Section, Army Pigeon Service, 11 July 1941, 9 September 1941, and 29 November 1941.”



GI Joe

Pigeon – USA43SC6390

Date of Award: August 1946

“This bird is credited with making the most outstanding flight by a USA Army Pigeon in World War II. Making the 20 mile flight from British 10th Army HQ, in the same number of minutes, it brought a message which arrived just in time to save the lives of at least 100 Allied soldiers from being bombed by their own planes.”

G.I. Joe was enlisted in the United States Army Pigeon Service and went on to save the lives of the villagers of Calvi Vecchia, Italy, as well as the British troops occupying it. This village was going to be bombarded by Allied forces, but he delivered the message just in time to prevent it. He was awarded the Dickin Medal for gallantry in November 1946.

Duke of Normandy

Pigeon – NURP.41.SBC.219

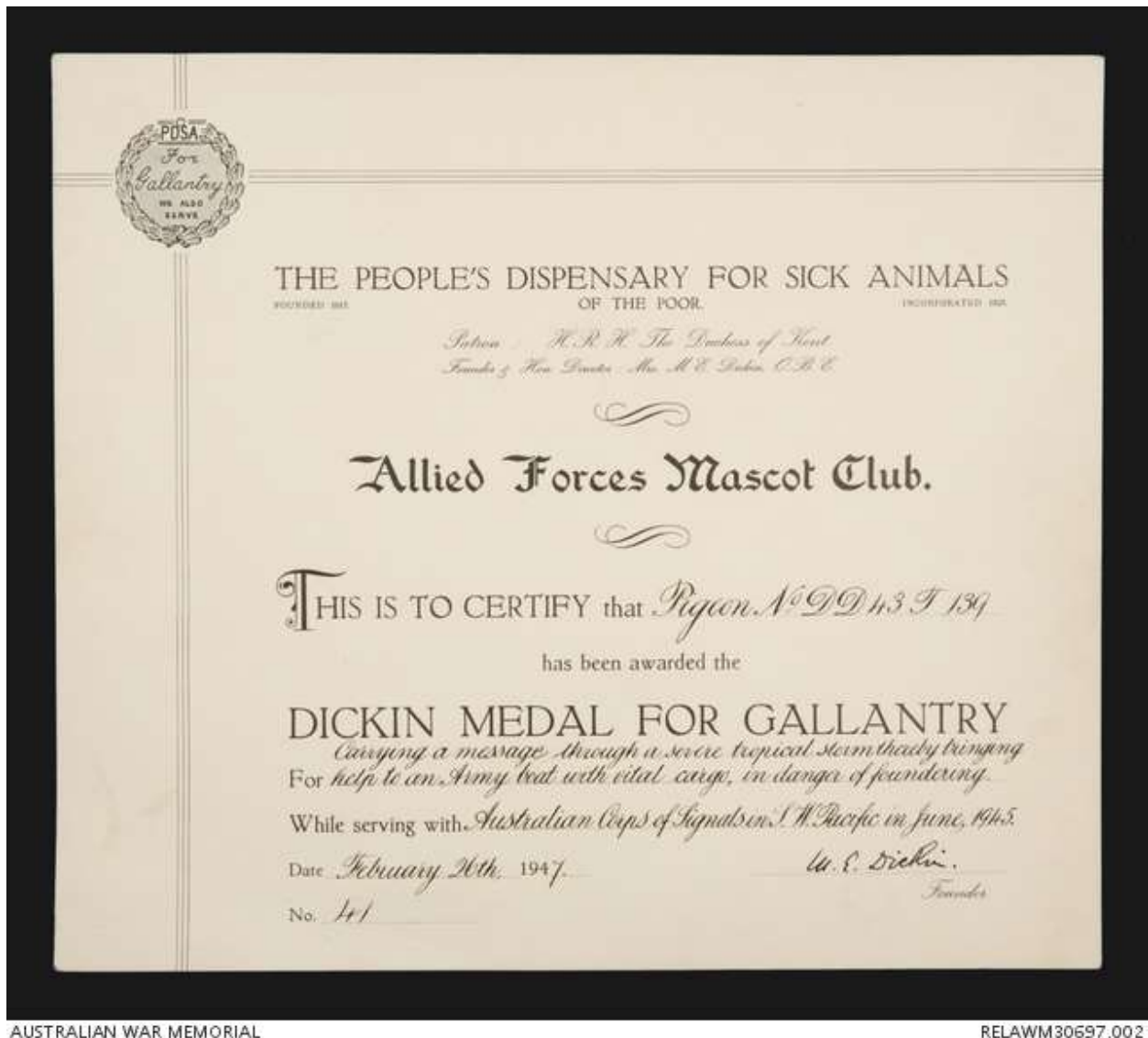
Date of Award: 8 January 1947

“For being the first bird to arrive with a message from Paratroops of 21st Army Group behind enemy lines on D Day 6 June, 1944, while serving with APS.”

Pigeon – NURP.43.CC.1418

Date of Award: 8 January 1947

“For the fastest flight with message from 6th Airborne Div. Normandy, 7 June, 1944, while serving with APS.”



Pigeon – DD.43.T.139 (Australian Army Signal Corps)

Date of award: February 1947

“During a heavy tropical storm this bird was released from Army Boat 1402 which had foundered on Wadou Beach in the Huon Gulf. Homing 40 miles to Madang it brought a message which enabled a rescue ship to be sent in time to salvage the craft and its valuable cargo of stores and ammunition.”

The certificate reads 'the people's dispensary for sick animals of the poor/ allied forces mascot club/ this is to certify that pigeon no. dd43 t139 has been awarded the dickin medal for gallantry carrying a message through a severe tropical storm thereby bringing help to an Army boat with vital cargo, in danger of foundering. While serving with Australian Corps of Signals in S.W. Pacific in June, 1943. Date February 26th 1947.' The back of the certificate has typed details of the breeder and donor of the bird to the Army, 'G.Adams Esq. 11 Vigo St. FOOTSCRAY W11 Victoria'.

This certificate accompanied the Dickin Medal awarded to Australian Army Blue Bar cock pigeon DD43 T139 for gallantry as a result of a flight he undertook through a severe tropical storm near

Madang, Papua New Guinea, on 12 July 1945. At the time the bird was located at 10 Pigeon Section (Type B) attached to Detachment 55 Port Craft Company, Madang. On that day he carried the following message, from a foundering boat to Madang, flying 40 miles in 50 minutes: 'To: Detachment 55 Australian Port Craft Company, MADANG. From: A.B. 1402. Date: 12.7.45. Engine Failed. Wash on to beach at WADAU owing very heavy seas. Send help immediately. Am rapidly filling with sand. TOO: 0800 - Senders signature - HOLLAND Cpl. TO Liberation 0805 - No. of copies 2. TOR at Loft - 0855'. As a result of the successful delivery of the message the boat, together with valuable stores, ammunition and equipment was salvaged. The bird had previously completed 23 operational flights over a total distance of 1,004 miles. The citation for the award reads: 'Awarded to Pigeon DD43 T139 for gallantry carrying a message through a severe tropical storm thereby bringing help to an army boat with a vital cargo, in danger of foundering.' The pigeon was donated to the army in 1943, as a patriotic gesture by a civilian pigeon fancier, Mr George Adams of 11 Vigo Street, Footscray, Victoria, for use in signals units in Papua New Guinea. Mr Adams, however, was not the bird's breeder. As part of his effort to obtain birds for the war effort Adams approached members of pigeon clubs in the Melbourne area, seeking the donation of birds. After he had approached the Yarraville Pigeon Club, one of its members, Mr Gordon Whittle, whose family had bred and raced pigeons for many years, donated a number of birds. One of the pigeons he bred was the bird who was awarded this Dickin Medal.

Pigeon – DD.43.Q.879 (Australian Army Signal Corps)

Date of award: February 1947 (Photo)

“During an attack by Japanese on a US Marine patrol on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, pigeons were released to warn headquarters of an impending enemy counter-attack. Two were shot down but DD43 despite heavy fire directed at it reached HQ with the result that enemy concentrations were bombed and the patrol extricated.”

Cologne

Pigeon - NURP39.NPS.144

Date of Award: unknown

“For homing from a crashed aircraft over Cologne although seriously wounded, while serving with the RAF in 1943.”

Cologne served with the National Pigeon Service as Pigeon NURP 39.NPS 144 and carried out over 100 missions with Bomber Command and had previously homed successfully from several downed aircraft before the incident which earned the Dickin Medal.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

<https://www.awm.gov.au/advanced-search?query=pigeons>

Croix de Guerre

Class of French military award



Cher Ami

Cher Ami (French for "dear friend", in the masculine) was a male Black Check cock homing pigeon who had been donated by the pigeon fanciers of Britain for use by the U.S. Army Signal Corps in France during World War I and had been trained by American pigeoners. He is famous for delivering a message from an encircled battalion despite serious injuries during the Meuse-Argonne offensive in October of 1918.

On October 3, 1918, Major Charles White Whittlesey and more than 550 men were trapped in a small depression on the side of the hill behind enemy lines without food or ammunition. They were

also beginning to receive friendly fire from allied troops who did not know their location. Surrounded by the Germans, many were killed and wounded and only 194 men were still alive and not captured or wounded by the end of the engagement. Because his runners were consistently intercepted or killed by the Germans, Whittlesey began dispatching messages by pigeon. The pigeon carrying the first message, "Many wounded. We cannot evacuate." was shot down. A second bird was sent with the message, "Men are suffering. Can support be sent?" That pigeon also was shot down. The artillery batteries supporting Whittlesey's men attempted to provide a "barrage of protection" for Whittlesey's men on the northern slope of the Charlevaux Ravine, but believed Whittlesey was on the southern slope of the ravine, resulting in a barrage inadvertently targeting the battalion, "Cher Ami" was dispatched with a note, written on onion paper, in a canister on his right leg,

We are along the road paralell [*sic*] to 276.4. Our own artillery is dropping a barrage directly on us. For heavens sake stop it.

As Cher Ami tried to fly back home, the Germans saw him rising out of the brush and opened fire. After several seconds, he was shot down but managed to take flight again. He arrived back at his loft at division headquarters 25 miles (40 km) to the rear in just 25 minutes, helping to save the lives of the 194 survivors. He had been shot through the breast, blinded in one eye, and had a leg hanging only by a tendon.

Cher Ami became the hero of the 77th Infantry Division. Army medics worked to save his life. When he recovered enough to travel, the now one-legged bird was put on a boat to the United States, with General John J. Pershing seeing him off.

The pigeon was awarded the Croix de Guerre Medal with a palm Oak Leaf Cluster for his heroic service in delivering 12 important messages in Verdun. He died at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, on June 13, 1919 from the wounds he received in battle and was later inducted into the Racing Pigeon Hall of Fame in 1931. He also received a gold medal from the Organized Bodies of American Racing Pigeon Fanciers in recognition of his service during World War I.

In November 2019, he became one of the first winners of the Animals in War & Peace Medal of Bravery, bestowed on him posthumously at ceremony on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C.



Mocker

Mocker, the hero pigeon was active during WWI in France. On September 12, 1918 heavy enemy artillery fire was blocking the American advance into the Alsace-Lorraine sector of France. Mocker carried a message that enabled American artillery to locate the enemy guns and silence them. Mocker lost his left eye and the top of his head was gashed, but he delivered the life saving message. He was awarded the Distinguished service Cross and the French Croix de Guerre Medal.