

World War One: The Battle for Communications

Carrier pigeons

Pigeons played a vital part in World War One (1914 -1918). They were an extremely reliable way of sending messages, especially when telegraph and telephone wires were cut by shell fire. They could also fly long distances and were fast with an average speed of 50mph.

Over 100,000 were used in the war. Almost all got through to their destination with their message. Under the **Defence of the Realm Act (1914)** it was illegal to shoot homing pigeons because they might be carrying important messages.

During the war, pigeons were taken up to the front line in wicker crates and in the later stages of the war they were frequently used to carry messages from tanks.



Left: A message-carrying pigeon being released from a port-hole in the side of a British tank, near Albert, France, August 1918. **Right:** Carrier pigeons: A bus converted into a mobile pigeon loft on the Western Front, August 1916.

Both images available in the public domain via [Wikimedia Commons](#) and the [Imperial War Museum](#).

Many pigeons were recognised for their wartime bravery. The most famous carrier pigeon of the war was an American-trained pigeon **Cher Ami** who, despite being shot at least twice, managed to fly 25 miles and deliver her message. The message saved the lives of 197 US soldiers of the “Lost Battalion” who were trapped behind German lines and were being shelled by friendly forces in October 1918.

Follow the instructions to make an origami carrier pigeon. What message will your pigeon carry?



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