

I SURVIVED

TRUE STORIES

COURAGEOUS CREATURES

Lauren Tarshis

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The American soldiers were doomed.

It was October 1918, not long before the end of World War I. This was a war more brutal than any before in history. Already millions were dead. More than 135 countries were losing soldiers in battles around the world.

Right now, in a dark, rainy forest in northeastern France, several hundred American troops were in a fight for their lives. The men were surrounded by enemy German soldiers.

Machine guns rattled. Bombs rained from the sky. The shouts and moans of wounded soldiers rose up. The Americans needed help. Their only hope was to get an urgent message to their commanders, 25 miles away.

But how? There were no walkie-talkies or cell phones in 1918, no computers to send emails, and the army radios weren't working.

Luckily, there was one brave warrior who had been trained for a moment exactly like this. She took off with the message, on a life-and-death race across the forest.

Her name was Cher Ami, and she was not a soldier. She was not even a human.

She was a pigeon.

INCREDIBLE POWERS

Cher Ami wasn't just any pigeon. Cher Ami (which means "dear friend" in French) was a special kind of bird—a carrier pigeon (sometimes called a homing pigeon). She was one of hundreds of carrier pigeons that helped the American military during World War I. Pigeons had an important job: to carry messages.

Why would the army use a pigeon to carry a message? For one thing, these pigeons are fast—some can fly up to 90 miles per hour.

They are also supersmart. A pigeon's brain is no bigger than a wad of bubble gum. But like the tiny chip in an iPhone, that pigeon brain is packed with power. For example, pigeons can be trained to



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Come si chiude il tubetto

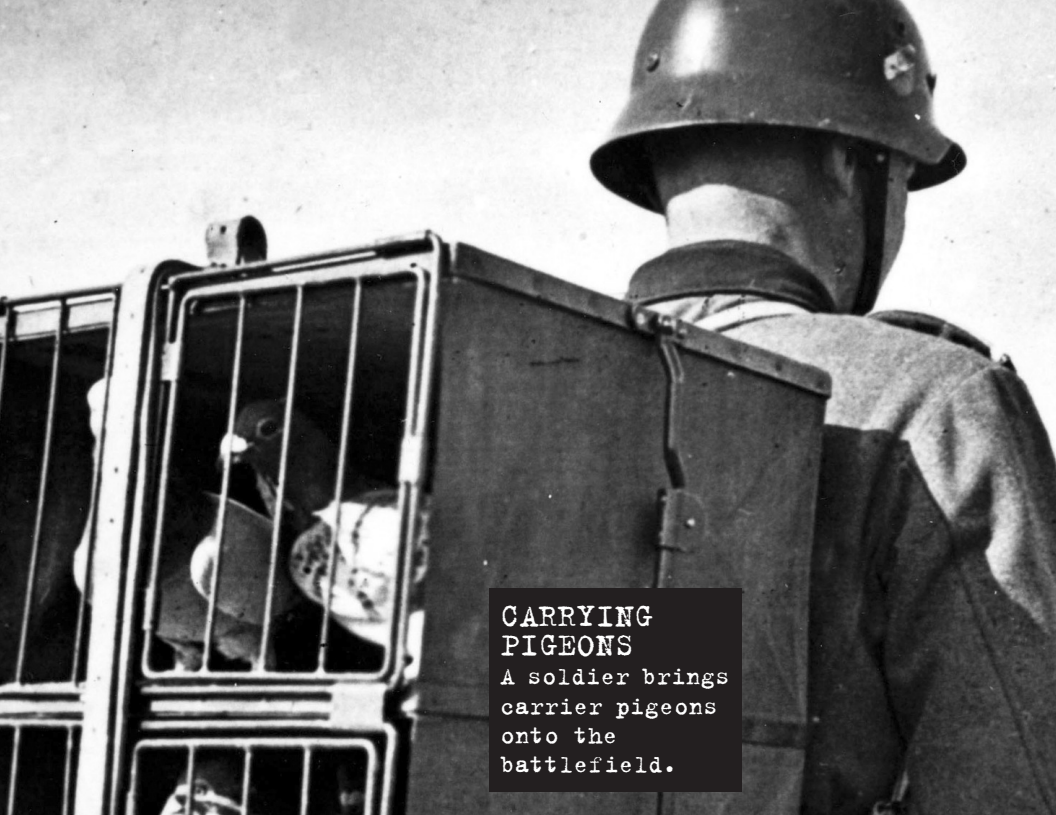
A message is slipped into a metal tube attached to a carrier pigeon's leg.

recognize letters and words.

But what truly makes these pigeons ideal for carrying messages is a unique talent. They always return to their home nest, no matter how far away it is. Nobody needs to show them how to get home. They just know. These humble gray birds can travel over oceans and mountains. They can fly across hundreds of twisting and turning miles. They can fly through thick fog and wild storms. And they almost never get lost.

It's this remarkable ability to navigate—to find their way—that makes them such incredible messengers.

But how does it actually work? How does the



CARRYING PIGEONS

A soldier brings
carrier pigeons
onto the
battlefield.



**MISERY ON THE
BATTLEFIELDS**
Soldiers wore masks
to protect them
from poison gas
used by Germany.