

### The Use of Messenger Pigeons on Coasts.

The Council of the Naval Volunteer Home Defence Association have recently directed their attention to the various modes of communication that can be made use of in connection with a Scheme of Naval Home Defence. Amongst the different means proposed is the employment of Homing Pigeons as message bearers. It was thought that the Naval Manœuvres would afford a favourable opportunity of testing the value of communication carried on by this means, and application was made to Major Allatt for information on the whole subject. In his report rendered to the Council of the Association, Major Allatt observes:—

The utility of pigeons as messengers in war, under certain conditions, does not admit of doubt. The subject has been exhaustively considered by most continental powers, with the result that a "Military Pigeon System" has invariably been established. Amongst Englishmen, however, it appears always to have been doubted whether such a means of carrying intelligence was applicable to our insular position. This impression is due chiefly to the want of knowledge of the subject amongst the educated classes. In any scheme of Home Defence the question of keeping up communication between ships and the shores is an important one. There can be little doubt that great advantage might accrue from the employment of pigeons liberated on board observation ships, especially in and about the English Channel, so as rapidly to convey intelligence to our harbours and other coast towns. Although fast despatch vessels may be employed for this purpose their use is restricted on account of their liability to capture, and the limited number that would be available. Recent naval manœuvres have abundantly demonstrated that fast hostile cruisers can inflict serious damage on our coasts, particularly if their approach is totally unexpected. Intelligence of the movements of an enemy hovering around our coasts is of primary importance. As regards the maintenance of communication between different ships at sea—to which your letter alludes—it is very doubtful if pigeons can be advantageously so made use of.\* Experiments have been tried at different times both in France and Germany, with a view to test the feasibility of carrying on correspondence at sea in this manner. Although these trials are said to have had satisfactory results, it is certain that pigeons could not be relied upon to fly back to a moveable home (such as a ship at sea) that had shifted its position a considerable distance, and in an uncertain direction, while the birds had been absent. The naval officers of the leading Continental powers have given considerable attention to the employment of homing pigeons in connection with naval operations, and preparations have been made for an extended use of the birds in case of necessity. The Italians place implicit reliance on pigeons to carry reports from their ships in the Mediterranean to their shore pigeon stations. There are twelve Government lofts established in Italy for naval and military purposes. Some of the birds are trained for land service, others for naval purposes. According to official reports of the work done in 1887, during the squadron manœuvres of that year, messages were regularly sent from ships by pigeons to the shore, and "often arrived many days before the despatch vessel sent at the same time." The birds were also used as message bearers between Rome and the Island of Maddelena, a passage of 150 miles of sea. In these latter experiments the average rate of flight was about 30 miles an hour. The pigeons from the Government loft of Cagliari were employed by ships as messengers across 300 miles of sea, which was said to be the greatest distance yet attempted over water. In Germany this question of pigeon flying has not been neglected. The whole Empire is spotted with pigeon stations. The northern coast line from Königsberg to Wilhelmshaven has several stations under the control of the Minister of Marine. The German Government "pigeon system" is by far the most extensive and complete of Europe. The English Channel has received a due share of attention, and a good many German birds have been trained, through Belgium, to fly from several points on our southern shores. The present Emperor appears to take a keen personal interest in the work of homing pigeons, and is doing a good deal to promote their use for war purposes. In France both the Minister of Marine and the Minister of War have systematically organised a service of pigeon post both in and around French territory. Valuable Government prizes are distributed in the presence of officers of high rank to successful competitors in the different pigeon races. At the annual squadron manœuvres in the Mediterranean pigeons are the messengers used to carry news to land. Toulon-Sur-Mer is the shore station for this service. Recently a large number of birds have been trained to fly via Dover from London to various parts of

France. Only a few weeks ago one of the Flying Clubs in the neighbourhood of Cherbourg flew a race from Plymouth, and the prize appears to have been given by the Minister of Marine. There are therefore in France a number of winged messengers available to carry intelligence across the Channel from any part of our southern coast. I think it would be unwise of us to give no serious attention to this method of communication. Besides the considerations which have influenced Continental naval services we have to bear in mind that our whole system of cable correspondence, on which we have become accustomed to depend for rapid and certain communication with the rest of the world, is obviously dangerously exposed to attack. Our Submarine Cables might be cut by an enemy that has never come within sight of our Island. It would be a difficult task for our home or Channel fleets to watch and protect them. Most of the telegraph lines which run into chief coast towns and between our coast fortresses are quite unprotected, and communication by their means might be interrupted or destroyed when its maintenance had become a matter of paramount importance. We appear to have made no provision for a contingency of this nature. Abroad provision has been made to meet such a situation by the training of pigeons to act as message bearers in such emergencies. There are at the present time a certain number of Pigeon Flying Societies, and, consequently, of trained homing pigeons, in the United Kingdom, but their number is quite inadequate to furnish sufficient material for naval or military purposes. The expenses of training the birds, that is of railway transport, are so heavy that the sport of pigeon flying can only be indulged in by those who are comparatively well to do. If the Naval Volunteer Home Defence Association recognise the utility of pigeons employed as messengers in connection with coast defence, their first step might be to give an impetus to pigeon flying in this country generally, by securing a reduction in railway rates, and offering prizes for races flown under specified conditions. With assistance and encouragement of this nature the number of birds trained by private enterprise would rapidly and largely increase, as has been the case abroad, and they would become available for public service in case of necessity.

### The Military Rifle League.

The League teams fired the third of their series of seven matches on Saturday afternoon last, 14th June. The weather seems to have been on the whole very favourable for shooting, the top scores and the general average both being the highest yet. Exceptions to the favourable conditions were, however, experienced in Prince Edward Island and in the North-West, as will be seen from the weather report appended.

#### THE WEATHER.

The following are the reports received of the weather, wind and light: Belleville, cloudy, slight 12 o'clock, light dark; Bowmanville, rainy, fishtail, light dull; Brantford, light variable; Charlottetown, cold, blustery gale 10 o'clock, light dark; Essex Centre, hazy, light variable; Halifax, foggy and rain, light 10 o'clock wind, light dark; Hamilton, fine, fishtail 3 o'clock, light hazy; Lindsay, showery, variable 2.30 o'clock, light variable; Montreal, overcast, fresh 3 o'clock, light dull; Ottawa, rainy, fishtail, light variable; Niagara Falls, raining, medium 10 o'clock, light dull; Port Arthur, fair, gusty 3 o'clock, light variable; Prince Albert, showery, strong gusty 4 o'clock, light very dull; Quebec, cloudy, cold, gale 10 o'clock, light dull; Regina, moderate gale 9 o'clock, light good; Sherbrooke, overcast, variable 8 o'clock, light dull; St. John, N.B., cool, variable 5 o'clock, light dark; St. John's, Q., fair, variable 5 o'clock, light indifferent; Toronto, rainy, variable 3 to 9 o'clock, light dull; Windsor Mills, fine, calm, light grey; Winnipeg, mild, fishtail 10 o'clock, light good; York, cloudy, 9 o'clock, light dull.

#### RESULTS OF THE MATCH.

For the second time the 54th Battalion headed the list, on this occasion with the total of 830 points, or the grand average of 83 points per man, and thus maintained first place in the aggregate, and substantially increased their lead over the field, being now 65 points above the second team, and 224 over the third. Also for the second time, the Halifax Garrison Artillery were second in the match, their total being 817 points, and they too retain their place in the aggregate, being a good second with but 65 points less than the 54th, and increasing their lead to 159 points over the third team. The handicap is a big one, but the third team—the 13th Battalion—are very strong, and apt to make the contest quite interesting in the succeeding matches. The difference in the aggregates of the teams next in order is not so marked, the hundred odd points between the third and the fifteenth being very evenly divided. The most noteworthy improvements in position in the aggregate are that the 13th Battalion rose from fourth to third place, the 53rd Battalion from tenth to fourth, the Royal Grenadiers from fourteenth to ninth, 45th Battalion Bowmanville team from thirteenth to fifth, and the 43rd Battalion from eighteenth to thirteenth. The Ottawa teams stick close

\*It is to be understood that this remark is strictly limited to direct communication between two vessels at sea—one or both of which have moved subsequently to the despatch of a bird. A vessel at sea can communicate with a shore loft by birds—and thence by despatch vessel with any other ship at sea. Ex: Assume war with France. A ship of war in English channel sends a message by bird to Dover, Plymouth, &c.; this is telegraphed via Germany to Italy, whence a despatch vessel communicates with the Mediterranean fleet at sea.