



Pigeon baskets

Carrier pigeons were a vital form of communication during the First World War, when wireless and telephone communication was often unreliable or unavailable. They were used in the trenches, in tanks, in aeroplanes, on boats, and for intelligence work. The Carrier Pigeon Service was formed in 1915, and at the end of the war had 22,000 pigeons.

The Carrier Pigeon Service infrastructure was highly organised. The Army division had a mixture of stationary and mobile pigeon lofts at the front. Pigeons would be transported to the front lines, where they were released when needed to carry their messages back to the lofts stationed behind the lines.

A huge number of containers was required for transporting the pigeons and willow baskets were an obvious choice, although many other materials were also used. These baskets varied from large panniers carrying twenty pigeons used aboard trawlers, to baskets worn on the backs of motorcycle riders for taking five to ten pigeons to the front lines, to baskets for just one or two birds used in the trenches. Within the Intelligence division, single pigeons were dropped by balloon into occupied France and Belgium in small baskets attached to parachutes.

While pannier-style baskets feature in the *British Amalgamated Union of Journeymen Basket, Cane and Wicker Furniture Makers List of Prices, Sizes and Particulars* of 1916, there does not appear to have been a standard design for other styles of pigeon basket.

