

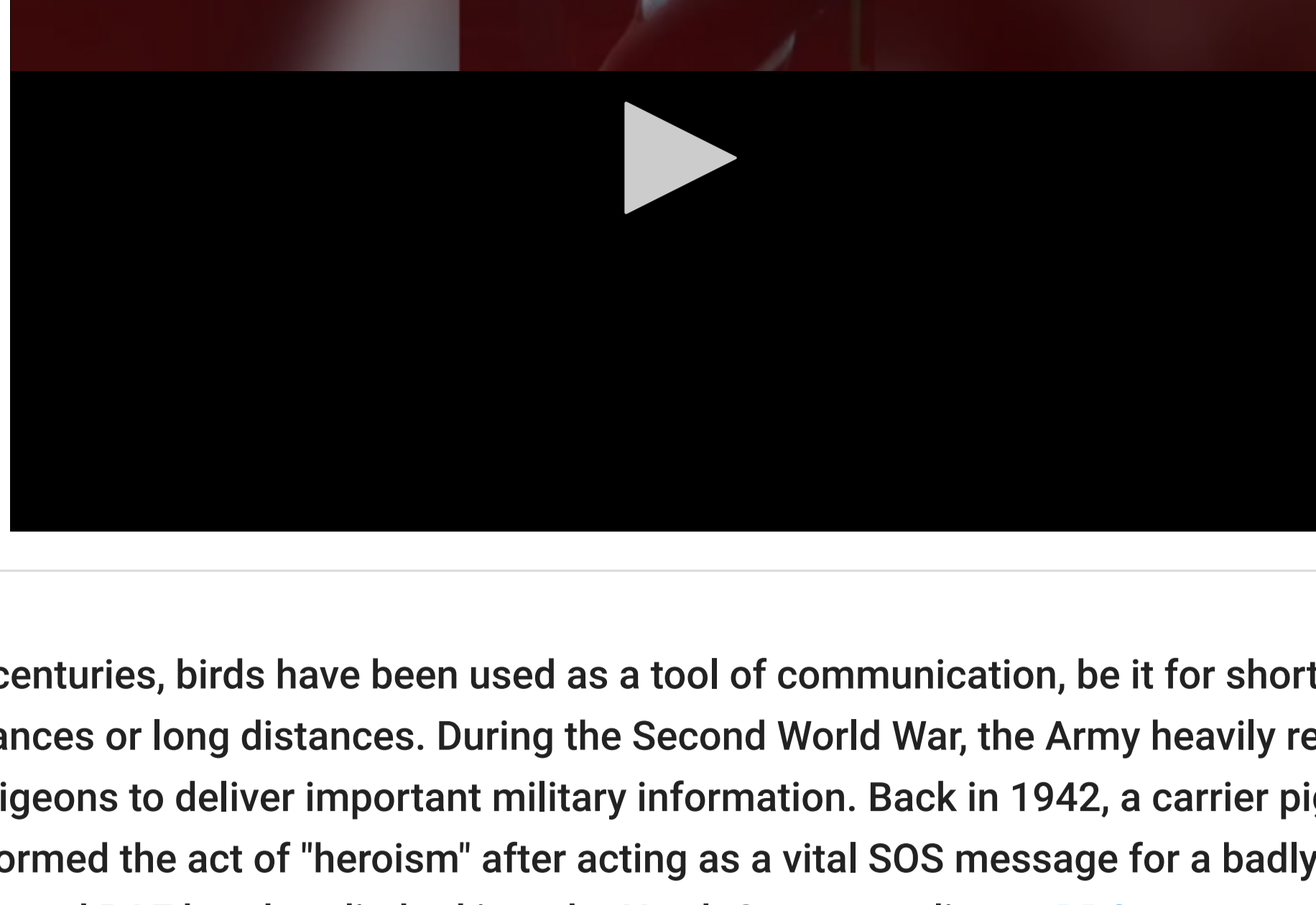
# Remarkable story of how a pigeon saved a crew of World War II bombers

A carrier pigeon performed the act of 'heroism' that saw it awarded the animal's equivalent of the Victoria Cross.

By Zoheb Alam  
May 6, 2024



Representative Cover Image Source: A soldier releases a carrier pigeon, 1942. Original publication: Picture Post - 1199 - Pigeon Service - unpub. (Photo by Bert Hardy/Picture Post/Hulton Archive/Getty Images)



For centuries, birds have been used as a tool of communication, be it for short distances or long distances. During the Second World War, the Army heavily relied on pigeons to deliver important military information. Back in 1942, a carrier pigeon performed the act of "heroism" after acting as a vital SOS message for a badly damaged RAF bomber ditched into the North Sea, according to [BBC](#).



Representative Image Source: Photo shows an English Army detachment releasing two winged messengers during World War II. Ca. 1940s.(Photo by Bettmann/Getty Images)

This tale of bravery and valor is set in the backdrop of the Second World War when the British crew of bombers were returning from a mission over Norway. However, due of severe damage from enemy fire, the bomber crashed into the sea more than 100 miles from home. After crashing into the sea, the four men did not have the ability to radio an accurate position back to base. But as the aircraft went down, the crew had managed to salvage their secret weapon - a carrier pigeon.



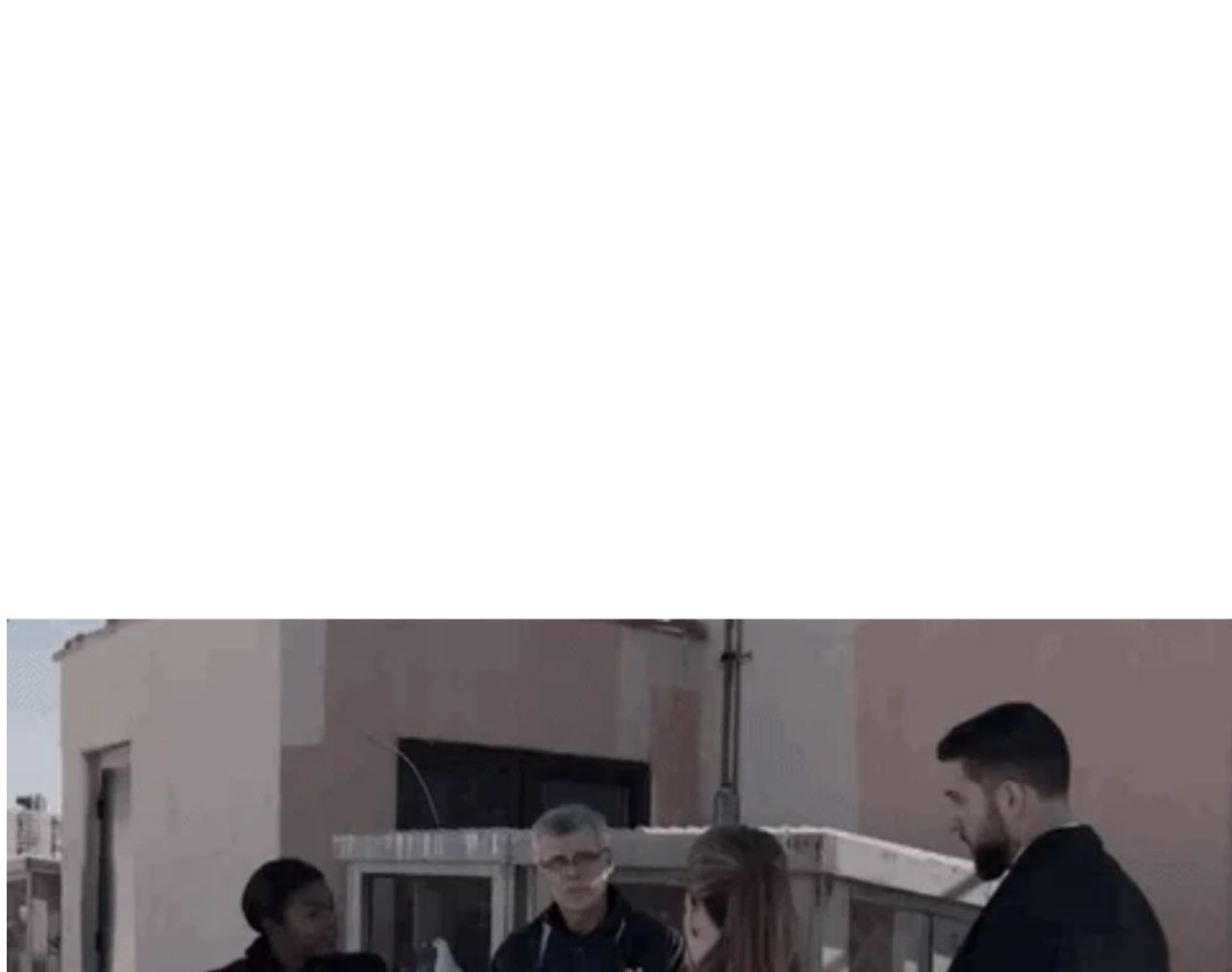
via GIPHY

Their carrier bird, called Winkie, was set free in the hope it could fly home to its loft in Broughty Ferry, near Dundee, and alert air base colleagues about their unfortunate crash. For the four British men stranded in the open sea, the carrier pigeon was the crew's last hope if they did not want to die a cold death. During World War II, carrier pigeons were routinely carried by RAF bombers for emergency situations. Back in the day, rescue operations were not smooth affairs due to the lack of GPS tech and for soldiers, their winged companions were their last hope.



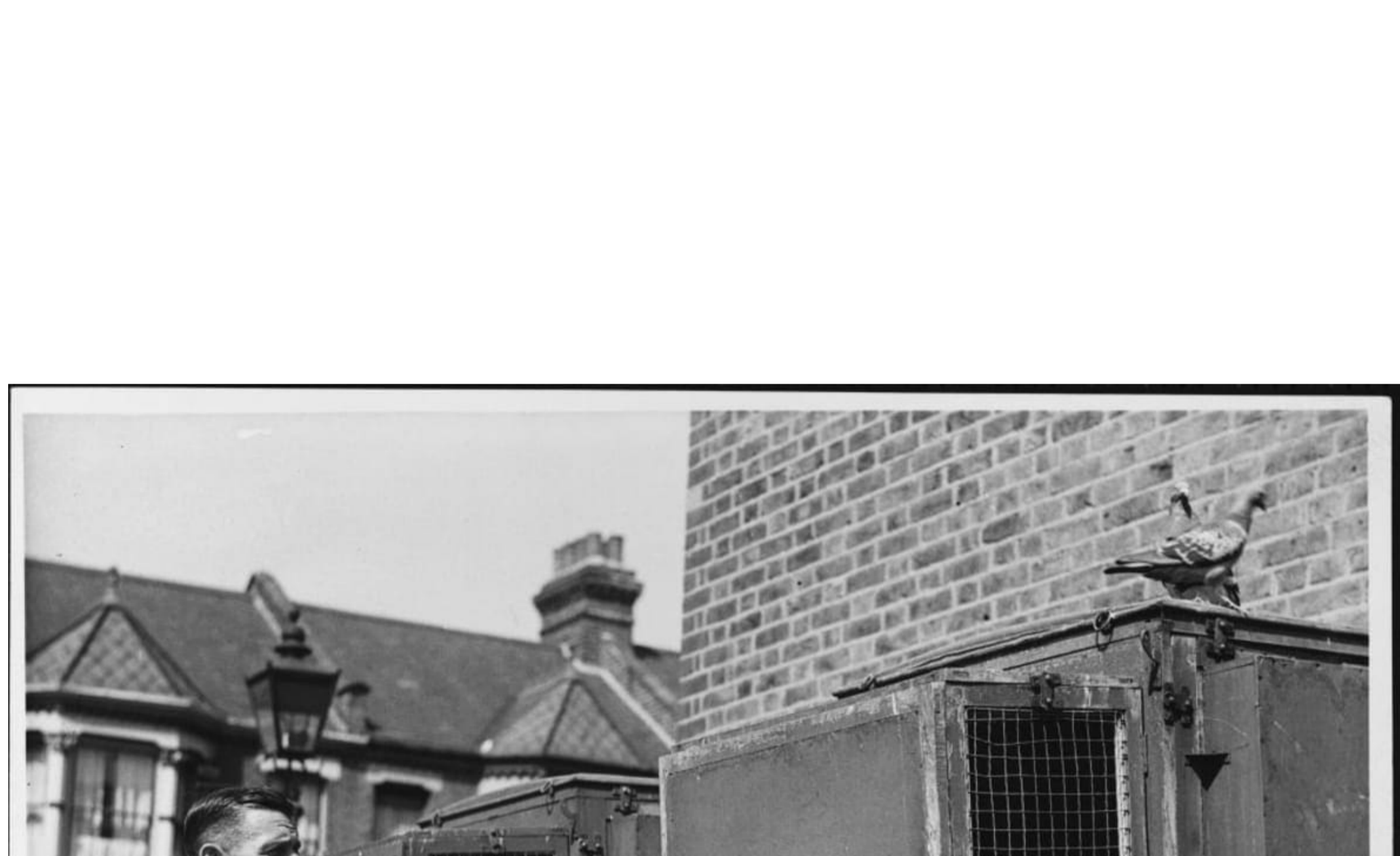
Representative Image Source: A carrier pigeon is released from its basket by British soldiers during World War II, with a message secured to its leg. (Photo by David Savill/Topical Press Agency/Getty Images)

It was Winkie's turn to serve her country and she did it with ease. She made it back to her owner after flying 120 miles. However, she was found exhausted and covered in oil by owner George Ross who immediately informed RAF Leuchars in Fife. Winkie arrived in tired condition but her whole body made a massive difference in locating the lost men at sea. The RAF was able to calculate the position of the downed aircraft using the time difference between the plane's ditching and the arrival of the bird - taking into account the wind direction and even the traces of the oil on Winkie's feathers to her flight speed.



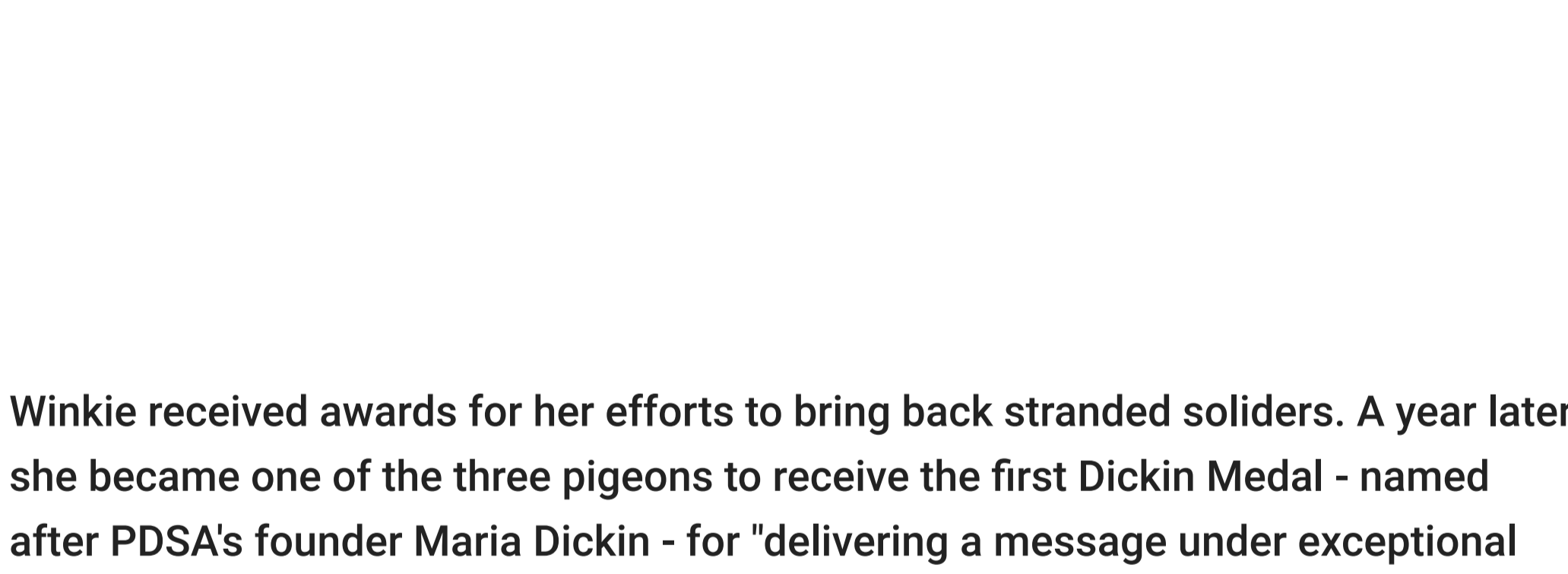
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Without any further ado, a rescue mission was launched by the RAF base, and the four stranded men were found within 15 minutes of the search. The four men stranded at the North Sea were brought back home safe and sound all thanks to their winged companion. Elaine Pendlebury, from veterinary charity PDSA, said the carrier pigeon had been released as a "last ditch stand" when the crew realized they had no other options. Pendlebury also added, "I find it very, very moving really. These people would have died without this pigeon message coming through."

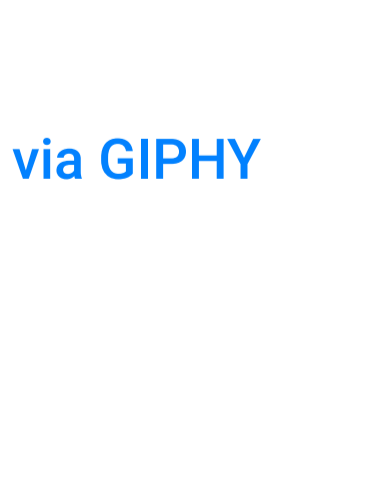


Representative Image Source: A handler from the Army Pigeon Service stands with some of the carrier pigeons that were used in Africa during World War II. (Photo by Hulton-Deutsch/Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis via Getty Images)

Winkie received awards for her efforts to bring back stranded soliders. A year later, she became one of the three pigeons to receive the first Dickin Medal - named after PDSA's founder Maria Dickin - for "delivering a message under exceptional difficulties."



via GIPHY



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