

## Reigate and Banstead Writes 2020

### A Reigate Pigeon's War!

By Orla McNally age 12

When I was younger, I never thought there was any place other than Reigate – my beloved home. The beautiful rows of monotonous houses that I could weave in and out of on a delightful, summer's day. But now I am in an unknown land with a tight, uncomfortable tube strapped to my slender leg. No one's bothered to tell me where I am or what I'm doing. All I know is that I want to go home. A stained piece of paper is slipped into the cylinder on my leg and then I'm told to fly away! Where do I go? Reigate is the only place I know but, for all I understand, I am thousands of miles away from there.

Dipping, diving through a colourless sky. I hear engines of planes nearby and ear-splitting bangs of guns but all I see is grey, all I smell is smoke and fumes. I taste sweat and hunger inside my mouth and can only feel the wind on my feathers and the digging pain of the capsule on my leg. There is another sense though, a sixth sense that isn't tired but eagerly searching for the place I love so much. The smoke is slowly clearing and I see towering white cliffs below me and land ahead!

I'm back in grey cloud, dodging bullets, my eyes bleary from the smoke. I can't keep a straight course because the wind is thrusting me sideways. Feeling hungry, drained and weak, I swoop down to land on a roof top to catch my breath. Slowly, my eyes become blurry and now all I can hear is silence...

I awake not knowing where I am. Smoke is billowing up from a chimney beside me and shouts are coming from below! This isn't the Doods Road pigeon loft, I think to myself. I decide to go and ask a few chattering pigeons on the neighbouring roof. Dreary and confused, I hobble over to greet them. They welcome me and give me a couple of worms to snack on - that's kind. They say I am in Kent, which means nothing to me. I just want to go home!

Finally, I set off rested and full, with a hope of making it to Reigate. I can sense it; I am almost home! Where I belong. There's the railway line at the bottom of Redstone Hill, the houses alongside it smouldering from a recent bomb hitting them. I see the spire of St Mary's Church and the roof of Reigate Grammar School, the lake in the park and, there it is, the Eagle Gates of Reigate Priory in the distance!

But the roofs are all so indistinguishable. How will I ever get the message to the right place? I feel like giving up but I'm so close! With little hope left, I slowly fly to Reigate Priory and land on the grimy roof. Suddenly, my sixth sense kicks in again. I don't know how but I know where to go! I can feel it in my feathers, and I'm off again on the final straight.

I follow the main road with a flutter in my heart, a spring in my wings and make it to my avenue. After a while of flying round and round the perimeter three times, I come to realise I don't actually remember which house is mine. I lose hope and start to cry.

But then, I hear a familiar voice below. My long-lost owner! I swoop down to land by her feet. She lets out a shout of relief and sweeps me up into the basket on the front of her bicycle. In a hurry, she gets onto the bike herself and starts to pedal down the bumpy streets. And now I see it, the bunker nestled in the trees below the hill by the chalky ground, where all those important people are waiting for the message I am carrying. Being thrown around in the front of a bike is not a fun experience but we make it and at last my precious canister with its priceless cargo inside is removed by a man I have never met before but he pats my head and says I did a good job.

'Finally, I'm home, I made it, I'm actually home,' I repeat to myself.

I hope I never have to fly hundreds of miles again and pray that the war is over soon because I can't bear to think that thousands of pigeons like me are doing that all over the country. But I'm back in Reigate now, safe and sound with all the other pigeons in the Doods Road pigeon loft, and it might just turn out that the message I flew home with will save millions of lives!