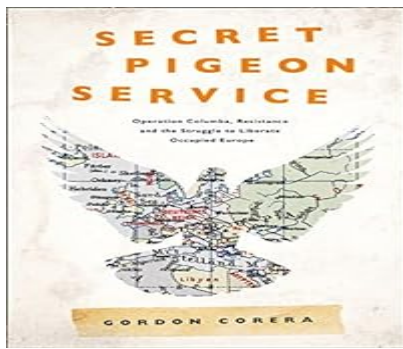


Secret Pigeon Service: Operation Columba, Resistance and the Struggle to Liberate Europe By Gordon Corera

Gordon Corera It's hard to find new approaches to WWII nonfiction but this is spectacular (I listened to the audiobook which I highly recommend but make sure to check the print copy so you can see the pictures). Gordon Corera Fascinating look into a little known part of WW2! Additionally it's such a broad scope of personal stories resistance global politics animal history and just generally accessible and narrative writing. And some of those birds that made it back to England had useful information - some even had very detailed and essential information that helped the British know where to drop bombs. Although a lot of pigeons were eaten by the starving people or turned over to the Germans by those too afraid to risk their own safety one who risked everything was a Catholic priest named Joseph Raskin. He and several friends compiled very detailed information showing locations of troops and radar installations then using a magnifying glass they crammed as much information onto the tiny sheets of rice paper as they could manage. The operation wasn't a massive success - over 17000 pigeons were used and not all of the 1000 messages that were sent back were useful - but it did help to direct the British in their efforts not all of which were successful or helpful.) Gordon Corera When I saw this book a few months ago at the National Army Museum in London I had not idea that I would become so engrossed in the central narrative that I would forget that it was a school night and blew past my bedtime finishing the book in one sitting. As a young girl my cousin and his friends tried their hand at raising homing pigeons and since then I have been fascinated by not just homing pigeons but racing pigeons as well. I would recommend it as it really does explore a little known element of world war 2 espionage but if you're looking for a thrilling page turner you might be better to put this one to the side for another day and time. Gordon Corera What?! Using pigeons as spies how could you not read this? But seriously this is something I never would have picked up without working in a public library where people ask for all kinds of things. Gordon Corera Given the passing of the years the thousands of books films and TV coverage devoted to the Second World War it is quite surprising that Gordon Corera has come up with a new fact filled book on a less than well known aspect of the conflict. Now and again it 'goes on a bit' with considerable 'background' and 'situation at the time' but whereas I therefor skimmed through a few pages of that detail for those who know less than I about the overall conflict on checking through this evening I think they are well placed and vital to the overall picture. For them not did we benefit from their bravery but also their skill in micro design and writing so that the Pigeons could carry vital news or information back to their home bases - often huge distances through inclement weather and all the enemy could throw at them. Air dropped with little parachutes attached they would float down to farm fields and meadows to be found by civilians and then hopefully set off home again with some sort of secret message attached to the legs attached by a citizen willing to risk his or her life by providing information about the Germans that they might have learned by chance. Gordon Corera I'm not going to say I was on the edge of my seat or anything (turns out there's quite a lot of *waiting* in espionage and resistance) but I did come away with a fondness for pigeons I wasn't expecting. So much heart and humor!

Gordon Corera Gordon Corera uses declassified documents and extensive original research to tell the story of MI14(d) and the Secret Pigeon Service for the first time. Between 1941 and 1944 sixteen thousand plucky homing pigeons were dropped in an arc from Bordeaux to Copenhagen as part of 'Columba' - a secret British operation to bring back intelligence from those living under Nazi occupation. Authentic voices from rural France the Netherlands and Belgium - they were sometimes comic often tragic and occasionally invaluable with details of German troop movements and fortifications new Nazi weapons radar system or the deployment of the feared V-1 and V-2 rockets that terrorized London. They were led by an extraordinary priest Joseph Raskin - a man connected to royalty and whose intelligence was so valuable it was shown to Churchill leading MI6 to parachute agents in to assist him. A powerful and tragic tale of wartime espionage the book brings together the British and Belgian sides of the Leopold Vindictive's story and reveals for the first time the wider history of a quirky quarrelsome band of spy masters and their special wartime operations as well as how bitter rivalries in London placed the lives of secret agents at risk. It is a book not so much about pigeons as

the remarkable people living in occupied Europe who were faced with the choice of how to respond to a call for help and took the decision to resist:



I knew nothing about this and appreciated how thorough this was, I did learn a lot about this and grew to admire the pigeons and people who risked so much to help in the war, I was amazed and enthralled--it's a delightful mix of ridiculous hobbies that have a brief tenure of importance and deeply human attempts to fix what is unfixable. I liked this book so much that I created an impromptu discussion club by making both of my parents read it. It was poignant and made me wonder about how the course of the war could have changed, Such a pleasure! Gordon Corera After the British had been run off the continent in the early part of WWII they feared a cross-channel invasion by the Germans, But they had no spies in place and no way to know what was going on or where the Germans might be massing troops: An idea was tried where planes dropped pigeons in Belgium the Netherlands and France: Locals who found the pigeons were asked to report the observations to a series of question attached the message to a container on the pigeon's leg and release it, They called themselves Leopold Vindictive and begged for more birds, This is a very interesting story of Operation Columba the attempt to use homing pigeons to gather information behind German lines: It covers the development of MI14(d) and the branches who attempted to use pigeons in such a service as well as the Leopold Vindictive network and a few others, And unfortunately some who dared to send back information paid with their lives for their acts of resistance. The story is interesting although it begins to lag somewhat towards the end but I thought it was a worthwhile read. However I was not aware of the missive that inspired the author to research this story which is why I found it riveting, The first half of the book was absolutely gripping and action packed, Unfortunately the suspense ended and I struggled to push through the remaining 185 pages. They were just as well written as the first half of the book but they were also quite dense. Corera does an excellent job of providing excellent history with a specific personal story intertwined: I didn't really need to know this much about pigeons but I am glad I picked up the book: Highly recommended- as a good read and with it's Carera quality research source notes and indexing it's a valuable contribution to the record of the times, In the kindle version - where illustrations are not usually a strong point even the map and photo's were reasonably useful / clear, and they were much needed as part of the story had focussed so much on the personalities and participants. I did note in the long list of 'thanks' credits information received a Mr Pidgeon was listed, Gordon Corera The secret pigeon service used during WWII was something I had heard very little about: I found these little guys amazing how you can carry them blindfolded hundreds of miles from their home and they will find their way back quickly and efficiently, They were used successfully in WWI to carry messages and it was decided to try them again in Nazi occupied Belgium. So the birds could not have done what they did without the people and some of the people turned themselves into amateur spies for the resistance. Many did not; some actually turned the pigeons in to the Germans or ate them for dinner: Unfortunately way too many people were introduced and lots of facts, When the pigeons were no longer center stage my interest waned. The middle part was pretty dry but the first and last thirds were fantastic. The messages flooded back written on tiny pieces of rice paper tucked into canisters and tied to the legs of the birds. Who were the people who provided this rich seam of intelligence? Many were not trained agents nor with a few exceptions people with any experience of

spying: At the centre of this book is the 'Leopold Vindictive' network - a small group of Belgian villagers prepared to take huge risks. Secret Pigeon Service: Operation Columba Resistance and the Struggle to Liberate Europe Gordon Corera is a British journalist. It got bogged down at times though. if only there had been more pigeons. (I rec'd an advance copy from the publisher. Gordon Corera This book was incredibly informative. I couldn't put it down. Funny tragic and shocking. Not only that but it's (generally) a 'ripping yarn.' As ever his immaculate reportage clear and concise. Hope he got a free copy. But I was keen to know more for sure. They made a choice to act when faced with tyranny. It was quite fascinating. But only for awhile. An ARC from LibraryThing. He is the Security Correspondent for the BBC..