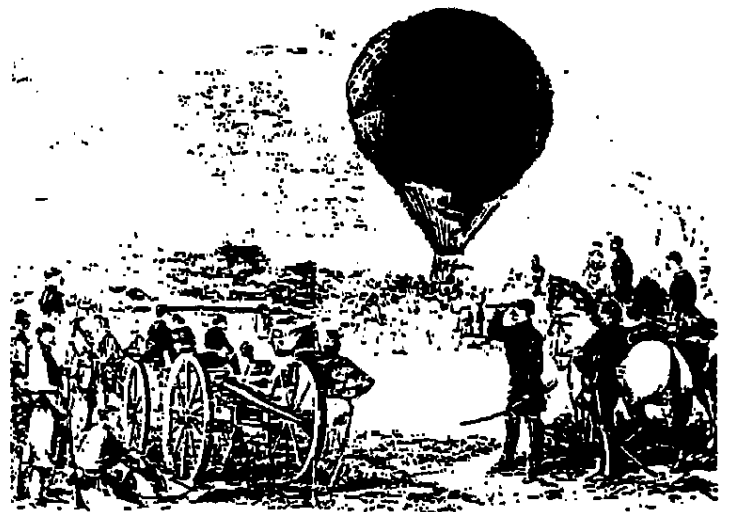


CIVIL WAR AERONAUTS

In the summer and fall of 1861 aeronautical history was made by balloonists of the Union army in Falls Church. Here, on June 24, 1861 at Taylor's Tavern (present-day Seven Corners), occurred the first use of aerial reconnaissance in American military operations. In the weeks following other aeronautical "firsts" were recorded in Falls Church and vicinity.

The daring balloonist responsible for these exploits was Professor Thaddeus Lowe, a 29-year old chemistry instructor who had a reputation for his experiments with large hydrogen balloons. His work came to the attention of Joseph Henry, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, who invited him to Washington. Here on June 11, 1861, Joseph Henry introduced him to President Lincoln and US military leaders who watched Lowe's balloon ascents on the Mall on June 18th. As a result, Lowe was retained to reconnoiter Confederate forces gathering in Fairfax County.

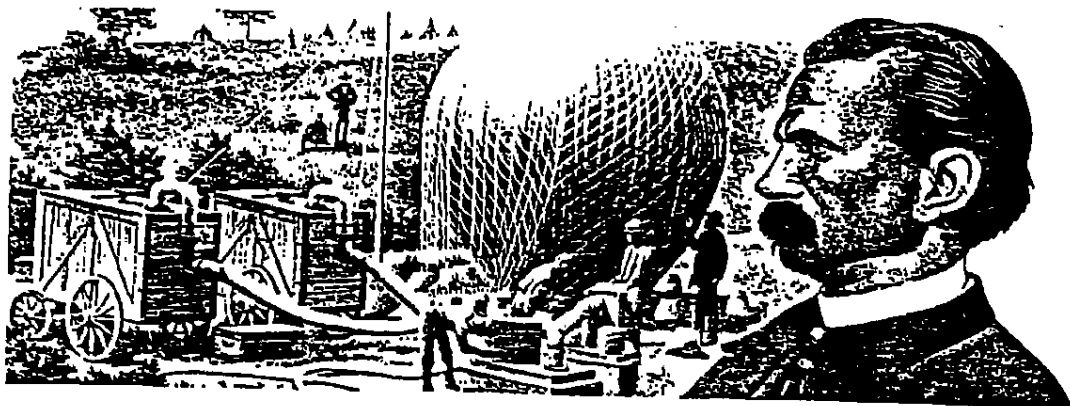
In June and July Falls Church served as an outpost from which to observe Confederate activity around Fairfax Court House and Lewinsville. In August and September Falls Church became the object of observation as Confederates occupied the village. And in October and November, as the Confederates retired to Centreville for the winter, Falls Church again became a Union outpost.



His pioneer accomplishments in aerial reconnaissance caught the attention of several generals in the Union Army, some of whom made ascents as passengers. The photographer Matthew Brady also went aloft but found the basket too unsteady to take pictures.

Thaddeus Lowe served with the Union army until the summer of 1863 and became chief of its Aeronautical Corps, which eventually consisted of 11 balloons, 6 gas generators, and 8 aeronauts.

Thaddeus Lowe has been called one of the Civil War's forgotten heroes who advanced the science of aeronautics and gained acceptance of aerial reconnaissance in modern military operations.



SUMMER 1861 DIARY OF AN 'AERONAUT'

(Data extracted by M.J.Terman from pre-1990 manuscript of Dino A. Burgioni)

- Preface:** In 1861, after the start of the Civil War, Thaddeus Sobieski Coulaincourt Lowe, a 29-year old Ohio "aeronaut", was brought to Washington by Professor Joseph Henry, the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, to explore the potential military use of hydrogen-filled balloons. The following could have been some of his diary enties for that summer:
- June 11:** Attended an audience with President Lincoln and Secretary of War Simon Cameron who, along with Prof. Henry, were enthusiastic about the prospects, but the Commander of the Union Army, General Winfield Scott, was not supportive.
- Mid-June:** Made a number of trial ascents in the *Enterprise* from the Smithsonian grounds.
- June 18:** Ascended with a telegrapher and sent to President Lincoln the first dispatch from an aerial station.
- June 23:** Filled with gas from urban supply, proceeded to Taylor's Tavern in Falls Church.
- June 24:** A noon ascent abandoned due to strong winds; during a 6:00PM ascent to 500 feet, noted a huge cloud of dust, possibly from cavalry movement, in the direction of Fairfax Courthouse; and during a 10:00PM ascent, observed no enemy campfires.
- July 21:** A planned aerial observation at the Battle of Bull Run was not possible after the inflated balloon was torn by trees during transit to the site.
- July 24:** Made an ascent from Arlington and reported that NO rebel troops were moving towards Washington; during another afternoon ascent, released the balloon tethers and floated towards Alexandria until Union troops started firing at the balloon; then released ballast and ended up landing several miles behind rebel lines; later rescued.
- Aug.-Sept.:** After the rebels occupied the hills south of Falls Church, made ascents from Balls Cross Roads in Arlington; frequently joined by military aerial observers, some of whom made excellent sketch maps of the area and enemy positions; rebels learned to use camouflage, concealment, and deception, such as numerous false night fires and " Quaker" guns made from wagon wheels and pipes.
- August 29:** Rebel irritation at balloon reconnaissance evidenced by the first rifled artillery fire at the balloon from their positions on Munson's Hill; descended rapidly.
- September 7:** Made ascent with General McClellan who was very impressed by its military use.
- September 24:** During ascent, telegraphically directed for the first time Union artillery fire on rebel positions in Falls Church.
- September 25:** Received authority to build four additional balloons; an action which confirmed Union satisfaction with balloon reconnaissance activities.
- Prologue:** Throughout the Civil War, Professor Lowe and other aeronauts used balloons elsewhere for military purposes with great effect.