

# Notes for NAVAL AERONAUTICS IN THE CIVIL WAR: NAVAL-ASSOCIATED OPERATIONS OF OBSERVATION BALLOONS, Part 1

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- <sup>1</sup> Haydon, F. Stansbury, *Military Ballooning during the Civil War*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, pp. 174 and 323-326. This book was originally published as *Aeronautics in the Union and Confederate Armies, with a Survey of Military Aeronautics prior to 1861, Volume I*, The Johns Hopkins Press, 1941; Haydon never published Volume II. *Military Ballooning* is the definitive work on Civil War observation balloons and its copious footnotes were of immense assistance to this author in finding primary-source information.
- <sup>2</sup> Gallagher, Gary W., editor, *Fighting for the Confederacy—The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1989, p. 116.
- <sup>3</sup> Haydon, *Military Ballooning*, pp. 1-2 and 5-15.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18; R.D. Layman, *Before the Aircraft Carrier: The Development of Aviation Vessels 1849-1922*, Annapolis, MD, Naval Institute Press, 1989, p. 13.
- <sup>6</sup> Haydon, *Military Ballooning*, pp. 4 and 24; Richard P. Hallion, *Taking Flight: Inventing the Aerial Age from Antiquity through the First World War*, Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 61.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67; Haydon, *Military Ballooning*, pp. 23-24.
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 24-32.
- <sup>9</sup> Haydon, *Military Ballooning*, Chapters 2 and 3, pp. 39-81.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 169-198.
- <sup>11</sup> Thaddeus S.C. Lowe to LtCol A.V. Colburn, Assistant Adjutant General, Army of Potomac, November 12, 1861, War Department, BGen Fred C. Ainsworth and Joseph W. Kirkley, editors, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (hereafter referred to as *O.R.*; unless otherwise noted, references to volumes in the *O.R.* will be from Series 1), Washington, DC, Government Printing Office (GPO), 1880, Series 3, Volume 3, pp. 265-266. In describing his flight from a vessel on the November 11, Lowe wrote: "I have the pleasure of reporting the complete success of the first balloon expedition by water, ever attempted," ignoring the fact that John La Mountain had already accomplished the feat some three months before. It is hard to believe this was written out of ignorance; according to Haydon, *Military Ballooning*, pp. 136-138, Lowe appeared to keep himself well informed of the activities of his rival.
- <sup>12</sup> Haydon, *Military Ballooning*, p. 82-83.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83-86; John La Mountain to Maj.Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, May 28, 1861, in the Papers of Benjamin F. Butler, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Box 5, General Correspondence. Why La Mountain singled out General Butler specifically to make this offer is unknown. Possibly it was on the advice of Oscar A. Gager, a prominent citizen of Bennington, Vermont, and mutual friend of both men. Gager accompanied Wise and La Mountain on the long-distance flight from St. Louis and knew the aeronaut's abilities well, along with those of his balloon. He also undoubtedly knew of his friend Butler's precarious position at Fortress Monroe when the general was assigned there in May. Gager visited Butler in mid June and probably encouraged him to use La Mountain's services when the aeronaut arrived at the fort. In addition, Gager provided the finances needed to move La Mountain's aeronautical equipment from New York to Fortress Monroe in July of 1861 (see Oscar A. Gager to Butler, June 22, 1861, Butler Papers).
- <sup>14</sup> John La Mountain to Butler, June 10, 1861, in Benjamin F. Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler During the Period of the Civil War, Volume I, April 1860 – June 1862*, Norwood, MA, Privately Issued, 1917, p. 132; Haydon, *Military Ballooning*, pp. 90-92.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 87-90; La Mountain to Butler, 10 June 1861, *Private and Official Correspondence*, p. 132. La Mountain's letter stated that he would bring two balloons to Fortress Monroe, although there is no evidence that he flew more than one, the *Atlantic*. Contemporary newspaper articles do not mention him operating two different balloons, and General Butler's endorsement of La Mountain's list of expenses for the period notes only one balloon, the *Atlantic*, at a cost of \$350, memo from Gen. Butler dated August 13, 1861, *Ibid.*, p. 211.
- <sup>16</sup> La Mountain to Butler, July 31, 1861, *Ibid.*, p. 189; Haydon, *Military Ballooning*, pp. 92-94; *New York Commercial Advertiser*, August 1, 1861, p. 3; *New York Times*, 2 August 1861, p. 1.
- <sup>17</sup> *New York Commercial Advertiser*, August 5, 1861, p. 3; *New York Times*, August 6, 1861, p. 4; *New York Tribune*, August 6, 1861, p. 6; *Philadelphia Daily News*, August 6, 1861, p. 3; *Chicago Tribune*, August 9, 1861, p. 1; *Scientific American*, August 17, 1861, p. 104.
- <sup>18</sup> *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 6, 1861, p. 8; *New York World*, August 7, 1861, p. 3; *Chicago Tribune*, August 9, 1861, p. 1; *Scientific American*, August 17, 1861, p. 104.
- <sup>19</sup> La Mountain to Butler, August 10, 1861, *O.R.*, Vol. 4, pp. 600-601; Henry Warren Howe, *Passages from the Life of Henry Warren Howe, Diary and Letters Written During the Civil War, 1861-1865*, Lowell, MA, Privately Printed, 1899, p. 27 – Howe was General Butler's orderly; *New York Commercial Advertiser*, August 12, 1861, p. 3; *New York Herald*, August 13, 1861; *New York Times*, August 13, 1861, p. 4; *New York Tribune*, August 13, 1861, p. 4; *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 13, 1861, p.2; *New York Tribune*, August 14, 1861, p. 4; *New York World*, August 14, 1861, p. 3. There is some uncertainty as to ship used on this date; the August 14 *New York World* account states it was the *Fanny*, while the August 13 *New York Herald* story and Howe say it was the *Adriatic*. As General Butler's orderly, Howe's statement as to the general's whereabouts that evening would seem to have the most credibility. Also, Haydon, *Military Ballooning*, p. 101, writes that La Mountain made "five" ascensions during daylight on August 10, before making the night ascension from the

- Adriatic*, citing as his source the New York *Tribune's* story of August 14. A re-reading of the story clearly states "...La Mountain made fine ascensions..." that day, rather than "five." La Mountain's own report, reproduced in the *Official Records*, says that he made two, as do the other newspaper articles cited above.
- 20 New York *Commercial Advertiser*; August 19, 1861, p. 2.
- 21 La Mountain to Butler, August 10, 1861, and Butler to Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott, Commander of the U.S. Armies, August 11, 1861, Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, Vol. 1, p. 206 (La Mountain to Butler of August 10 is also found in *O.R.*, Vol. 4, pp. 600-601.)
- 22 New York *Commercial Advertiser*; August 16, 1861, p. 3; Philadelphia *Daily News*, August 17, 1861, p. 3; La Mountain to Butler, August 13, 1861, Butler Papers, Box 7; Butler to Col. Thomas A Scott, Assistant Secretary of War, August 13, 1861, Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, Vol. 1, pp. 210-211.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Haydon, *Military Ballooning*, pp. 112-115.
- 25 Ibid., pp. 132-142 and 148-153.
- 26 Ibid., pp. 154-163.
- 27 Ibid., pp. 222-226; BGen Montgomery C. Meigs, Quartermaster General of the Army, to Lowe, September 25, 1861 (this correspondence is part of "The Official Report of the Operations of the Aeronautic Service," Lowe's final report of his service to Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War, dated June 4, 1863, *O.R.*, Series 3, Volume 3, pp. 252-319), p. 264.
- 28 Lowe to Maj Hartman Bache, Bureau of Topographical Engineers, July 29, 1861, *O.R.*, Ser. 3, Vol. 3, pp. 256-257.
- 29 Lowe to LtCol J.N. Macomb, October 21, 1861, Record Group (RG)-77: Records of the Office of the Chief of Engineers, Papers of Engineer Officers and Others, Entry 153: Papers of Col. John N. Macomb, Box 1, National Archives, Washington, DC. Early in October 1861 Macomb was given oral orders by BGen R.B. Marcy, McClellan's chief of staff, to supervise Lowe and the activities of the Aeronautic Corps. Macomb never was given a written explanation of either the authorities or responsibilities this task entailed, and he deferred to the aeronaut with respect to the work being done by the Navy, noting that Lowe told him "that he [Lowe] was duly authorized to get work done at the Navy Yard" – see Macomb to Maj Israel C. Woodruff, Bureau of Topographical Engineers, February 23, 1863, enclosure to File L852, RG-107: Records of the Office of the Secretary of War, Entry 18: Letters Received (Main Series), 1801-1889, Microfilm M221, Roll 237, National Archives.
- 30 Lowe, T.S.C., *My Balloons in Peace and War, Memoirs of Thaddeus S.C. Lowe, Chief of the Aeronautic Corps of the Army of the United States During the Civil War*, unpublished manuscript edited by Augustine Lowe Brownbeck, undated, Archives of the National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, pp. 65-66.
- 31 Capt John B. Howard, Assist Quartermaster, Army of the Potomac, to BGen Rufus Ingalls, Chief Quartermaster, Army of the Potomac, March 26, 1863, RG-92: Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Entry 225: Consolidated Correspondence File, Box 87, Subject: "Balloons," National Archives. Although a copy of McClellan's letter is not available in this folder (or found in other records), Howard describes the document as quoted in the text.
- 32 Lowe, *Memoirs*, p. 66; Lowe to Henry Forrest, Master Joiner at the Washington Navy Yard, October 14, 1861, RG-181: Records Of the Washington Navy Yard, Entry 576: Miscellaneous Correspondence Received, 1860-90, Box 1, National Archives; CDR John A. Dahlgren to Commodore Joseph Smith, Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, October 23, 1861, RG-71: Records of the Bureau of Yards and Docks, Entry 5: Letters From Commandants, Washington, Box 320, Vol. 1, National Archives. The letter of October 14 from Lowe to Forrest, requesting that the Navy Yard construct the first of the gas generators, carried an endorsement stating, "Mr. Forrest was ordered to have the tank made as soon as possible. Oct 17 '61." Dahlgren also may have been influenced to assist Lowe by the commanding officer of the *USS Pocahontas*, CDR Benjamin M. Dove, who, in the process of a frustrating mission scouting for Confederate batteries established on the lower Potomac, mentioned that "Professor Lowe and his military balloon are the only means of ascertaining the fact of erection of fortifications," Dove to Dahlgren, July 4, 1861, Navy Department, LCDR Richard Rush and Robert H. Woods, editors, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of Rebellion* (hereafter referred to as *O.R.N.*), Washington, DC, GPO, 1894-1922, Series 1, Volume 4, pp. 561-562 (all references to volumes in the *O.R.N.* are within Series 1).
- 33 Some publications erroneously refer to the balloon barge as the *USS* (United States Ship) *George Washington Park Custis*. The ship's steam propulsion was removed in 1856 and the Navy purchased it five years later as a barge, never commissioning it as a United States Ship.
- 34 Lowe, *Memoirs*, p. 86; Charles Dana Gibson and E. Kay Gibson, compilers of The Army's Navy Series: *Dictionary of Transports and Combatant Vessels, Steam and Sail Employed by the Union Army, 1861-1868*; Camden, ME, Ensign Press, 1995, p. 123; RG-41: Enrollments and Registers of Ships, "Record of Vessels" and "Citation of Marine Document" cards for the *G.W.P. Custis*, National Archives; William M. Lytle and Forrest R. Holdcamper, *Merchant Steam Vessels of the United States, 1790-1868* (The Lytle-Holdcamper List), revised and edited by C. Bradford Mitchell, Staten Island, NY, The Steamship Historical Society of American, Inc., 1975, entry for the *G.W.P. Custis*.
- 35 *Boyd's Washington and Georgetown Directory*, Thomas Hutchinson, Publisher, Washington, DC, 1860-1862, Washingtoniana Room, Martin Luther King, Jr., Library, Washington DC Public Libraries. These city and commercial directories of Washington and Georgetown, DC, for the years 1860 through 1862 have no information further identifying Mr. Fallon.
- 36 Exhibits by the Navy Agent at Washington, DC, for the Month of August 1861, RG-71, Entry 61: Navy Agent's Exhibits and Vouchers, Washington, Box 131, "Item 30: Receipt for the *G.W.P. Custis*," National Archives; Dahlgren to Smith, August 8, 1861, RG-71, Entry 5, Box 320, Vol. 1.
- 37 Dahlgren to Smith, August 12, 1861, Ibid.
- 38 Lowe to Henry Forrest, October 14, 1861, RG-181, Entry 576, Box 1.
- 39 Macomb to Woodruff, February 23, 1863, RG-107, Entry 18, Microfilm M221, Roll 237, File Number L852; Macomb to Welles, November 6, 1861, RG-45: Records of the Office of Naval Records and Library, Entry 36: Miscellaneous Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy, Microfilm M124, Roll 389, Letter Number 121, National Archives.

- 40 Dahlgren to Welles, October 22 and 29, 1861, RG-45, Entry 51: Letters from Commandants, Vol. 87; Welles to Dahlgren, October 30, 1861, RG-45, Entry 489: Letters to Commandants, Washington, Vol. 1. After the fact, it does not appear that any of these canal boats were ever purchased, or at least, such a purchase does not show up in the accounts of the Navy Agent in Washington from October 1861 through March 1862.
- 41 Welles to Dahlgren, November 7, 1861, *Ibid.*
- 42 New York *Herald*, November 13, 1861, p. 1.
- 43 Lowe to Dahlgren, November 16, 1861, from the Papers of Thaddeus S.C. Lowe, Boxes 80-84, contained in the Papers of the *American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC (hereafter referred to as the Lowe Papers; Lowe's correspondence is arranged chronologically in Boxes 83-84 – exceptions to this filing arrangement will be noted); Ebenezer Seaver to Lowe, inventory of Aeronautic Corps equipment at Budd's Ferry, 10 March 1862, Lowe Papers.
- 44 Lowe to Macomb, October 21, 1861, RG-77, Entry 153, Box 1.
- 45 Haydon, *Military Ballooning*, pp. 76-77, 86-88, 104; Lowe to Forrest, 14 October 1861, RG-181, Entry 576, Box 1.
- 46 Lowe to BGen Fitz John Porter, a division commander in the Army of the Potomac, 16 September 1861, and Lowe to Colburn, December 3, 1861, *O.R.*, Ser. 3, Vol. 3, pp. 262 and 268.
- 47 Lowe to Forrest, October 14, 1861, RG-181, Entry 576, Box 1.
- 48 Haydon, *Military Ballooning*, pp. 247-250.
- 49 New York *Times*, November 9, 1861, p. 1; Lowe to Forrest, October 14, 1861, RG-181, Entry 576, Box 1; George N. Beale, Naval Storekeeper, to the Quartermaster General, November 26, 1861, enclosure to File Number L852, RG-107, Entry 18, Microfilm M221, Roll 237.
- 50 Lowe to Colburn, December 3, 1861, Ser. 3, Vol. 3, p. 268. It appears that Lowe could be demanding in his requests for assistance. In his letter of October 14, 1861, sent from Philadelphia, Lowe asked Henry Forrest to construct four tanks for the gas generators, to be completed by the 19th, only five days hence.
- 51 Dahlgren to Smith, October 23, 1861, RG-71, Entry 5, Box 320, Vol. 1; Smith sent Dahlgren's requisition back the next day and told him to forward it to the Quartermaster General's Office, Smith to Dahlgren, October 24, 1861, RG-71, Entry 1: Letters to Commandants, Vol. 18.
- 52 Macomb to Woodruff, February 23, 1863, enclosure to File L852, RG-107, Entry 18, Microfilm M221, Roll 237. The requisition itself was dated November 7, 1861, and probably was the same requisition for "lumber etc. for Professor Lowe," received by the Quartermaster General on November 14, 1861, per RG-92, Entry 19: Register of Letters Received, Volume 46. The author was not able to find a copy of the actual requisition within RG-92.
- 53 Lowe to Porter, September 16, 1861, *O.R.*, Ser. 3, Vol. 3, p. 262.
- 54 Beale to the Quartermaster General, November 26, 1861, enclosure to File L852, RG-107, Entry 18, Microfilm M221, Roll 237.
- 55 Haydon, *Military Ballooning*, p. 255; Macomb to Dahlgren, April 18, 1862, RG-181, Entry 576, Box 2.
- 56 Ebenezer Seaver to Lowe, March 10, 1862, Lowe Papers.
- 57 Macomb to Welles, November 6, 1861, RG-45, Entry 36: Miscellaneous Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy, Microfilm M124, Roll 389, Letter Number 121; Lowe to Dahlgren, November 16, 1861, Lowe Papers.
- 58 Lowe, *Memoirs*, p. 86.
- 59 New York *Times*, November 9, 1861, p. 1, dateline Washington, November 8.
- 60 Lowe to BGen Joseph Hooker, November 11, 1861, Lowe Papers; Lowe to Colburn, November 12, 1861, *O.R.*, Ser. 3, Vol. 3, pp. 265-266; New York *Herald*, 13 November 1861, report of its Special Correspondent on the Lower Potomac, dateline Mattawoman Creek, November 10. Lowe did not state the identities of the "assistant aeronauts" with him, although it surely included William Paullin, who was to operate the *Constitution* at its post on the lower Potomac, and it may have included Ebenezer Seaver and/or John Starkweather, both of whom Lowe hired that month.
- 61 New York *Herald*, November 13, 1861, report of its Special Correspondent, dateline Mattawoman Creek, November 11.
- 62 Lowe to Colburn, November 12, 1861, *O.R.*, Ser. 3, Vol. 3, pp. 265-266; New York *Commercial Advertiser*, November 12, 1861, p. 2; New York *Herald*, November 13, 1861, p. 1; New York *Times*, November 13, 1861, p. 1; Washington *Star*, November 13, 1861, p. 2; Chicago *Tribune*, November 14, 1861, p. 1.
- 63 Lowe to Colburn, November 12, 1861, *O.R.*, Ser. 3, Vol. 3, pp. 265-66; Washington *Star*, November 13, 1861, p. 2; New York *Herald*, November 24, 1861, p. 2, report of its Budd's Ferry Correspondent, dateline November 13.
- 64 Hooker to BGen Seth Williams, Adjutant General, Army of the Potomac, November 12, 1861, *O.R.*, Vol. 5, pp. 407-408.
- 65 New York *Herald*, November 14, 1861, p. 6; New York *Times*, November 15, 1861, p. 1
- 66 Philadelphia *Inquirer*, November 15, 1861, p. 4; Paullin to Lowe, November 14, 1861, Lowe Papers.
- 67 The history of the *G.W.P. Custis* is poorly documented. Events such as those in November 1861 and the Peninsular Campaign of 1862 are reasonably well sourced through Lowe's correspondence and writings, the *Official Records* of the Army and Navy, and in newspaper accounts. After that, information concerning the activities and movements of the *G.W.P. Custis* is fragmentary. Much of it comes from scattered records in Lowe's Papers and at the National Archives that generally lack context, often requiring heroic assumptions about how the pieces fit into the story.
- 68 Philadelphia *Inquirer*, November 28, 1861, p. 1.
- 69 Clovis Lowe to T.S.C. Lowe, January 17, 1862, Lowe Papers.
- 70 Philadelphia *Inquirer*, January 29, 1862, p. 8.
- 71 Lowe to Macomb, February 13, 1862, Lowe Papers.
- 72 Seaver to Lowe, March 10, Lowe to Seaver, March 8, and Lowe to Macomb, March 15, 1862, all in the Lowe Papers.
- 73 Lowe to Dahlgren, telegram of March 19, 1862, RG-94: Records of the Adjutant General, Entry 168: Records Relating to Pilots, the Balloon and Construction Corp, and Sutlers, Box 1, Folder "Balloons," 2 of 2; Hooker to Lowe, March 20, 1862, and Ingalls to Lowe, telegram dated March 24, 1862, both in the Lowe Papers.
- 74 Lowe to Col. D.H. Rucker, Aide de Camp and Assistant Quartermaster, Washington, January 7, 1862, Lowe Papers; as an interesting aside, in this note Lowe asked that the *G.W.P. Custis* be towed from Georgetown to "...Bell Plain with apparatus belonging to the Aeronautic Corps on board." Unless this is an unofficial name of a Washington-area location during the Civil War, the only "Bell Plain" in the region reachable by water was Belle

Plain, Virginia, a landing on the Potomac River about 50 miles south of Washington and occupied by the Confederates at that time. If Lowe's cryptic note referred to a possible balloon reconnaissance of the artillery batteries along the Potomac down to Belle Plain, there is no record of it being carried out.

<sup>75</sup> Glassford, Capt William A., "The Balloon in the Civil War," *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States*, Governor's Island, New York, Vol. 18, No. 80, March 1896, p. 261.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266.