

1941

Book Reviews

Recommended Citation

Book Reviews, 12 J. AIR L. & COM. 201 (1941)

<https://scholar.smu.edu/jalc/vol12/iss2/7>

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BOOK REVIEWS

AERONAUTICS IN THE UNION AND CONFEDERATE ARMIES,
with a Survey of Military Aeronautics Prior to 1861. By F. Stansbury
Haydon. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1941. Vol. I. \$4.00

Ask a dozen people: "In what war were aircraft first employed?" and you will probably get twelve identical answers: "The First World War." The mere title of Mr. Haydon's book—*Aeronautics in the Union and Confederate Armies*—proves that all twelve would be wrong by at least fifty-three years, and the book itself shows a margin of error of one hundred and twenty years.

Mr. Haydon's exhaustive study starts with the first successful balloon ascension, which took place at Paris on October 15, 1783. Within five days a commentator suggested that the new invention would prove useful in warfare. The suggestion was not taken up, however, until 1794, when a balloon company was organized as a part of the French army. In the summer of that year the first military reconnaissances from the air took place. The balloon service, however, failed to gain the favor of commanders, and the company was disbanded five years later.

For the next sixty years, European armies experimented intermittently with military aeronautics, but did nothing more than that. In the United States the use of balloons for observation purposes was urged in both the Seminole and Mexican wars, but in neither case was any action taken. Not until the American Civil War did the balloon as a military instrument get a real test. With that conflict, Mr. Haydon gets to the heart of his story.

Four men, working independently and at the same time, initiated balloon service in the army of the United States. The first of these was James Allen, of Providence, Rhode Island. When the First Rhode Island Regiment embarked for Washington four days after Lincoln's first call for troops, Allen, with two balloons, was with them. Three months later he tried to use the balloons at the Battle of Bull Run and failed. That ended his venture, although he later served as a member of the balloon corps.

The second aeronaut was John Wise, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, who was ordered by the Topographical Engineers to construct a balloon for war service in the early summer of 1861. Completed on July 16, 1861, his was the first balloon in the country specifically designed and built for military use. Like Allen, he tried to get it into action at Bull Run and failed. Like Allen, he was blamed unfairly, and left the service.

John LaMountain of Troy, New York, was the third pioneer in military aeronautics. His proffer of services at the outbreak of the war was ignored by the War Department, but in June, 1861, Maj. Gen. B. F. Butler, in command at Fortress Monroe, offered him employment as a military observer. LaMountain accepted, and on July 25 and 31 made the first successful use of observation balloons in the United States Army. Other flights yielded valuable information,

but there were difficulties over supply and personal relations, with the result that the aeronaut was dismissed from the service early in 1862. Mr. Haydon lays his own judicial impartiality aside long enough to pay him this tribute: "John LaMountain was an able aeronaut, courageous and energetic in the prosecution of his duty. He accomplished results of importance, and was the first aeronaut to perform successful operations in the United States service . . . In the main, it seems that he deserved a better reward than the curt dismissal that ended his army career."

Last of the four was the only one who succeeded in forming anything like a permanent connection with the army. He was T. S. C. Lowe, a well known balloonist who was called into service in June, 1861. On the 18th of that month he made his first ascension, and used—for the first time—the electric telegraph to communicate with the ground. Like two of his fellow-aeronauts, he tried to get his balloon to the Bull Run battlefield and failed; unlike all of them, he made a favorable impression upon the military authorities. As a result, in August, 1861, he was employed as a military aeronaut.

Lowe's operations (including the direction of artillery fire) were so successful that in September General McClellan authorized him to proceed with the construction of four additional balloons. Thus the Balloon Service of the Army of the Potomac came into existence. By the end of the year the number had increased to seven balloons of various sizes.

Five of the balloons, with the Army of the Potomac under Lowe's direction, gave valuable service. One, attached to the Port Royal expedition in South Carolina, was of little use; and another, sent to the Department of Missouri, was of no value whatever. In general, however, the aeronauts with the Union armies proved their usefulness during the winter of 1861-62. They demonstrated that under favorable conditions they could provide accurate information as to enemy dispositions and activity, direct artillery fire, coordinate distant forces of their own command, and make reliable maps and sketches.

But by the end of the winter of 1861-62 the difficulties that were to wreck the service eventually were also evident. Chief among these were the anomalous status of the aeronauts themselves—they were civilians in a military organization—the lack of understanding on the part of military men whose cooperation was essential, administrative red tape, and above all, the indifference, even hostility, of commanding officers.

Mr. Haydon's account is in the best academic tradition, and exhibits both the defects and merits of university scholarship. There is an excess of detail, and the documentation is so thorough that it will be ignored by all except the few readers interested in the author's authority for almost every sentence. On the other hand, the references prove the author's familiarity with every possible source of information; and his is the healthy historical skepticism that rejects hearsay and treats with suspicion every statement, even though contemporary, which is unsupported by collateral evidence. The result is a study which quite likely is to be definitive.

There is a section of interesting illustrations, unfortunately hidden at the very end of the book. There is also a good index.

Paul M. Angle,
Illinois State Historical Library.