

Tradecraft and Technology – Intelligence in the Civil War Lecture Three: From Aerial Reconnaissance to Signals Collection Technologies Improve

A. Aerial Reconnaissance: New Intelligence Uses for an Old Technology

- U.S. Army Balloon Corps was headed by civilian Thaddeus Lowe.
- Bureaucratic and logistical challenges
- McClellan's Peninsula Campaign saw the first use of aerial reconnaissance.
- Early morning flights, many officers take a turn in the basket
- Confederate counter-measures
- Confederacy attempts to create balloon corps
- Within a year, both sides had given up on balloons – the Union over bureaucratic squabbles, the Confederacy for lack of funds.

B. Expanding Role of Technology: USA & CSA Signal Corps Organizations

- CSA Signal Corps, headed by Col. William Norris, had a small nucleus of 50 officers and NCO's, with another 1,500 men detailed from other branches of the services.
- USA Signal Corps: Created & headed by Col. Albert James Myer. At its peak, U.S.S.C. numbered some 300 officers and 2,500 men.
- Signal stations took two forms: 1) observation - observing & reporting on a particular area or looking out for the enemy; or 2) communication - relaying messages.
- The "wigwag" tactical battlefield system employed flags during the day and torches at night to send messages by code.
- Wigwag's first tactical military intelligence success probably was at First Manassas.
- Telegraph: The Signal Corps flag signals were supplemented by (and sometimes interlinked with) a telegraphy system.
- Intelligence perspective - the telegraph permitted the Army of the Potomac & the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia to exchange information with other commands and the governments in Washington & Richmond.
- Field and Headquarters telegraph and telegraphers

C. Cryptology

- Codes and ciphers
- Cipher Discs: Developed by both sides. Used for important messages.
- Encoding went from simple ciphers in 1861 to more complex cipher discs and machines by 1864.
- Signal Intercepts: Reading the enemy's mail became big activity for both sides.

D. Mr. Lincoln's "T-Mails" – Executive Control of the Military & Intelligence

- Lincoln's daily visit to War Dept. Telegraph Office – "Situation Room"
- Lincoln uses telegraph to start conversation, make impactful decisions