

**Excerpts from *Eye of the Storm: A Civil War Odyssey*
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January 25, 1862

... Professor Lowe* was here, making ascensions in his balloon, which was held by fifteen enlisted men by three long ropes and a portable windlass. He had just finished his observations when the snow shut out his view and compelled him to pack up his balloon in two wagons and return to Alexandria. The balloon was up 1,000 feet. Lowe was observing the country towards Colchester, and saw earthworks being constructed by the enemy from there to Aquia Creek on the lower Potomac, which he of course marked on his map.

A reserve picket was here at the church, which stood in an open glade where four roads met. The forest had been cut for a long ways from it. Pohick Church was a substantial two story brick structure with white marble quoins and trimmings, and old colonial gambrel roof. It had neither tower or cupola however. It had been designed by Washington and was built of bricks imported from England in 1765.* Here Washington attended service, with all the old first families of the time ... Washington drove from Mount Vernon to church in his coach with four horses, tandem fashion as did the others. Now the church was in a ruinous condition. Windows were all broken out, doors gone, pews nearly gone, being used for fire wood by our pickets. The ceilings broken by the rain coming through the roof, walls discolored black by smoke, etc. The mahogany pulpit was half cutaway carried off for relics, while the cornerstone had been unearthed and the contents carried off. Washington had lain this stone in 1765 and the soldiers who got it out must have found valuable relics. There was not much left for the relic hunters now even the scones and door knobs and hinges are gone. The owner was in the Rebel army and the house had no furniture. From here our picket line was strung along the banks of Pohick Creek ...

*Thaddeus S. C. Lowe (1832-1913) was the driving force behind the establishment of the Union army's balloon corps. Used extensively by McClellan in the upcoming campaign, the program inexplicably was abandoned by the Union high command in 1863.

February 1, 1862

Professor Lowe is staying here for a few days. [He] has several small balloons with him to use in an experimental way, from this high hill he can see many miles in all directions. Some of our sanguine generals want him to cut his balloon loose ... sail over the enemy's camps and drop shells on the fellows below. Lowe won't do it however as it would be murder, not war. If the enemy ever took prisoner [of] one who would do this, he would meet a varied kind of death at once. Balloons are now used frequently as Pohick Church and on our front lines at Chain Bridge, whence Munson's Hill and all the country up river can be observed. A gas wagon is attached to the balloon [partly] with which the balloon is only one half or one third inflated, then it rises 1,000 feet or more, and is held on the ground by two or three long ropes by a lot of soldiers who are detailed for the purpose. [They] are paid 25c per day in addition to their regular pay, work or no work as may be ...

*Built in 1769-1774, the church was probably designed by James Wren, not Washington, who served on the vestry.