

ticularly the relative positions of the contending forces; and his observations, telegraphed to headquarters, were the basis of orders of battle. An incident of aeronautic and telegraphic achievement marked the close of the battle of Fair Oaks, which it is well to recall. It was described thus by a special correspondent of the TIMES with the army when the battle occurred:

"One of the most remarkable occurrences of the army has this moment taken place. PARK SPRING, the telegraphic operator situated in Prof. Lowe's balloon, at an elevation of one thousand feet, with one end of the telegraphic wire attached to an instrument in the car, is freely and rapidly communicating with the Department at Washington. The Secretary of War is now accurately acquainted with the present position of the two armies, and will know immediately if any change takes place."

The balloons advanced with the army to the front of Richmond, and hovering in the air day after day, seemed to the anxious people of the long beleaguered city the sure presages of an evil fate soon to burst upon their devoted town. The presence of these aerial observatories never failed to rouse the ire of rebel artillerists, whether on the Potomac, Chickahominy or Rappahannock; and many a rifled cannon shot has been sent hurtling through the air in the effort to puncture them. From first to last, however, they have been unharmed, and no loss of life, it is believed, has attended their use in all the time of their employment by the Army of the Potomac.

Use of Balloons in War.

An item of news, received from Washington a short time since, was to the effect that the "Aeronautic Corps" of the Army of the Potomac had been dispensed with, and the balloons and inflating apparatus had been sent back to that city. It does not appear whether it is intended, but it is evidently implied by the form in which this announcement is made, that balloons have been found of no value in the conduct of military operations, or at least not of sufficient value to justify the expense and trouble of them. This will excite some surprise, for the public has been led to put considerable confidence in balloon reconnoissances from facts heretofore given. And the rare use made by the rebels of similar means of observation has always been attributed to their lack of fit material for the construction of balloons and for the preparation of gas to inflate them. There is not more than one authenticated case of a balloon reconnoissance by the rebels since the war began, and that occurred in its early stages. If they satisfied themselves by one experiment of the inapplicability of balloons to purposes of war in this country they deserve credit for dropping them so soon and avoiding the expense.

Frequent attempts have been made in past wars to obtain knowledge of the movements of an enemy by the use of balloons. Louis NAPOLEON employed them, and, it was alleged, with success, in his Italian campaign. But there has never been so liberal, thorough and systematic an attempt to make this means of military observation available as by the United States Government in the present war. Fortunately, there was quite an aeronautic mania prevailing in the country just previously to the war. LA MOUNTAIN had made his celebrated sail through the air from St. Louis to Lake Ontario; and he had a number of rivals and competitors in different parts of the country, of equal capacity and daring. There were several balloons built or building; and when the war broke out these were diverted from their objectless aerial voyages, and their owners, who had got to styling themselves "Professors," found profitable employment in the service of the Government, spying out the ways of the rebels in their approaches toward Washington.

An Aeronautic corps was organized in the early months of the war, and it has followed the army in all its wanderings, from the Potomac to the Peninsula and back again, and all through the Maryland and Rappahannock campaigns, until last week, when it appears to have been sent to the rear in disgrace. A history of the Aeronautic corps, and the incidents of its service with the Army of the Potomac, would be very interesting; and it is to be hoped that some one competent to the task has been along with the corps through all the campaigns, and will give to the country and to science the benefit of his observations. It will be found, perhaps, that the use of balloons has not been wholly barren of results, and that their partial failure, if such is the final judgment of our military leaders, is owing to the heavily wooded character of the State of Virginia, where they have been used, whose dense forests screen so much of the movements of armies from view. In a prairie or champaign country, it is easy to understand that the attitude so ordinarily and easily reached in a balloon would enable an observer to gather in every movement of an army, down to that of brigades and regiments, in every direction within the range of vision. This would be an advantage of infinite importance, if possessed by one side and denied to another, in an impending conflict.

There are three specific achievements, we now call to mind, of the Aeronautic corps of the Army of the Potomac. 1. It was a balloon reconnoissance that first made known the abandonment by the rebels of the batteries that had so long blockaded the lower Potomac. 2. It was by means of balloon reconnoissances that the configuration and strength of the rebel works at Yorktown were obtained, and McCLELLAN'S approaches governed. 3. And it was by the same important aid, by the acknowledgment of Gen. McCLELLAN, that the battle of Fair Oaks was fought and won. The aid of balloons in this great struggle was of incalculable value. The sudden rise of the Chickahominy River had separated the attacked portion of the Union army from its supports, and rendered intercommunication by ordinary means, with the view to the proper direction of reinforcements, slow and difficult. Professor Lowe made repeated ascensions while the fight was in progress, noted par-