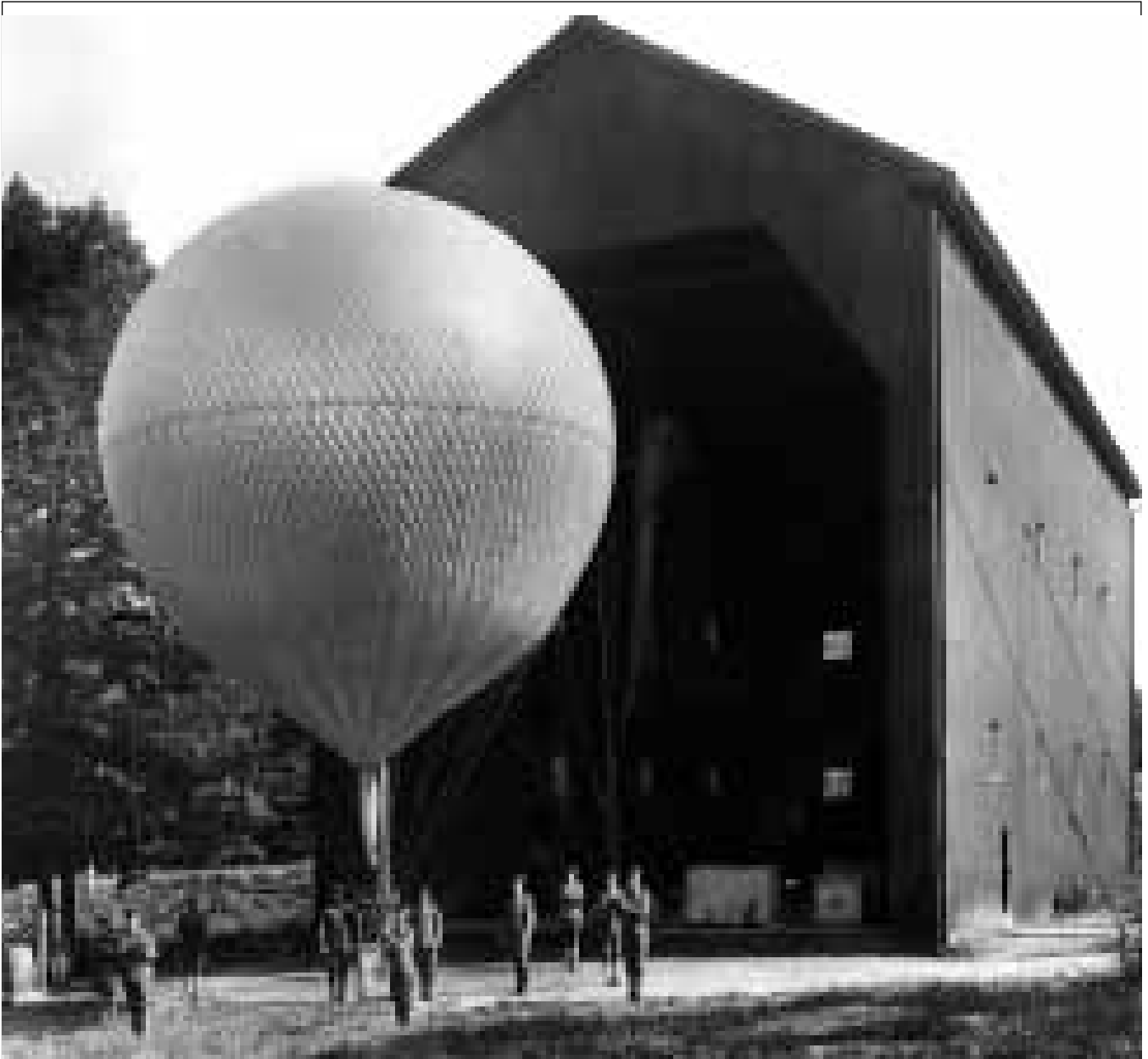


The Lighter than Air Force



Long before satellites and advanced technology, the hot-air balloon performed the first reconnaissance missions. The Army's first air arm was created during the Civil War, under the command of balloonist Thaddeus S. Lowe. The Balloon Corps of the Army of the Potomac, as it was called, proved to be a valuable asset in aerial observation but was disbanded in June 1863 due to changes in Union Army command.

In 1887, impressed with the balloon's contributions in the Civil War, Signal Corps chief Brig. Gen. Adolphus W. Greely established a balloon squadron, much like the one seen here at Ft. Myer, Va. During the Spanish–American War, the Signal Corps used balloons to observe Spanish forces and direct artillery fire in the Battle of San Juan Hill. Even during the early stages of World War I, balloons continued to be used

as recon vehicles. With the invention of the airship and airplane, the skies became unsafe for balloon travel, thus ending the use of balloons in recon missions.