Record Traffic From The Past

Balloon Pioneer Rises To Fame

BG Adolphus W. Greely (Photo courtesy Fort Huachuca Historical Museum)

By MSG Herbert W. Denmark

The true forerunner of Army aviation is the Signal Corps.

One man who stands out as an early proponent of military aviation in America was BG Adolphus Washington Greely. BG Greely entered the Army in 1861 as an enlisted man. He had a long and eventful career. His importance to military aviation began in 1891, 4 years after he was named Chief Signal Officer for the Army, a post he held for 19 years.

Part of the Signal Corps' mission in 1891 was to collect and transmit information for the Army. BG Greely showed interest in investigating the potentials of using aeronautics to help the Signal Corps accomplish its mission.

To investigate these possibilities, he sent LT William A. Glassford to France with the mission of studying the latest developments of the balloon by that country. France had formed the world's first air force—The French Aerostatic Corps—in 1794 and boasted the world's first experts on aeronautics. LT Glassford was impressed by the French aviation program. He returned to the United States in 1892 with a balloon and an optimistic view of the military use of this vehicle.

LT Glassford's report was so convincing that BG Greely authorized the first balloon company in the history of the Signal Corps. The unit, the first all-military air unit in America, was formed at Fort Logan, CO.

The Signal Corps' first balloon—the *General Myer*—was named for the Army's first Signal Officer, MG Albert J. Myer. This balloon, the sole aircraft in the Signal air corps, was displayed at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago.

Without the foresight of BG Greely and the organization of the first aviation units by the Signal Corps, Army air traffic controllers may not have become a necessary part of the Army structure. Army air traffic controllers were "unassigned" for a long time. But 2 July 1973 marked the return of Army air traffic controllers to their rightful branch when the Air Traffic Control mission was given to the U.S. Army Communications Command, headquartered at Fort Huachuca, AZ.

Controllers are communicators. We are happy to be back home.