

Danville Leadbetter (August 26, 1811 – September 26, 1866) was a career [U.S. Army](#) officer and later he served as a [Confederate general](#) during the [American Civil War](#).

A trained engineer, Leadbetter supervised the construction of forts before and during the war, and is noted for his controversial involvement in the November 1863 [Battle of Fort Sanders](#) in eastern [Tennessee](#). Afterward the conflict he left the United States and lived out the remainder of his life on foreign soil.



Early life and career

Danville Leadbetter was born in [Leeds, Maine](#). He attended the [United States Military Academy](#) in [West Point](#) in July 1832, and graduated four years later, standing third out of 49 cadets. He was commissioned a [second lieutenant](#) in the 1st U.S. Artillery on July 1, 1836. Leadbetter transferred to the [Army Engineers](#) on November 1, but as a [brevet](#) second lieutenant to rank from July 1. He then returned to the 1st Artillery on December 31, and went back and forth between the two regiments and ranks throughout 1837. Leadbetter was promoted to [first lieutenant](#) on July 7, 1838, and was promoted to [captain](#) on October 16, 1852.^[1]

Leadbetter spent 1853–57 at [Mobile, Alabama](#), working on the construction and/or repair of the city's harbor forts.^[2] He resigned from the U.S. Army on the last day of 1857 and settled in [Alabama](#). There he later

became the state's chief engineer.^[1]

Civil War service

Choosing to follow his adopted home state and the Confederate cause, entered service in the [Confederate States Army](#) on March 16, 1861, as a [major](#) in the army's regular engineers. He was sent to [Mobile, Alabama](#), to oversee the defenses under construction. By August 3 he was the acting chief of the Confederacy's Engineer Bureau, a post he would hold until November 11.^[3] Two days later Leadbetter returned to Mobile and continued his work there.^[4] He was promoted to the rank of [lieutenant colonel](#) that October.^[1]

Leadbetter was promoted to [brigadier general](#) on February 27, 1862, and began his [Western Theater](#) service. In May he was given command of the 1st [Brigade](#) in the District of East Tennessee (Department Number Two), and held this position until July 3.^[1] He next served as the Engineer of various Confederate districts and armies, and was assigned Chief Engineer of the Department then [Army of Tennessee](#) in the fall of 1863.^[5]

Knoxville



Defenses of Knoxville, Tenn.

As the Chief Engineer of the Army of Tennessee, Leadbetter was responsible for the layout of the Confederate defensive lines prior the [siege and Battle of Chattanooga](#).^[2] During [Lt. Gen. James Longstreet's Knoxville Campaign](#) that winter against Union-held [Knoxville, Tennessee](#), Leadbetter was sent by army commander [Gen. Braxton Bragg](#) to aid the Confederate planning against the Federal positions. Leadbetter arrived on November 25 and consulted with Longstreet, using his prior knowledge of the fortifications in Knoxville he had designed the year before.^[6]

For two days Longstreet, his subordinates, and Leadbetter reconnoitered the Union lines around Knoxville. After a second look at [Fort Sanders](#), the dominating feature of the Federal defenses, Leadbetter recommended to hit them there.^[7] The result of this counsel led to the selection of the attack route and the ultimately unsuccessful [Battle of Fort Sanders](#) on November 29.^[6]

Leadbetter's last Confederate command was the District of the Gulf (Department of Alabama, [Mississippi](#), & East [Louisiana](#)) from November 22 to December 12, 1864. There is no record of him receiving a parole from the U.S. Government when the Civil War ended.^[1]

Postbellum

After the war Leadbetter fled to [Mexico](#) (as did many other ex-Confederate officers) and then went to [Canada](#), where he died in [Clifton](#) in 1866. His body was returned to Alabama and buried in [Magnolia Cemetery](#) within the city of Mobile, Alabama.^[1]

Assessment

Exactly how much and the quality of Leadbetter's service to the Confederate Army is debatable.^[8] Military historian Ezra J. Warner states he was usually highly thought of by several of his superiors;^[9] however [Edward Porter Alexander](#), whom Leadbetter served with during the Knoxville operations, was critical in post-war writings of his involvement and influence in the campaign.^[10]

Alexander believed that in the selection of the artillery site to attack Fort Sanders, "Leadbetter evidently had no appreciation of the ground" he himself had earlier assessed as unpracticable and very exposed.^[10] Alexander believed Longstreet knew better, "but was misled in some way I have never [been] able to understand"^[10] and that accepting Leadbetter's recommendations "robbed him of most of his few remaining chances of victory."^[8]

Engineer assignments and dates

Leadbetter was the lead engineer of the following Confederate units, followed by his starting date:

- [Chattanooga, Tennessee](#), from July 10, 1862
- District of the Gulf,^[11] from October 19, 1862
- Department of Tennessee, from July 25, 1863
- [Army of Tennessee](#), from October 23, 1863
- District of the Gulf,^[12] from April 30, 1864^[11]

Notes

1. ^{^ a b c d e f g} Eicher, p. 342.
2. ^{^ a b} Warner, p. 176.
3. [^] Eicher, p. 72; Weinert, p. 99. Eicher states he possibly assumed this position on August 22, 1861, while Weinert gives the earlier date of August 3.
4. [^] Weinert, p. 99.
5. [^] Wert, p. 348.
6. ^{^ a b} Wert, pp.349-53.
7. [^] Mendoza, pp. 129-31.
8. ^{^ a b} Warner, p. 177.
9. [^] Warner, p. 177. "...apparently highly esteemed by such officers as General Bragg, Beauregard, Maury, and Joseph E. Johnston...
10. ^{^ a b c} Wert, p349.
11. [^] part of Confederate Dept. No. Two.
12. [^] part of Confederate Dept. of Ala., Miss. & E. La.

References

- Eicher, John H., and [Eicher, David J.](#), *Civil War High Commands*, Stanford University Press, 2001, [ISBN 0-8047-3641-3](#).
- Mendoza, Alexander, *Confederate Struggle For Command: General James Longstreet and the First Corps in the West*, Texas A&M University Press, 2008. [ISBN 1-60344-052-6](#).
- Warner, Ezra J., *Generals in Gray: The Lives of the Confederate Commanders*, Louisiana State University Press, 1959, [ISBN 0-8071-3150-3](#).
- Wert, Jeffery D., *General James Longstreet: The Confederacy's Most Controversial Soldier: A Biography*, Simon & Schuster, 1993, [ISBN 0-671-70921-6](#).

- Weinert, Richard P., Jr., *The Confederate Regular Army*, White Mane Publishing, 1991, [ISBN 0-942597-27-3](#).

Further reading

- Wilson, John Alfred, *Adventures of Alf. Wilson: A Thrilling Episode of the Dark Days of the Rebellion*, National Tribune, 1897.