

Martin Luther Smith (September 9, 1819 – July 29, 1866) was an [American](#) soldier and [civil engineer](#), serving as a [major general](#) in the [Confederate States Army](#). Smith was one of the few Northern-born generals to fight for the [Confederacy](#), as he had served most of his early military career in the [South](#) with the [United States Army](#)'s topographical engineers, marrying a native of [Athens, Georgia](#). He planned and constructed the [defenses of Vicksburg](#).



Martin Luther Smith

Early life

Smith was born in [Danby, New York](#), where his father had settled after moving from [Maine](#). In 1842, he graduated 16th in his [West Point](#) class of 56, which included twenty-two future Civil War generals including [James Longstreet](#), [D. H. Hill](#), and [Abner Doubleday](#).^[1] His initial assignment was in [Florida](#), where he surveyed the terrain and drew maps for army usage. In 1846, he married a Georgia woman and subsequently raised a family.

He served as an engineer during the [Mexican-American War](#), and was [brevetted](#) for his performance in mapping the valley of [Mexico City](#) prior to [Winfield Scott](#)'s assaults. He returned to Florida after the war. He was promoted from [second lieutenant](#) to [first lieutenant](#) in 1853. Three years later, he was elevated to [captain](#). He resigned from the army on April 1, 1861, to side with the Confederacy. He was commissioned as a [major](#) of engineers.

Civil War

Early in the Civil War, Smith was appointed [colonel](#) of the 21st Louisiana. He served under General [David Twiggs](#) at [New Orleans](#) and commanded a [brigade](#) of infantry while helping plan the defenses of the city. On April 11, 1862, Smith was promoted to [brigadier general](#) and transferred back to the engineers. In May, he took charge of constructing the defenses of [Vicksburg, Mississippi](#), as well as leading a [division](#). After the town fell in July 1863, he was captured and was held as a [prisoner of war](#) for seven months.^[2]

He was exchanged in early 1864 and briefly was the head of the Engineer Corps for the entire Confederate Army from March until April, when he became the chief engineer for the [Army of Northern Virginia](#). Later, he held the same position for the [Army of Tennessee](#). As chief engineer of the Department of Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana at the end of the war, he prepared the defenses of [Mobile, Alabama](#), under the command of [P.G.T. Beauregard](#). He remained in Mobile until the city fell to Union forces, and then returned home to Athens, where he surrendered in May 1865.

Postbellum life

Smith moved to [Savannah, Georgia](#), soon after the war ended and established a civil engineering company. He died less than a year later. At the time of his death, he was chief engineer of the railroad system that linked [Selma, Alabama](#), with [Dalton, Georgia](#) (the Selma, Rome, and Dalton Railroad).^[3] He is buried in Oconee Hill Cemetery in Athens, Georgia.^[4]

A bust of General Smith stands at the [Vicksburg National Military Park](#). It was sculpted in 1911 by [Henry Hudson Kitson](#).

Notes

1. Warner, p. 282.
2. Warner, p. 283.
3. Appletons Cyclopaedia.
4. Welsh, p. 201.

References

- *This article incorporates text from the [public domain Appletons' Cyclopædia of American Biography](#).*
- Warner, Ezra J., *Generals in Gray: Lives of the Confederate Commanders*, Louisiana State University Press, 1959, [ISBN 0-8071-0823-5](#).
- Welsh, Jack D., *Medical Histories of Confederate Generals*, Kent State University Press, Kent OH, 1995.