



Engineering in the Confederate Heartland by Larry J. Daniel.

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Civil War historian Larry Daniel wisely begins his book on Confederate engineers by quoting Earl Hess's advice that Civil War historians must "stretch themselves out of comfortable niches imposed by their large popular audiences."¹ Instead of more books on generals and battles, we need studies of specialized branches like the engineers. Daniel adds that there are several books on the Union engineers and their achievements building fortifications, bridges, roads, and railroads, but almost nothing recent about the men doing the same work for the Confederacy.

Daniel then makes an unusual decision that makes *Engineering in the Confederate Heartland* difficult to follow and, ultimately, less useful. He limits his study to the Western theater of the war, specifically the Mississippi Valley and the area controlled by the Confederate States of America's (CSA's) Army of the Tennessee: the region stretching from the Mississippi across Tennessee, northern Mississippi, and Alabama, and into Georgia as far as Atlanta. Daniel has written seven books on the Civil War, all of them focused on this region; in short, he knows the geography and campaigns very well. Unfortunately, Richmond was the administrative heart of the Confederacy, and much of the fighting took place within two hundred miles of the capital. A good, current overview of the role of engineers in the CSA would make *Engineering in the Confederate Heartland* work. But, as Daniel explains, the last such book is short and old (pub., 1957).

Chapter 1, "Defending the Mississippi River," sets the tone for the book. It describes the various earthworks and forts the Confederates built in Kentucky and Tennessee and along the banks of the river. From late 1861 through 1862, Union forces, backed by ironclad gunboats, moved south, bypassing or capturing each of the CSA strongpoints. Daniel carefully details the construction of each redoubt—who did the work, how many guns it mounted, etc.—along with biographical details on the engineers involved. What he does not provide is a clear overview of the Union's successful campaign to take control of the river and its banks. Instead, readers get paragraphs like the following:

Gray did receive a new engineer—twenty-two-year-old Lieutenant Arthur B. De Saulles of New Orleans, who received his civil engineering degree from the Polytechnic School of Geological Studies in Troy, New York, and then the Imperial School of Mines in Paris. Among his many studies, he was proficient in the topographical plotting of maps. After working on the fortifications at Columbus, De Saulles was transferred to Island No. 10, where he fell wounded during the siege and recuperated in Corinth, Mississippi. After the war, he moved to Pennsylvania. In 1917, while visiting his son Jack on Long Island, New York, he witnessed his son's murder by his daughter-in-law. Already in bad health, De Saulles passed away shortly thereafter, his friends claiming that he "died of a broken heart." (14)

1. In Andrew S. Bledsoe and Andrew F. Lang, ed., *Upon the Fields of Battle: Essays on the Military History of America's Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State U Pr, 2018) 28.

A good map of the central Mississippi Valley would help here, but instead there is a contemporary map of the New Madrid area. This shows what maps armies had at hand in 1862, but Island No. 10 is not labeled, nor are any of the fortifications or ship movements.

The rest of the book follows this template. Daniel follows the war as the Union armies advance, seizing control of the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. After describing the loss of the major rivers in the west, he shifts to the railroads and bridges that allowed armies to move troops and supplies. An entire chapter concerns battles around Vicksburg and then the Union siege of the city. In the end, the defenses built by Confederate engineers held the Union soldiers at bay, and the siege succeeded by starving the rebel army and civilians.

Daniel now moves on to the South's loss of Tennessee, along with the Battle of Chickamauga and other fighting. Then, at last, comes Sherman's march and the capture of Atlanta. Some chapters—"The Mapmakers," "The Pontoniers"—promise to concentrate on certain engineering specialties, but mostly just further the general narrative.

Engineering in the Confederate Heartland is a disappointment. It provides no general history of the engineering branch of the CSA Army, or even all the commands in this Tennessee theater of the war. Only readers already knowledgeable about the war in the southwest will be able to follow the story as new people and places are constantly introduced. Though we learn a great deal about individual engineering officers, it is presented in an episodic and disorganized way.

Nor does Daniel have an argument to make. Though he cite Thomas F. Army's excellent study of Civil War engineering,² he does not emulate his approach. On the plus side, he enhances the book's detailed biographical information with several period photos, a glossary, two appendices, excellent endnotes, a bibliography, and an index.

2. Viz., *Engineering Victory: How Technology Won the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U Pr, 2016).