

= Edward Porter Alexander =

Edward Porter Alexander ( May 26 , 1835 ? April 28 , 1910 ) was a military engineer , railroad executive , planter , and author . He served first as an officer in the United States Army and later , during the American Civil War ( 1861 ? 1865 ) , in the Confederate Army , rising to the rank of brigadier general .

Alexander was the officer in charge of the massive artillery bombardment preceding Pickett 's Charge , on the third day of the Battle of Gettysburg , and is also noted for his early use of signals and observation balloons during combat . After the Civil War , he taught mathematics at the University of South Carolina in Columbia , spent time in Nicaragua , and wrote extensive memoirs and analyses of the war , which have received much praise for their insight and objectivity . His Military Memoirs of a Confederate were published in 1907 . An extensive personal account of his military training and his participation in the Civil War was rediscovered long after his death and published in 1989 as *Fighting for the Confederacy* .

= = Early life and career = =

Alexander , known to his friends as Porter , was born in Washington , Georgia into a wealthy and distinguished family of planters of the Old South . He was the sixth of ten children of Adam Leopold Alexander and Sarah Hillhouse Gilbert Alexander . He became the brother @-@ in @-@ law of Alexander R. Lawton and Jeremy F. Gilmer . He graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1857 , third in his class of 38 cadets , and was brevetted a second lieutenant of engineers . He briefly taught engineering and fencing at the academy before he was ordered to report to Brig. Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston for the Utah War expedition . That mission ended before he could reach Johnston , and Alexander returned to West Point . He participated in a number of weapon experiments and worked as an assistant to Major Albert J. Myer , the first officer assigned to the Signal Corps and the inventor of the code for " wig @-@ wag " signal flags , or " aerial telegraphy " . Alexander was promoted to second lieutenant on October 10 , 1858 .

Alexander met Bettie Mason of Virginia in 1859 and married her on April 3 , 1860 . They would eventually have six children : Bessie Mason ( born 1861 ) , Edward Porter II and Lucy Roy ( twins , born 1863 ) , an unnamed girl ( 1865 , died in infancy prior to naming ) , Adam Leopold ( 1867 ) , and William Mason ( 1868 ) . Lt. Alexander 's final assignments for the U.S. Army were at Fort Steilacoom , in the Washington Territory , and at Alcatraz Island , near San Francisco , California .

= = Civil War service = =

After learning of the secession of his home state of Georgia , Alexander resigned his U.S. Army commission on May 1 , 1861 , to join the Confederate Army as a captain of engineers . While organizing and training new recruits to form a Confederate signal service , he was ordered to report to Brig. Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard at Manassas Junction , Virginia . He became the chief engineer and signal officer of the Confederate Army of the Potomac on June 3 .

At the First Battle of Bull Run , Alexander made history by being the first to use signal flags to transmit a message during combat over a long distance . Stationed atop " Signal Hill " in Manassas , Alexander saw Union troop movements and signaled to the brigade under Col. Nathan " Shanks " Evans , " Look out for your left , your position is turned " . Upon receiving a similar message , Beauregard and Gen. Joseph E. Johnston sent timely reinforcements that turned the tide of battle in the Confederates ' favor .

Alexander was promoted to major on July 1 and lieutenant colonel on December 31 , 1861 . During much of this period he was chief of ordnance , under Johnston 's command , managing supplies and ammunition in what later became the Army of Northern Virginia . He was also active in signal work and intelligence gathering , dealing extensively with spies operating around Washington , D.C.

During the early days of the Peninsula Campaign of 1862 , Alexander continued as chief of ordnance under Johnston , but he also fought at the Battle of Williamsburg , under Maj. Gen. James

Longstreet . When Gen. Robert E. Lee assumed command of the army , Alexander was in charge of pre @-@ positioned ordnance for Lee 's offensive in the Seven Days Battles . Alexander continued his intelligence gathering by volunteering to go up in an observation balloon at Gaines ' Mill on June 27 , ascending several times and returning with valuable intelligence regarding the position of the Union Army .

Alexander continued in charge of ordnance for the Northern Virginia Campaign ( Second Bull Run ) and the Maryland Campaign ( Antietam ) . He barely missed capture by Federal cavalry , under Col. Benjamin F. " Grimes " Davis , that had escaped from Harpers Ferry during the Maryland Campaign ; over 40 of Longstreet 's 80 ammunition wagons were captured .

Porter Alexander is best known as an artilleryman who played a prominent role in many of the important battles of the war . He served in different artillery capacities for Longstreet 's First Corps of the Army of Northern Virginia , starting that role on November 7 , 1862 , after leaving Lee 's staff to command the battalion that was the corps ' artillery reserve . He was promoted to colonel on December 5 . He was instrumental in arranging the artillery in defense of Marye 's Heights at the Battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862 , which proved to be the decisive factor in the Confederate victory . While the rest of Longstreet 's corps was located around Suffolk , Virginia , Alexander accompanied Stonewall Jackson on his flanking march at the Battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863 , and his artillery placements in Hazel Grove at Chancellorsville proved decisive .

= = = Gettysburg cannonade = = =

Alexander 's most famous engagement was on July 3 , 1863 , at the Battle of Gettysburg , during which he was in command of the artillery for Longstreet 's corps . On that day , he was effectively in control of the artillery for the full army ( despite Brig. Gen. William N. Pendleton 's formal role as chief of artillery under Lee ) . He conducted a massive two @-@ hour bombardment , arguably the largest in the war , using between 150 and 170 guns against the Union position on Cemetery Ridge . Unfortunately , the poor quality of the Confederate fuses delayed the planned detonation of many of the shells , and a number of the guns were not properly ranged , so that the rear areas sustained more damage than the front lines . General Longstreet effectively put Alexander in charge of launching Maj. Gen. George Pickett on his famous charge , placing the young colonel under enormous pressure to determine whether the Union artillery defenses had been suppressed . Alexander would blame Lee for the defeat at Gettysburg , writing in 1901 : " Never , never , never did Gen. Lee himself bollox [ sic ] a fight as he did this . "

= = = Longstreet 's Chief of Artillery = = =

Alexander accompanied the First Corps to northern Georgia in the fall of 1863 to reinforce Gen. Braxton Bragg for the Battle of Chickamauga . He personally arrived too late to participate in the battle , but served as Longstreet 's chief of artillery in the subsequent Knoxville Campaign and in the Department of East Tennessee in early 1864 . He returned with the corps to Virginia for the remainder of the war , now with the rank of brigadier general ( as of February 26 , 1864 ) . He served in all the battles of the Overland Campaign , and when Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant slipped around Lee 's army to cross the James River and assault Petersburg , Alexander was able to move his guns quickly through the lines , emplacing them to repel the main attack .

During the Siege of Petersburg , Alexander had to adapt his artillery tactics to trench warfare , including experimentation with various types of mortars . He became convinced that the Union forces were attempting to tunnel under the Confederate lines , but before he was able to act on this , on June 30 , 1864 , he was wounded in the shoulder by a sharpshooter . As he departed on medical leave to Georgia , he informed Lee of his suspicion . After unsuccessful attempts were made to locate the tunneling activity , the Battle of the Crater caught the Confederates by surprise , although it ended in a significant Union defeat . Alexander returned to the Army in February 1865 and supervised the defenses of Richmond along the James River . He retreated along with Lee 's army in the Appomattox Campaign .

At Appomattox Court House , it was Alexander who made the famous proposal to Robert E. Lee that the army disperse , rather than surrendering . Lee rebuked him , and Alexander later wrote about regretting his suggestion . Although this incident is sometimes described as a proposal for " guerrilla war " , Alexander describes his proposal in his memoir , *Fighting for the Confederacy* , as one in which " the army may be ordered to scatter in the woods & bushes & either to rally upon Gen. Johnston in North Carolina , or to make their way , each man to his own state , with his arms , & to report to his governor . "

= = Later life = =

After the surrender , Alexander briefly toyed with joining the Brazilian Army . Finding that he no longer desired the Georgia plantation life of his youth , he taught mathematics at the University of South Carolina in Columbia , and then served in executive positions with the Charlotte , Columbia , and Augusta Railroad ( executive superintendent ) , the Savannah and Memphis Railroad ( president ) , the Louisville and Nashville Railroad ( president ) , and in the late 1880s the Central Rail Road and Banking Company of Georgia until 1891 .

Alexander became friends with Grover Cleveland and the two spent many hours hunting for ducks on Alexander 's estate . In May 1897 , President Cleveland appointed Alexander as the arbiter of the commission tasked with fixing and demarcating the boundary between the Republics of Nicaragua and Costa Rica , with a view towards the possible construction of an interoceanic canal to be dug across Central America . Alexander spent two years at the head of that commission , headquartered in the coastal village of Greytown ( now San Juan de Nicaragua ) . He completed the work to the satisfaction of the two governments and returned to the U.S. in October 1899 . His wife Bettie became ill while he was in Nicaragua and she died shortly after his return , on November 20 , 1899 . In October 1901 , Alexander married Mary Mason , his first wife 's niece .

Alexander was selected to give the Confederate veteran 's speech on Alumni Day during the centennial celebration at the United States Military Academy on June 9 , 1902 . The speech was so well received that it was reprinted in the NY Times in its entirety in the 15 June 1902 edition . The NY Times referred to the speech as " decidedly the feature of Alumni Day . " The audience included President Theodore Roosevelt as well as Alexander 's former commander , General Longstreet .

After the war , Alexander became a well @-@ respected author . He wrote many magazine articles and published his *Military Memoirs of a Confederate : A Critical Narrative* ( 1907 ) , praised by Douglas Southall Freeman as " altogether the best critique of the operations of the Army of Northern Virginia . " Long after his death , it was realized that Alexander had produced the *Military Memoirs* , which sought to be a professional work of military history and analysis , after a long effort of editing a collection of much more personal memoirs that he had started compiling during his time in Greytown , Nicaragua , at the behest of his family . Those earlier memoirs were edited and published posthumously in 1989 as *Fighting for the Confederacy : The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander* .

Unlike such Confederate officers as Jubal Early and William Pendleton , Alexander eschewed the bitter Lost Cause theories of why the South was doomed to fail , given the overwhelming superiority of the North . He was willing to express in writing his criticisms of prominent Confederate officers , including General Lee himself . Many historians regard Alexander 's memoirs as among the most objective and sharpest sources produced by a Civil War combatant . David Eicher called *Fighting for the Confederacy* " a superb personal narrative with a good deal of analysis of Lee 's operations ... Dramatic and revealing , an important source on the general , his fellow officers , and the Army of Northern Virginia . " Alexander 's other books include *Railway Practice* ( 1887 ) and *Catterel , Ratterel ( Doggerel )* ( 1888 ) . Alexander died in Savannah , Georgia and is buried in Magnolia Cemetery , Augusta , Georgia .

= = In Popular Culture = =

Alexander was portrayed by James Patrick Stuart in the 1993 film *Gettysburg* and its 2003 prequel

Gods and Generals .

In the alternate history novel *How Few Remain* , Alexander continues his career as a brigadier general long after the Confederate States of America wins the civil war and was instrumental in defending Confederate Kentucky and fending off another Union invasion while under Stonewall Jackson during a second war with the United States in the 1880 's .