

Josiah Gorgas (July 1, 1818 – May 15, 1883) was one of the few Northern-born [Confederate](#) generals and was later president of the [University of Alabama](#).^[1]

As chief of ordnance during the [American Civil War](#), Gorgas managed to keep the Confederate armies supplied with weapons and ammunition, despite the [Union blockade](#) and even though the [South](#) had hardly any munitions industry before the war began. He kept diaries during the Civil War which are now a popular subject of study for historians.^[2]

Early life

Josiah Gorgas was born in [Dauphin County, Pennsylvania](#). He was graduated from [West Point](#) in 1841 and was assigned to the Ordnance Department. He served in the [Mexican-American War](#) and was promoted to [captain](#) in 1855. In 1853, he married [Amelia Gayle](#), daughter of former [Alabama](#) governor [John Gayle](#).

Gorgas served in [arsenals](#) in different parts of the country before the Civil War broke out. Gorgas and in November 1851 at Fort Monroe in Virginia. There he began his association with the Tredegar Iron Company and conducted experiments on gun-barrel iron. He was commanding the [Frankford Arsenal](#) when he resigned from the [United States Army](#).^[2]

Civil War



Josiah Gorgas was the first acting Chief of Engineer Bureau April 8, 1861 – August 3, 1861. He followed his wife into secession, moved to [Richmond](#) and became chief of ordnance for the Confederacy. In this capacity, he worked to create an armaments industry almost from scratch. The South had no [foundry](#) except the [Tredegar Iron Works](#). There were no rifle works except small arsenals in [Richmond](#), and [Fayetteville, North Carolina](#), plus the captured machines from the Union army in [Harpers Ferry](#). Gorgas established armories and foundries, found alternative sources for [saltpeter](#), and created a huge [gunpowder](#) mill at [Augusta, Georgia](#). Thanks to his efforts, the Southern armies never lacked weapons, though they were short on almost everything else. On November 10, 1864, Gorgas was promoted to [brigadier general](#).^[2]

Postbellum

After the war, Gorgas purchased an interest in the [Brierfield Furnace](#) in [Bibb County](#), near Ashby in Alabama, which had helped supply the in [Confederate Naval Ordnance Works](#) in [Selma](#). The other directors appointed him to manage the iron works and he moved his family to the furnace site. Due to high operating and management costs he was forced to lease the iron works after just a couple of years in operation. ^[3] ^[2]

In 1870 Gorgas accepted a position at the newly established [University of the South](#) in [Sewanee, Tennessee](#). In 1878, he was elected president of the [University of Alabama](#) and moved into an 1829 mansion on campus. When he was forced to resign due to ill health, the trustees gave him the house for his retirement. The building was dedicated as a memorial to the family in 1944, and is now known as [Gorgas House](#).

Gorgas died at the age of 65 in Tuscaloosa in 1883. His widow was installed as the university's librarian. The main university library is named the Amelia Gayle Gorgas Library. Their oldest son, [William Crawford Gorgas](#) (born 1854) served as [Surgeon General of the U.S. Army](#) and is credited with implementing preventative measures against [malaria](#) that allowed for the completion of the [Panama Canal](#). ^[2]