

# Major General William T. Sherman's Total War in the Savannah and Carolina Campaigns

A Monograph

by

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## Abstract

Major General William T. Sherman's Total War in the Savannah and Carolina Campaigns, by MAJ Christopher S. Hoffman, US Army, 37 pages.

The Savannah and Carolina campaigns cemented Major General William T. Sherman's place in American History. While these two campaigns are controversial, Sherman's application of total war was operationally necessary to achieve the Union's military end state of ending the Civil War, as supporting operations to Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant's operations against Confederate General Robert E. Lee in Virginia. The focus of the campaigns was to destroy the support base of the Confederacy, railroad infrastructure and material in the Deep South. Sherman's application of total war, however, was not only to destroy the support base of the Confederacy but also to take the war to the people of the Deep South, making them feel the hardships of war and breaking their will. To do this, however, Sherman needed the will of the people of the Union and the enmity of his soldiers in order to wage total war campaigns.

Without Sherman's use of total war, the Civil War could have lasted longer than it did. Sherman's armies destroyed the railroad networks in Northern Georgia and the Carolinas, consumed or destroyed material intended for the Confederate armies, and achieved Sherman's personal intent of punishing the people of the South for their support of the Confederacy. These two campaigns took their toll on Lee's army and had a direct impact on his eventual surrender.

From these two campaigns, modern day military planners can understand when to consider total war as a viable option. Total war cannot be used in a limited war with limited aims, but will only be effective where the political aims are total victory. Will and enmity of the people are vital factors to address; if they do not exist, then a campaign built around total war will not be palatable to the American people.

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## Introduction

In November 1864, Major General William T. Sherman found himself in a unique position. He was already famous throughout both the Northern and Confederate states for his success as a corps commander during the Vicksburg campaign of December 1862 to July 1863. His fame continued to grow when on September 1, 1864; Sherman seized the major Confederate supply hub of Atlanta, Georgia. After the seizure of Atlanta, Sherman focused on the destruction of Confederate General John Bell Hood's Army of the Tennessee. However, from September to October of 1864, Hood was not willing to meet Sherman in a decisive battle. While Sherman would have preferred to fight a decisive battle against Hood, he was already developing the plan for the Savannah campaign. This plan would not be an enemy focused plan but terrain and population focused. Sherman, according to historian John M. Marszalek, "believed the Union war effort had to be total" with the intended effect on the southern people that the "destruction of Southern land and property to break Southern will made more sense"<sup>1</sup>

Sherman did not codify or write about total war or his application of total war theory in the Civil War. Yet, many historians point to Sherman and his Savannah and Carolina campaigns as one of the first true examples of total war since the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. While Sherman was not the first general to use this type of warfare; he might be labeled as the first general to use the concept of total war in the scale in which he applied it. During the Civil War, total war theory was not a concept generally discussed in military conversations because it did not exist as a formal theory. Sherman's application of total war was not a result of theoretical study, but from what he believed was necessary to end the Civil War and what he understood the mindset of the Southern population to be. Analyzing Sherman's application of total war is relevant and there are lessons to be learned by what he, and his army accomplished. A lesson that should be taken away from Sherman's Savannah and Carolina campaigns was that his application

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<sup>1</sup> John F. Marszalek, *Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 294.



of total war was operationally necessary to achieve the Union military's end state of ending the Civil War.

For the purposes of this monograph, it is important to define total war. The definition of total war, by historian Lance Janda, when describing Sherman's campaign through the south is "military force against the civilian population of the enemy."<sup>2</sup> Janda's definition does not provide the necessary detail to explain Sherman's desired outcome of the campaigns in Georgia and the Carolinas. The definition of total war, as intended by Sherman, will need Janda's definition expanded to include: military force against the civilian population of the enemy that affects both their psyche and economic support. Sherman understood that the Confederate Army gained their support from the Southern population and the Union Army was "not only fighting hostile armies, but a hostile people, and must make old and young, rich and poor, feel the hard hand of war."<sup>3</sup>

The concept of absolute war was considered as a theoretical basis for this monograph but was determined not to apply to Sherman's Savannah and Carolina campaigns. Prussian military theorist Carl Von Clausewitz explored the concept of absolute war. In his book, *On War*, Clausewitz does not outright define absolute war but described, "the concept of absolute war...is indivisible, and its component parts are of value only in relation to the whole."<sup>4</sup> The reason Clausewitz's concept of absolute war does not adequately apply to Sherman's campaigns is that the campaigns were a part of a whole. The Savannah and Carolina campaigns alone were not intended to defeat the Confederacy or the Confederate Army. Instead, they were a part of the overall Union military strategy to defeat the Confederate armies; specifically General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. The two purposes of the campaigns were to destroy the

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<sup>2</sup> Lance Janda, "Shutting the Gates of Mercy: The American Origins of Total War, 1860-1880," *The Journal of Military History* 59, no. 1 (January 1995): 2, accessed July 10, 2017, <https://search.proquest.com/printviewfile?accountid=28992>.

<sup>3</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 809.

<sup>4</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989) 582.

Confederacy's ability to supply their armies and indirectly affect the morale of Confederate soldiers.

The economic support the Deep South provided the Confederate armies was vast. When Sherman seized Atlanta on September 1, 1864, he was able to cut both the Southern economy and the Confederate Armies from a major supply and railroad hub. Sherman biographer James Lee McDonough commented about Sherman's plan for the Savannah and Carolina campaigns when he stated, "The most effective way to end the conflict was to destroy the support base, both material and psychological, of the Confederate war effort."<sup>5</sup> By implementing a total war strategy in Georgia and the Carolinas, Sherman devastated the countryside within his armies' path. He also destroyed the infrastructure that was of both military and civilian value. To Sherman, everything that lay within the borders of seceded states a part of the Confederate war effort. Sherman understood that the Savannah and Carolina campaigns were not meant to defeat the Confederacy on their own. The intent of the campaigns was to be supporting efforts to Grant's main effort. The focus of Grant's operations was against Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Sherman's supporting operations were not focused on engaging Confederate forces but to destroy the Confederate railroad network to prevent large-scale supply efforts.

The psyche of the Southern populations was an element that Sherman directly targeted. He also intended for the effects to indirectly target the Confederate soldiers who were still motivated to fight. As military historian, B. H. Liddell Hart observed about soldiers and their fundamental motivations to fight. "Man has two supreme loyalties—to country and to family...but even the bonds of patriotism, discipline, and comradeship are loosened when the family is itself menaced."<sup>6</sup> Sherman's plan would not only bring the hardships of war to the doorstep of the people of Georgia and the Carolinas, but also divert the attention of the soldiers

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<sup>5</sup> James Lee McDonough, *William Tecumseh Sherman: In the Service of My Country* (New York: Norton), 555.

<sup>6</sup> B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategist*, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed. (New York: Meridian Books, 1991) 135-136.

fighting in the Confederate armies. If soldiers are concerned about the security and welfare of their families, how can they focus on their duty when the uncertainty of their families looms over them? If Sherman's operations gave Confederate soldiers a reason to desert, then the Confederate Armies became more susceptible to defeat. To do this, Sherman did not plan to harm the people of the south but to leave a path of destruction the people of the South would never forget.

For Sherman to be able to conduct his campaigns of total war, he had to have not only the support of Grant and Lincoln. He needed the support from the people of the Union. It was necessary for the will and enmity from the people of the Union to be at such a point where they would accept the necessity of total war campaigns. With years of disappointment from the Army of the Potomac, the people of the Union saw the elevation of Grant to General in Chief and Sherman to Commander of the Military Division of the Mississippi as the right decision. Historian Philip Paludan described this when he stated, "hope rose that the West might come to the Potomac and bring its way of victory."<sup>7</sup> However, Paludan also noted that with the people's desperation for the war to turn around in their favor that "the nation would learn the true cost of unconditional surrender"<sup>8</sup>

With the expectations of the Union on his shoulders, Grant spent the majority of 1864 pursuing Lee with the intent of destroying his army and ending the war. The two main battles in which Grant and Lee's armies fought were the Battle of the Wilderness and the Battle of Spotsylvania. The Battle of the Wilderness occurred from May 5-7, 1864. While this battle was at best a draw, Grant's army suffered 17,666 casualties and Lee's army lost about 7,500 men.<sup>9</sup> Grant was able to hold his ground and attempt to maneuver around Lee's eastern flank to reach the Spotsylvania Court House. If Grant was able to maneuver his army to the Spotsylvania Court

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Shaw Paludan, *A People's Contest: The Union & Civil War 1861-1865*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1996), 300.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Herman Hattaway and Archer Jones, *How the North Won: A Military History of the Civil War* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 545.

House before Lee, he felt the result would cut Lee's communications to Richmond. This was significant because it was "an important strategic site only because the roads pass through it to Chancellorsville, Wilderness Tavern, and Fredericksburg."<sup>10</sup> Grant felt it was important to place his army in between Lee and Richmond so Lee would have to fight at a disadvantage to recover his communications.

To Grant's dismay, he was not able to turn Lee's eastern flank to reach the Spotsylvania Court House before Lee's army arrived. This allowed Lee's army to prepare defensive positions and defend against Grant's forces. For ten days, 10-20 May, Grant's army attacked Lee's entrenched position with no positive results and accrued heavy casualties, which totaled 18,399 soldiers compared to Lee's 10,000 casualties.<sup>11</sup> Eventually, Grant realized attacking Lee's defensive positions was not working and chose to attempt another turning movement to place himself between Lee's army and Richmond. Again, Lee was able to disrupt Grant's turning movement. While the Battles of the Wilderness and Spotsylvania were tactical defeats for the Union Army, Grant was able to achieve operational success by putting Lee's army "on the verge of collapse from 50 percent casualties" which equates to approximately 18,000 soldiers.<sup>12</sup> Grant's inability to destroy Lee's army forced Grant to reevaluate the campaign and eventually approve Sherman's audacious plan through Georgia.

An important element to note about Sherman's proposed campaign through Georgia was Lincoln needed the political flexibility to gamble on Sherman's plan. This flexibility came with Lincoln's re-election, which was aided by Sherman's seizure of Atlanta. With Lincoln's re-election, not only did the people of the North speak in approval to the direction of the war but the soldiers within the army approved. Paludan noted this when he said, "When Sherman's taking of

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<sup>10</sup> Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 552-553.

<sup>11</sup> Shelby Foote, *The Civil War A Narrative: Red River to Appomattox* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 241-242.

<sup>12</sup> Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 567.

Atlanta reinvigorated Unionist feelings, the election showed determination to hang on till victory...The army gave a stronger endorsement to the war effort than did civilians. And in so doing, it symbolized to the nation the depth of commitment to the policy of battle....”<sup>13</sup> This commitment by the people, represented in the re-election of Lincoln, symbolized the nation’s support of Sherman and Grant’s concept of war in respect to the Confederate armies.

Sherman’s desire to conduct the Savannah and Carolina campaigns were militarily necessary to achieve the long awaited victory. However, it would be negligent to discuss Sherman’s operations in Georgia and the Carolinas without the discussion of the deep personal enmity that had built up as the war progressed. The Civil War was supposed to be a quick war. Both the Union and Confederates felt they would meet in a decisive battle and the war would be over. After three years of hard fighting, the hatred developed by the Union soldiers towards the Confederates was as strong as ever. After Sherman seized Savannah on December 23, 1864, he looked toward South Carolina. He knew the control he had over his soldiers in Georgia would not be the same in South Carolina because South Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union, Therefore the soldiers blamed its citizens for starting the war.<sup>14</sup>

## Literature Review

There have been numerous books and articles written about Sherman’s life, his service in the Civil War, and specifically the Savannah and Carolina campaigns. While Sherman has been a popular topic, there has not been much focus on his application of total war. One of the first historians to write significantly on Sherman and his application of total war was John Bennett Walters in his book *Merchant of Terror: General Sherman and Total War*. In his book, Walters looks at Sherman’s Civil War service and traces Sherman’s total war development as an

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<sup>13</sup> Paludan, *A People’s Contest*, 312.

<sup>14</sup> William Tecumseh Sherman, *The Memoirs of W. T. Sherman: All Volumes* (1886; repr., New York: Firework Press, 2015), 505.

evolutionary process. A part of this process is how Sherman remained loyal to the Union and frustrated over the events of Southern secession while he was the superintendent of the Louisiana State Seminary. According to Walters, events in the South and the politics within Louisiana were the start of the personal enmity Sherman had toward the Southern cause.

While Walters framed Sherman's mindset at the beginning of the war, he continued to follow Sherman's career in the Union army and the evolution toward the necessity of the total war against the Confederacy. One of the campaigns Walters' explores as a part of Sherman's development of his total war concept is the Vicksburg campaign, specifically the destruction of Jackson, Mississippi. Here, Walters commented that Sherman "realized full well how effectively his destruction of Jackson in May had prevented that Southern army [Johnston's army] from rendering any assistance to the besieged city of Vicksburg."<sup>15</sup> As a corps commander, Sherman gained fame for having played a significant part of one of the most visible Union victories since the start of the war.

Prior to finishing his book, Walters discusses how the Atlanta campaign set the conditions for the Savannah campaign and provided Sherman with an opportunity to take his theory of total war to a new level. Overall, Walters concluded that Sherman's application of total war throughout the south was not necessary. It created a deeply rooted hatred from the Southern population in which the Union was trying to bring back into the fold.

Sherman's practice of total war against the people of the South had led him to wage a war of annihilation against those whom he professed he was bringing back into the Union of State. The people of Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina returned to their places in the Union of States, but the same results could have been obtained without the wanton destruction, the outrages and indignities which were visited upon them.<sup>16</sup>

It is clear Walters felt Sherman could have taken a different approach toward his campaigns and still achieved the same results, without the enmity that developed among the Southern population

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<sup>15</sup> John Bennett Walters, *Merchant of Terror General Sherman and Total War* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1973), 94.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

While taking a non-total war approach may have taken more time, in Walters' view, it would have prevented issues during the reconstruction period.

Lance Janda used Walters' concept of Sherman's approach to total war as the basis for his article "Shutting the Gates of Mercy: The American Origins of Total War, 1860-1880." Janda claimed total war did not peak in the Civil War but later in the First World War in 1914. The Civil War was where total war first emerged on a large scale. Yet, the United States' application of total war did not take a fifty-year hiatus, but continued into the 1880s in the frontier territories against Native American tribes. Janda stated, "A doctrine that was anathema in 1860 emerged from the Civil War as the weapon of choice on the frontier, and by 1880 total war theory dominated the mainstream of American military thought."<sup>17</sup> One of the main reasons for the continued use of total war was due to Sherman's influence as General in Chief.<sup>18</sup>

The initial justification for the use of total war was because of the "idea that the Southern people deserved their fate was of crucial importance to Northern commanders, especially Sherman."<sup>19</sup> This concept is important to Janda's argument that Union commanders, particularly Sherman, were forced to employ total war against the Southern population. The Southern people became a part of the war effort when they approved secession and subsequently their continued support of the Confederate army.

Janda continued his argument with Sherman's promotion to General in Chief and his ability to influence operations in the frontier. The purpose of the operations was to expand American western territorial expansion into Native American lands. Overall, Janda does not consider the enmity that had grown between Union and Confederate forces. He does not consider the Union's desire to end the war. Janda looks at the Civil War as the initiation of total war theory

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<sup>17</sup> Janda, "Shutting the Gates of Mercy," 1.

<sup>18</sup> Janda also gives equal credit to Generals Grant and Sheridan as being proponents of total war in the Civil War and projecting it into the frontier in the 1880s.

<sup>19</sup> Janda, "Shutting the Gates of Mercy," 5.

for Generals Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan, and how their influence within the Army perpetuated total war theory through the wars of the frontier and the First World War.

Southern journalist Burke Davis focused his book *Sherman's March* to Sherman's campaigns through Georgia and the Carolinas. Unlike Walters and Janda, Davis does not analyze Sherman's use of total war. Rather, he explores at the effects of the campaigns not only at the general officer or politician level but from the soldier and civilian perspective as well. Davis wanted to tell the story of the suffering and devastation Sherman's army caused during the campaigns. His intent was to "present the march in the words of these hundreds of witnesses and participants...and though individually of minor importance, contribute to an understanding of this climactic episode of the war."<sup>20</sup> Davis wanted to move past the over glorified nature of war and tell the story of the people who lived it. By telling the story about the people who lived through this campaign, maybe he could demonstrate that war is not a glorious endeavor.

Historian John M. Marszalek's biography on Sherman's life titled *Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order* does not focus on only Sherman's Civil War service. He examines Sherman's life from childhood and pre-Civil War business ventures to Sherman's Civil War and post-Civil War service. Throughout the book, Marszalek takes as unbiased an approach to Sherman's life as a historian can take. Unlike Burke Davis, Marszalek does not focus on the struggles of the civilian populace; rather he discusses the reasons behind why Sherman felt that a total war approach was the only approach that would end the war.

A reason Marszalek provides for Sherman's belief of total war was there was more of an effect against the Confederate armies with less casualties, both civilian and military. He discussed how the Meridian campaign in February 1864 potentially influenced Sherman's belief in total war. "he declared total war against the against the Mississippi country side...he cut loose from his supplies, lived off the civilian population in the countryside, terrorized them, and maintained total

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<sup>20</sup> Burke Davis, *Sherman's March: The First Full-Length Narrative of General William T. Sherman's Devastating March through Georgia and the Carolinas* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 303.



secrecy over his activities...Few people—civilian or military—had died.”<sup>21</sup> The fact that Sherman was able to generate significant results through terrain-focused maneuver rather than being enemy-focused deeply influenced how he proceeded with the development of the Savannah and Carolina campaigns.

Historian Joseph T. Glatthaar wrote specifically on the Savannah and Carolina campaigns in his book *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman’s Troops in the Savannah and Carolina Campaigns*. Glatthaar took a different approach to the campaigns than Davis or Marszalek. Instead of writing in a linear manner, Glatthaar evaluated and wrote about the campaigns by subject. Specifically with chapters dedicated to and titled, “The March,” “Foraging,” “Destruction and Pillaging,” and “Battle.” This allowed Glatthaar to look at certain aspects of the campaigns without being restrained by the order of events. The overall intent for his book was not to judge Sherman or his soldiers but to “ascertain exactly what they did and understand why they did it.”<sup>22</sup>

Throughout his book, Glatthaar mentions the lack of discipline in Sherman’s soldiers and in Sherman for not enforcing certain orders and restrictions. The reason for this, in Glatthaar’s opinion, is due to the experienced veteran army Sherman commanded. He wrote:

[T]he implementation of the concept of total warfare, was the product of this veteran character. The strategy to make southerners feel the iron hand of destruction derived from prolonged years of hardship and sacrifice and an unfaltering commitment to the cause of reunification. Sherman’s veterans adopted the total-war concept as retaliation for the deaths and tragedies that their ranks had endured and also because they saw it as the most effective means of winning the war.<sup>23</sup>

Sherman trusted his men and his men trusted him. The soldiers under Sherman’s command knew he would not put their lives at risk unless there was no other way. They believed in Sherman’s total war concept and his methods would end the war quickly and allow them a greater chance of returning home.

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<sup>21</sup> Marszalek, *Sherman*, 294.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph T. Glatthaar, *The March To The Sea and Beyond: Sherman’s Troops in the Savannah and Carolinas Campaigns* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), xiv.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, xxi.

This monograph focuses on the operational necessity of Sherman's application of total war in the Savannah and Carolina campaigns due to a current gap of knowledge. Walters evaluates Sherman and total war through the lens of how the actions taken during the war effected the integration of the Southern states back into the Union. Janda discusses the use of total war in the Civil War but as a stepping-stone for the Army's tactics in the frontier wars and later in the First World War. Davis does not explicitly mention total war but he does discuss the effects Sherman's march had on the people who encounter Sherman's army and the devastation that occurred. Marszalek and Glatthaar have more scholarly insights into Sherman's use of total war than Davis. Their approaches, while different, looked at the reasons why Sherman applied total war instead of only focusing on the impact on the population, which was Davis' focus.

## The Savannah Campaign

On November 15, 1864, Sherman and his army departed Atlanta, which began the campaign famously known as "The March to the Sea." In Special Field Order No. 119, Sherman's intent for the Savannah campaign was, "to strike a blow at our enemy that will have a material effect in producing what we all so much desire, his complete overthrow."<sup>24</sup> Sherman was clear to his soldiers that the intent was to end the Confederate rebellion against the legitimate Federal government. To achieve his end state, Sherman had two goals, to devastate the Southern economy by living off the land and to bring the war to the people of the South.

Sherman organized his army into two wings with General Henry Slocum in command of the left wing and General Oliver Howard in command of the right wing. Both Slocum and Howard had Sherman's confidence as he stated in his memoirs, "educated and experienced officers, fully competent to their commands." Within these two commands, Slocum's army consisted of two corps, the Fourteenth and Twentieth. Howard's army consisted of Fifteenth and

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<sup>24</sup> Official Records (O.R.), ser. 1, vol. 39, pt. III, 701, accessed December 27, 2017, <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cache/w/a/r/waro0079/00703.tif100.gif>.

Seventeenth corps. In total, Sherman’s official strength at the beginning of the campaign was approximately 60,000 men. He specified his numerical strength in his memoirs as, “fifty-five thousand three hundred and twenty-nine infantry, five thousand and sixty-three cavalry, and eighteen hundred and twelve artillery in all, sixty-two thousand two hundred and four officers and men.”<sup>25</sup>

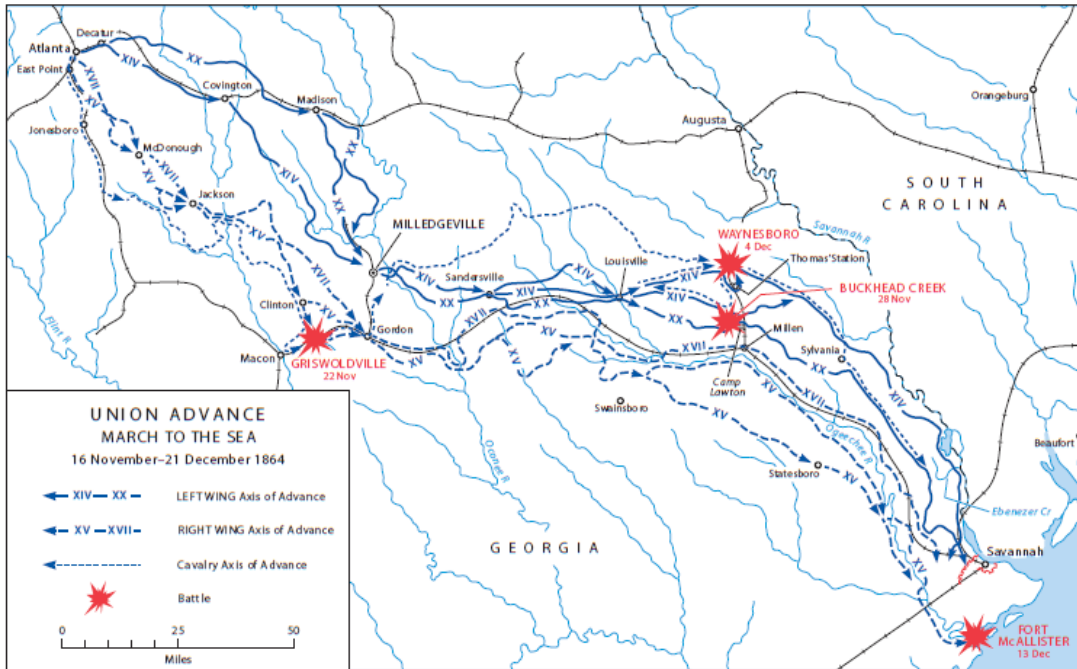


Figure 1. Union Advance: March to the Sea, “The Atlanta and Savannah Campaigns 1864” (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 2014) 71.

Sherman’s intent for his forces was to be light and mobile to allow them to march quickly. He envisioned his forces to march fifteen miles per day. To do this, he had to assume some risk with his artillery and supply lines. Artillery is heavy and required numerous horses to pull. The supply requirements for both horses and ordinance placed a large burden on an army’s movements. To compensate for this, Sherman reduced the number of artillery pieces to “sixty-five, or about one gun to each thousand men.”<sup>26</sup> Sherman was confident the reduction of artillery

<sup>25</sup> Sherman, *Memoirs*, 441.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 442.

support would not affect the campaign was because he knew Hood's army was to the northwest and focused on Tennessee.

The second risk Sherman assumed was with his supply lines and wagon trains. Sherman wanted his army to live off the land as a part of his application of total war. However, he still needed to ensure his soldiers were supplied throughout the duration of the campaign in the event foraging did not provide enough to sustain his soldiers. Sherman specified this concept in his Special Field Order No. 120 issued on November 9, 1864: "The army will forage liberally on the country during the march...aiming at all times to keep in the wagons at least ten days' provisions for his command, and three days' forage."<sup>27</sup> Sherman had no intent of using Atlanta as a supply base for his campaign. A supply base would potentially slow him down and create a vulnerability for which he would have to allocate men to protect against Confederate attacks. In addition, living off the land would directly accomplish his goal of bringing the war to the people of the South and devastate the economy of Georgia.

As a part of Sherman's application of total war, he issued specific guidance about the destruction of property and who could authorize any destruction. He delegated the decision to destroy property to his corps commanders, when he stated, "To corps commanders alone is intrusted [sic] the power to destroy mills, houses, cotton-gins, etc."<sup>28</sup> An issue that comes with this guidance is Sherman restricted his subordinate commanders from further delegating this authority. Sherman expected his four corps commanders to cover a fluid area within their command that could be ten to fifteen miles wide and ten miles long. With a planned daily movement distance of fifteen miles per day, the expectation of corps commanders to make decisions on what property should or should not be destroyed was lofty. Sherman's guidance to his commanders about the destruction of property was:

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<sup>27</sup> O.R., ser. 1, vol. 39, pt. III, 713-714, accessed December 27, 2017, <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cache/w/a/r/waro0079/00715.tif100.gif>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

In districts and neighborhoods where the army is unmolested, no destruction of each property should be permitted; but should guerrillas or bushwackers molest our march, or should the inhabitants burn bridges, obstruct roads, or otherwise manifest local hostility, then army commanders should order and enforce a devastation more or less relentless, according to the measure of such hostility.<sup>29</sup>

This guidance was meant to be specific to civilian property. Sherman wanted his subordinate commanders to destroy property that was of military value to the Confederacy but not to destroy personal property. Yet, Sherman's army understood what he wanted to achieve. Historian James McPherson commented on this when he said, "Their factories, railroads, farms---indeed their will to resist---must be devastated."<sup>30</sup> This is because, "Sherman's soldiers shared their leader's total-war philosophy."<sup>31</sup>

While Sherman wanted to bring the horrors of war to the people of the South, he had a specific social class in mind: the Southern elite. Sherman specifically stated in Special Field Orders No. 120 that "the rich, who are usually hostile, and the poor and industrious, usually neutral or friendly."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, Sherman's men knew there was a difference between the common person and a member of the Southern elite, who were not to receive any mercy. Sherman blamed the Southern elite for the Southern states' decision to secede from the Union. From his brief time in Louisiana prior to the war, he felt the regular farmer or businessperson did not want to leave the Union because this would only disrupt their lives. Unlike the common person, the Southern elite were the societal class who voted for secession. Therefore, Sherman did not want his soldiers to destroy needlessly the common person's property, but he did want the sense of security among the entire population to be gone.

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<sup>29</sup> O.R., ser. 1, vol. 39, pt. III, 713-714, accessed December 27, 2017, <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cache/w/a/r/waro0079/00715.tif100.gif>.

<sup>30</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 809.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> O.R., ser. 1, vol. 39, pt. III, 713-714, accessed December 27, 2017, <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cache/w/a/r/waro0079/00715.tif100.gif>.

Prior to Sherman's army departing Atlanta, on November 12, 1864, Sherman ordered "the railroad and telegraph communications with the rear were broken."<sup>33</sup> The destruction of the lines of communication forced Sherman and his army to live off the land as the plan intended. It also prevented the leadership in Washington from directing operations or diverting Sherman's forces to fight either Hood's army in Tennessee or Lee's army in Virginia. Burke Davis describes Sherman's motivation for cutting the telegraph wire as, "no longer did he fear an order to abandon his march."<sup>34</sup> Sherman was free to implement his total war philosophy against the Confederacy because he believed it was most effective way to end to the war. In addition, by cutting the telegraph lines, he did not have to allocate soldiers to protect the lines. He could focus on his march through Georgia and less about protecting infrastructure to his rear.

Savannah and Augusta were two destinations considered for Sherman to march his army. Sherman convinced Grant that Savannah was the obvious choice because the port would give Sherman access to the Union Navy. This support from the Navy would allow his army to resupply and prepare for follow-on operations.<sup>35</sup> Had Sherman decided to march his army to Augusta he would have been land locked and depended on the same rail lines he tried to deny to the Confederacy. By selecting Savannah, he increased his logistical options and allowed his army to be resupplied from multiple supply lines. Sherman was not restricted to just the railroad in Savannah; he could leverage the union's naval supremacy and not worry about protecting rail lines going in and out of Augusta.

Sherman's army marched from Atlanta toward Savannah not in a linear column but in a wide parallel front with each wing on separate paths. These paths followed the rail lines as described by Sherman biographer John F. Marszalek when he wrote, "The left wing moved down the Georgia Railroad toward Augusta, the right wing along the Macon and Western Railroad to

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<sup>33</sup> Sherman, *Memoirs*, 441.

<sup>34</sup> Davis, *Sherman's March*, 25-26.

<sup>35</sup> Lee Kennett, *Sherman: A Soldiers Life* (New York: Perennial, 2002), 257-259.

Macon.”<sup>36</sup> By marching his army through Georgia in this manner, Sherman was able to create numerous effects between both the Confederacy and the population. First, Sherman and his army were able to destroy the rail lines between Atlanta and Augusta, Macon, and Savannah. Second, by marching his army in a parallel front, he had access to more land to forage from which also allowed him access to more of the Georgian population. Third, his final destination of Savannah was not readily apparent to the Confederates. Sherman wanted the Confederates to think he was marching toward Augusta or Macon. Instead, “Sherman hoped to confuse the Confederates over his objective; he was actually aiming for Milledgeville.”<sup>37</sup> The importance of Milledgeville was symbolic in nature because it was at the time the state capital of Georgia. The deception worked because “Sherman moved too rapidly and deceptively...His adversaries prepared for him at Augusta, but he avoided that city.”<sup>38</sup>

Within Sherman’s total war philosophy and his application of it in the Savannah campaign are the two operational ends he wanted to achieve: to attack the Southern sense of security by bringing the war to the people and destroy the economic support the Deep South provided the Confederacy. One of the methods, whether by Sherman’s intent or not, that proved to be effective in accomplishing these two goals was in the daily foraging operations. Burke Davis described how foraging operations slowly grew into something beyond the written intent of Sherman’s guidance. At the start of the campaign, “Sherman’s official foragers were absurdly inept in their first attempts at living off the country” due to the poor organization and the immense scale of supplies the foragers needed to acquire.<sup>39</sup> Yet, it did not take long for the men to become better at foraging, especially after Sherman reduced the daily march distance from

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<sup>36</sup> Marszalek, *Sherman*, 301.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 648.

<sup>39</sup> Davis, *Sherman’s March*, 40.

fifteen to ten miles. Eventually, foraging operations evolved to where “these men [foragers] remained in the countryside, far from their units, day after day in order to avoid army discipline.”<sup>40</sup> Like Sherman, who cut the telegraph lines so his superiors could not disrupt his campaign, foragers, more famously known as “bummers,” applied their trade far from their regiment’s areas so they could avoid punishment.

Foraging operations had their intended effect. There was an ample amount of resources for the Union army to pick up along their march to sustain the army. Due to foraging, the people within a sixty-mile wide path of Sherman’s army felt the pain of an army on the march. Yet, Sherman tried to respect the private property of the common people by not burning their homes and leaving enough food to survive; but for the Southern elites, there was no mercy. When Sherman’s men found the plantation house of Confederate General Howell Cobb, who was a former speaker of the House of Representatives, Treasury Secretary, and outspoken secessionist, he “sent back word to General Davis [XIV Corps commander] to explain whose plantation it was and instructed him to spare nothing.”<sup>41</sup> While the common people may have had their belongings and food stolen, at least they kept their homes. Marszalek aptly describes the effects Sherman wanted to see from the civilian populace, which was to “create the kind of terror he [Sherman] was attempting to instill in the civilian populace. The more havoc he could cause, the less hope these civilians would have and the less trust they would place in their government and their army.”<sup>42</sup>

While there were no major Confederate forces in Georgia to prevent Sherman’s army from marching through the state, there were “several thousand Georgia militia and 3,500 rebel

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<sup>40</sup> Davis, *Sherman’s March*, 39-40.

<sup>41</sup> Foote, *The Civil War*, 643-644.

<sup>42</sup> Marszalek, *Sherman*, 302-303.



cavalry commanded by Joseph Wheeler.”<sup>43</sup> The militia did not consist of young men who were fighting for their homes. The militia were “most(ly)...boys or old men...untrained and poorly armed.”<sup>44</sup> The intent was never for this militia to become decisively engaged. On November 22<sup>nd</sup>, the inexperienced Confederate General P. J. Phillips saw an opportunity and took it near the town of Griswoldville, ten miles east of Macon. Here, the Georgia militia attacked elements of Fifteenth Corps, which resulted in 600 Confederate casualties to sixty Union casualties.<sup>45</sup> After this engagement, the remaining Confederate forces focused largely on delaying Sherman’s march, by burning bridges and any other methods to impede his progress. Confederate forces also wanted to buy time for a larger and more coordinated Confederate response.

While elements of Sherman’s right wing moved on from their encounter with local militia forces, elements of the left wing entered the state capital of Milledgeville unopposed on Thanksgiving Day, November 23<sup>rd</sup>. A few days prior on November 19<sup>th</sup>, anticipating Sherman’s arrival, the majority of the Georgia state legislators evacuated the city. The successful seizure of Milledgeville was symbolic of the Confederacy’s inability to secure its state capitals, let alone the rest of their territory or the populace from Union movements. However, Union soldiers were not in Milledgeville long as the last of Sherman’s forces left the morning of November 25<sup>th</sup>.<sup>46</sup>

On December 22, 1864, thirty-seven days since the campaign began, Sherman and his army seized Savannah. Two days prior, Confederate forces withdrew with 10,000 soldiers into South Carolina.<sup>47</sup> Sherman would have preferred to prevent the Confederate defenders from withdrawing to fight another day. However, it did not prevent him from immediately claiming victory to Lincoln, when he wrote, “I beg to present you as a Christmas-gift the city of Savannah,

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<sup>43</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 809.

<sup>44</sup> Davis, *Sherman’s March*, 53.

<sup>45</sup> Marszalek, *Sherman*, 304; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 809.

<sup>46</sup> Davis, *Sherman’s March*, 67.

<sup>47</sup> Foote, *The Civil War*, 654.

with one hundred and fifty heavy guns and plenty of ammunition, also about twenty five thousand bales of cotton.”<sup>48</sup> Lincoln was relieved to receive this message from Sherman because there had been no reports on Sherman’s activities outside of Confederate newspaper articles.

Although Sherman was in control of Savannah, Lee’s army still had not disintegrated and the Confederacy had not collapsed. Sherman knew his march to the sea was only a part of a larger whole. He wrote to Grant on December 24<sup>th</sup>, “The occupation of Savannah completes the first part of our game.”<sup>49</sup> Individuals on both the Union and Confederate sides realized Lee’s army was the center of gravity for the entire war. The Chief of Confederate Ordnance, General Josiah Gorgas wrote on January 25, 1865, “As long as Lee’s army remains intact there is no cause for despondency.”<sup>50</sup> With Lee’s army still fighting, another campaign needed to be conducted and Sherman knew exactly where he wanted to go, through South Carolina.

Sherman’s march through Georgia achieved the effects he desired. He successfully disrupted the economic support the Deep South provided the Confederacy, and specifically Lee’s army. Gorgas wrote on December 26, 1864, “While there is plenty of food in Georgia there is none here [Richmond, VA]. There is no sufficient excuse for this. The food must be brought here and the means to do so provided and organized.”<sup>51</sup> Through the destruction of the railroads in Georgia, Sherman’s campaign was able to deny the Confederate government’s ability to transport food and supplies to Lee’s army. While Sherman and Grant wanted the Confederacy, as a whole, to be affected by the lack of access to Georgia, the most important aspect was to cut Lee’s army from their supplies. Gorgas confirmed the dire situation for Lee’s army on January 4, 1865 when

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<sup>48</sup> Sherman, *Memoirs*, 487.

<sup>49</sup> William T. Sherman, *Sherman’s Civil War Selected Correspondence of William T. Sherman 1860-1865*, eds. Brooks D. Simpson and Jean V. Berlin (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 773.

<sup>50</sup> Josiah Gorgas, *The Journals of Josiah Gorgas 1857-1878*, ed. Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 149.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

he questioned, “how is it that Lee’s Army is almost without bread and quite without meat.” He provided more details on January 12<sup>th</sup> when he stated, “Gen. Lee’s army has but two days food left.”<sup>52</sup> At the beginning of 1865, the results of Sherman’s march were felt by Lee’s army. The concern with how to supply Lee’s army had become more than just an issue but an outright crisis for the Confederate government.

While Gorgas was able to provide an insider look into the desperation Sherman’s army caused the Confederacy at the end of his Savannah campaign, the amount of supplies his army acquired through foraging was impressive. According to Joseph Glatthaar, “From Georgia alone they confiscated 6,871 mules and horses, 13,294 head of cattle, 10.4 million pounds of grain, and 10.7 million pounds of fodder as Georgia farmers unwillingly contributed almost 6 million rations of beef, bread, coffee, and sugar to the Union infantry and artillery.”<sup>53</sup> The vast amount of supplies acquired over the course of the campaign proved Sherman’s assumption correct in that his army would be able to live off the land. Yet, supplies to sustain the army were not the only items acquired through foraging operations. Yale historian John Fabian Witt notes that Sherman’s army “confiscated or destroyed 90,000 bales of cotton worth some \$36 million.... Sherman estimated the total value of goods confiscated and destroyed at \$100 million.”<sup>54</sup> Neutralizing the South’s stockpile of supplies was not the only target of Sherman’s campaign, he wanted to hurt the people’s livelihood and the Confederate economy as a whole. To do this, his army also destroyed cotton crops wherever they found them.

The importance of cotton to the Southern economy cannot be understated. Cotton was one of the main export goods the Southern states used to acquire wealth and thus fund the war. Yet, the Union naval blockade disrupted Confederate trade with the rest of the world, particularly the United Kingdom. Professor Eugene M. Lerner wrote, “The inaccessibility of foreign markets

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<sup>52</sup> Gorgas, *The Journals of Josiah Gorgas*, 146-147.

<sup>53</sup> Glatthaar, *The March To The Sea and Beyond*, 130.

<sup>54</sup> John Fabian Witt, *Lincoln’s Code* (New York: Free Press, 2012), 277.

caused by the northern blockade and the refusal of the Confederate government to extend aid on the cotton crop were powerful incentives for the planters to reduce their output of cotton.” Because of these two factors, Confederate cotton output fell from 2.3 billion pounds in 1859 to an average output of 1.2 billion pounds from 1866-1870. This reduction in cotton production affected the Confederate government’s ability to fund the war effort and support their domestic economy. Farmers whose livelihoods depended on cotton had to grow other types of crops due to a lack of market access and the need to feed their families.<sup>55</sup>

Sherman’s army did a fantastic job of foraging and the supplies they acquired had an effect on Lee’s army’s morale and its ability to operate. Nevertheless, supplies were not the only element of the Southern economy Sherman destroyed. The railroad network in the South was the lifeline of support for Lee’s army. At the conclusion of the Savannah campaign, Sherman’s army destroyed over 150 miles worth of rail lines. Confederate inspections of the rail lines estimated “the middle of February was the earliest date which they might be repaired.”<sup>56</sup> If the citizens of Georgia were able to replace the supplies Sherman’s army acquired, there would be no way for them to transport the supplies out of Georgia. Thus, the aim of destroying the South’s ability to supply Lee’s army was successful but the question of the psyche of the Southern people was also affected. Confederate President Jefferson Davis in a letter to General Richard Taylor wrote, “Sherman’s campaign has produced [a] bad effect on our people. Success against his future operations is needed to reanimate public confidence.”<sup>57</sup> Davis acknowledged Sherman’s campaign through Georgia had destroyed the notion that the Southern population was safe at

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<sup>55</sup> Eugene M. Lerner, “Southern Output and Agricultural Income, 1860-1880,” in *The Economic Impact of the Civil War*, edited by Ralph Andreano (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Publishing Co, 1962), 94, 99.

<sup>56</sup> Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 654-655.

<sup>57</sup> O.R., XLV, pt. 2, 778, accessed February 17, 2018, <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=moawar;cc=moawar;q1=January%2012%2C%201865;rgn=full%20text;idno=waro0094;didno=waro0094;view=image;seq=780;page=root;size=100>.

home. Sherman's army displayed the Union's ability to reach deep into Confederate territory. At the same time, the Confederacy displayed their inability to protect their citizens and their property from Union forces.

While Sherman prepared for his next campaign into the Carolinas, his fame could not be higher. One reason was due to the stories the people of the North heard about his exploits through Georgia. Paludan wrote, "The progress of that army generated an outpouring of books, articles, and editorials creating Sherman's story. It was a story that told the people what their heroes were, what the people were capable of, what they were fighting for, what war was doing to their society."<sup>58</sup> With the people of the North able to read about Sherman's campaign through Georgia, they could understand for themselves not only what the Union army was doing but also why they were doing it. The will of the people along with the enmity built up from three years of failure in the Eastern Theatre allowed Sherman to conduct his total war campaign in Georgia and subsequently in the Carolinas.

## The Carolina Campaign

By early 1865, Sherman understood the Confederacy was on the brink of collapse, which led to the development of the Carolina campaign shortly after the seizure of Savannah. However, Sherman and Grant disagreed on how to proceed with the next phase of their plan. Grant proposed for Sherman to take his army to the James River by naval transport. His reasons, as stated in his memoirs, were because "the season was bad, the roads impassable for anything except such an army he had, and I should not have thought of ordering such a move."<sup>59</sup> Grant had another reason for the movement. He wanted to take advantage of Sherman's uncommitted army and place them south of Richmond to force Lee to fight. While Lee's army was the center of

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<sup>58</sup> Paludan, *A People's Contest*, 305.

<sup>59</sup> Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs* (1885; repr., New York: Modern Library, 1999), 529.

gravity for the Confederate cause, Richmond was the capital of the Confederacy and symbolic to the cause. Grant believed that from Lee’s perspective, “if the cause of the South is lost he wants Richmond to be the last place surrendered.”<sup>60</sup> Yet, Sherman persuaded Grant not to pursue this course of action but to allow him to march through South Carolina and subsequently North Carolina.

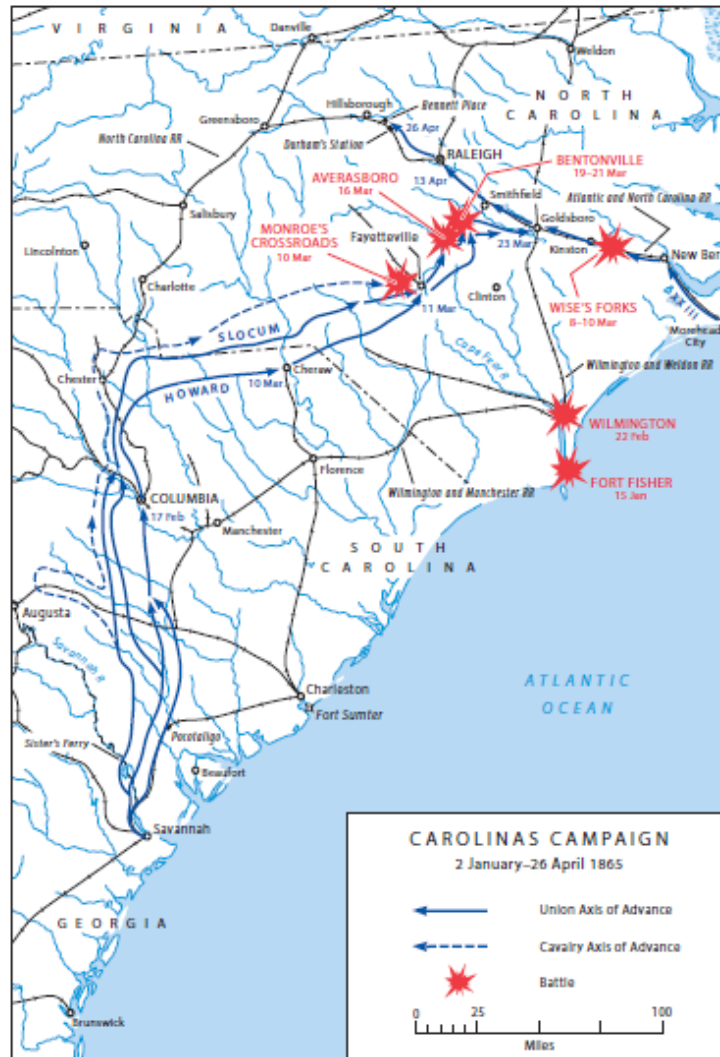


Figure 2. Carolinas Campaign. “The Civil War Ends 1865” (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, 2015) 12.

<sup>60</sup> Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 657.

Sherman felt the Confederate supply lines and psyche, while severely damaged, were not yet destroyed. His goal before the Savannah campaign was to destroy the Confederate supply lines to the Deep South and break the morale of the Southern population forever. If he took his army south of Richmond by naval transport, he would not be able to accomplish these goals. On December 27, 1864, Sherman received a letter from Grant approving the march through the Carolinas which stated, “The effect of such a campaign will be to disorganize the South, and prevent the organization of new armies from their broken fragments...Break up the railroads in South and North Carolina, and join the armies operating against Richmond as soon as you can.”<sup>61</sup> Similar to the Savannah campaign, Sherman and his army were to be a supporting effort to Grant and the Army of the Potomac’s operations against Lee’s army.

On February 1, 1865, forty-one days after seizing Savannah, Sherman and his army of 60,000 soldiers began their march through the Carolinas. Historian James McPherson explained that the Carolina campaign “had two strategic purposes: to destroy all war resources in Sherman’s path; and to come up on Lee’s rear to crush the Army of Northern Virginia...”<sup>62</sup> While this aligns with Grant’s purpose for Sherman’s march. Sherman also had a personal reason for this campaign: revenge. If the citizens of Georgia thought Sherman had a grudge against them, they did not know the enmity he and his soldiers had for the people of South Carolina. McPherson referred to this when he stated, “Sherman’s soldiers had a third purpose in mind as well: to punish the state that had hatched this unholy rebellion.”<sup>63</sup> Sherman also discussed this topic in his memoirs when he stated, “Somehow, our men had got the idea that South Carolina was the cause of all our troubles; her people were the first to fire on Fort Sumter, had been in a great hurry to precipitate the country into civil war; and therefore on them should fall the scourge of war in its

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<sup>61</sup> Sherman, *Memoirs*, 491-492.

<sup>62</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 826.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

worst form.”<sup>64</sup> It is clear Sherman understood the enmity within his army towards the people of South Carolina would not be an issue during the campaign through the Carolinas. South Carolina started the war and Sherman and his soldiers wanted to punish them for it. However, before they could punish the population of South Carolina, Sherman’s army had to overcome the South Carolina terrain and weather.

Unlike the Savannah campaign, the terrain and weather were not favorable to Sherman’s army. Sherman had to “cross nine substantial rivers and scores of their tributaries during what turned out to be the wettest winter in twenty years.”<sup>65</sup> McPherson discussed the challenges of terrain and weather on Sherman’s army and the solutions they used: “so far under water were the roads in this region [South Carolina] that Union scouts had to reconnoiter some of them in canoes.”<sup>66</sup>

The destination for Sherman’s army was Goldsboro, North Carolina. Goldsboro was selected because it was the optimal location for Sherman to resupply his army and to be a staging point for follow on operations. The reason why Goldsboro was an ideal location was due to the Wilmington and Goldsboro railroad line and the Neuse River. These multiple supply lines would connect Sherman to the sea, through Wilmington, and allow him to resupply his army quickly without having to rely on only one supply line.

To get to Goldsboro, Sherman had to march his army through South Carolina. Similar to the Savannah campaign, Sherman wanted to keep his destination a secret to the Confederates. To accomplish this, his plan was to march his army from Savannah to Columbia, the state capital of South Carolina. The intent was to deceive the Confederate defenders into thinking he was marching his army to either Charleston or Augusta.

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<sup>64</sup> Sherman, *Memoirs*, 505.

<sup>65</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 827.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*



Sherman arranged and marched his four corps in a manner that would not allow the Confederate defenders to ascertain his destination. The formation he chose was to place his four corps in a “Y” formation. This allowed Sherman to have two corps march toward Augusta and Charleston while the other two corps provided support in reinforcements were needed.<sup>67</sup> The deception was critical to Sherman’s march because there were approximately 20,000 Confederate soldiers in South Carolina. Sherman wanted to split the Confederate forces and force them to defend both Augusta and Charleston. Sherman explained his reasoning to Grant in a letter written on December 24, 1864 that stated, “I left Augusta untouched on purpose: because now the enemy will be in doubt as to my objective point after crossing the Savannah River, whether it be Augusta or Charleston, and will naturally divide his forces.”<sup>68</sup> In bypassing Augusta and Charleston, Sherman assumed an element of risk.

This element of risk was by bypassing Augusta; Sherman would not destroy the Confederate “gunpowder and munitions plants.”<sup>69</sup> This was an acceptable risk to Sherman because while these factories would still be operational, there would be no way for the gunpowder and munitions to be transported out of Augusta. This would be due to Sherman’s army having destroyed the railroads between Augusta and Lee’s army. This risk would be further mitigated once Sherman secured Columbia and could “strike for the Charleston and Wilmington R. Road...”<sup>70</sup> The same rationale was used for Charleston, a port city that would be cut off to Confederate logistics once Columbia was secured. Columbia was to be a location from where Sherman would be able to extend his operational reach into North Carolina and continue destroying critical railroad lines to disrupt Southern logistics support to Lee’s army.

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<sup>67</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 828.

<sup>68</sup> Sherman, *Sherman’s Civil War*, 773.

<sup>69</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 828.

<sup>70</sup> Sherman, *Sherman’s Civil War*, 773.

Sherman's plan to deceive Confederate forces to his destination worked. Confederate General Joseph Johnston made the decision to station 10,000 Confederate soldiers at both Augusta and Charleston to defend what he thought was an inevitable attack by Sherman. On February 17, 1865, Sherman seized Columbia with two corps.<sup>71</sup> Thus comes one of the largest controversies of Sherman's campaigns through Georgia and the Carolinas, the burning of Columbia. Historians dispute the responsibility for the fire that destroyed Columbia. Sherman discussed this incident in his memoirs that the mayor of Columbia had approached with the intention of surrendering the city to Sherman. "Near the market-square we found Stone's brigade halted, with arms stacked, and large detail of his men, along with some citizens, engaged with an old fire-engine, trying to put out the fire in a long pile of burning cotton-bales, which I was told had been fired by the rebel cavalry on withdrawing from the city that morning."<sup>72</sup> Sherman did not spend a lot of time discussing the fire that destroyed Columbia but he clearly placed blame on Confederate forces for burning the bales of cotton as the source of the fire. Yet, his soldiers did not help matters because "residents of Columbia distributed some...liquor the dipperful...in an effort to curry favor; instead it turned some of them into inebriated incendiaries."<sup>73</sup> Yet, McPherson gives his opinion on this subject and stated on the side of Sherman, "Sherman did not burn Columbia...Sherman worked through the night to put out the fires than to set them."<sup>74</sup> Since the Mayor of Columbia had surrendered to Sherman, there was no reason to destroy the city. Similar to the city of Savannah, Sherman did not intend to destroy a city that did not resist Union occupation.

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<sup>71</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 829.

<sup>72</sup> Sherman, *Memoirs*, 526.

<sup>73</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 829.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

Historian Joseph Glatthaar does not agree with McPherson. In his opinion, “Just as Sherman’s troops burned a dozen towns en route to Columbia, so they torched the capital of South Carolina.”<sup>75</sup> Glatthaar does not give credence to the idea of Confederate forces burning bales of cotton as they withdrew from Columbia as the cause of the fire. He blames intoxicated Union soldiers with a desire to burn everything in South Carolina as the cause. Glatthaar attributes the desire of Union soldiers to burn Columbia to Sherman and his “policy of devastation” which by the time the army left South Carolina the policy “had been a success.”<sup>76</sup>

Historian Anne Sarah Rubin described the feelings of those who blame Sherman for Columbia’s fate when she stated, “For South Carolinians and white Southerners in general, it became an indisputable article of faith that Sherman’s men had burned Columbia.”<sup>77</sup> Those who blame Sherman and his army for the burning of Columbia argue because Union soldiers found large amounts of liquor, which became the catalyst of a poorly disciplined army that wanted revenge. While the debate continues on who was responsible for Columbia’s fate, the outcome is not up for debate with three fourths of the city destroyed, totaling fourteen hundred buildings.<sup>78</sup>

It is important to understand the significance of the destruction of Columbia within the context of the time. While Sherman’s intent for South Carolina was to punish the people for initiating the war, the intent, with respect to Columbia, was not to destroy the capital aside from the public buildings. This was due to the mayor proactively surrendering the town to Sherman. Because of the mayor’s action, Sherman did not intend for his army to destroy private property, only public property that could continue to aid the Confederacy. Sherman reflected on this topic in his memoirs when he stated, “we contemplated no destruction of any private property at

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<sup>75</sup> Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond*, 143.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>77</sup> Sarah Rubin, *Through the Heart of Dixie: Sherman’s March and American Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 33.

<sup>78</sup> Rubin, *Through the Heart of Dixie*, 33.

Columbia at all.”<sup>79</sup> Sherman’s application of total war did have limits and Columbia is a demonstration of those limits. The citizens of Columbia acknowledged they were defeated and could not prevent Sherman from seizing the town; therefore, they peacefully surrendered to him. This act by the citizens of Columbia was a potential indication to Sherman that his application of total war was having the desired effect on the population of the Confederacy as a whole.

With Columbia destroyed, Sherman and his army continued the march into North Carolina. Prior to marching into North Carolina, orders had to be issued about the treatment of civilians in North Carolina. Major General Frank P. Blair, Commander of the Seventeenth Corps, issued Special Orders No. 63 that stated, “The State of North Carolina is to a great extent loyal, and as such, a marked difference should be made in the manner in which we treat the people and the manner in which those of South Carolina were treated.”<sup>80</sup> There is a clear message Blair communicated to his corps. This message was that the people in North Carolina were to be treated more like the people of Georgia than South Carolina. This meant the devastation brought by Sherman’s army would be contained to infrastructure of military value and to the Southern elite who supported succession.

Sherman’s march through the Carolinas was having an effect not only on the population, but also on Lee’s army. The desertion rate from not only Lee’s army but also the Confederate army as a whole had become a serious issue. North Carolina Governor Z. B. Vance expressed this in a letter to Lee dated March 2, 1865 when he wrote about the lack of manpower to arrest all of the deserters. Vance wrote, “In many counties, however, they are necessarily inefficient from the great number of deserters and the natural fear of the destruction of their property.”<sup>81</sup> Lee

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<sup>79</sup> Sherman, *Memoirs*, 525.

<sup>80</sup> Special Orders no. 63, O.R., XLVII, pt. 2, 760, accessed February 17, 2018, <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=moawar;cc=moawar;q1=March%2010%2C%201865;rgn=full%20text;idno=waro0099;didno=waro0099;view=image;seq=762;page=root;size=100>.

<sup>81</sup> O.R., ser. 1. Vol. 47, pt. II, 1312, accessed February 19, 2018, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924085376600;view=1up;seq=420>

responded to Vance's letter on March 9<sup>th</sup> where he commits a "detachment of 500 men" and acknowledges that the "bands of deserters were represented to be very numerous."<sup>82</sup> These two letters show that Sherman's campaigns in both Georgia and South Carolina had an effect on both the Southern population and the soldiers within the Confederate armies. The people of the North Carolina were concerned about their property and Lee knew about the significant desertion rate within his army.

While Confederate officials grappled with the increasing desertion issue, Sherman marched his army to Goldsboro. Similar to his march from Savannah to Columbia, Sherman organized his forces so his destination was not apparent. Confederate General Josiah Gorgas discussed this in a journal entry on February 27, 1865 when he stated, "Sherman's movements seem to be illy understood. It is supposed he is moving toward Fayetteville and Goldsboro."<sup>83</sup>

This assumption by Gorgas was confirmed on March 11<sup>th</sup> when Sherman and his army arrived in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Sherman would not stay in Fayetteville long. By March 13<sup>th</sup>, Sherman and his army were back on the march toward Goldsboro. Before he left Fayetteville on March 15<sup>th</sup>, Sherman reported to Grant on the destruction of the railroads he and his army had caused since they left Columbia. "We destroyed, in passing, the railroad from Edisto nearly up to Aiken; again, from Orangeburg to the Congaree; again from Columbia down to Kingsville on the Watertree, and up toward Charlotte as far as the Chester line; thence we turned east on Cheraw and Fayetteville."<sup>84</sup> In accordance with his total war philosophy, Sherman left Fayetteville after he destroyed the arsenal and several public buildings. While Sherman was proud of the destruction his army caused to the rail lines in South and North Carolina, he considered the next

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<sup>82</sup> O.R. ser 1. Vol. 47, pt. II, 1354, accessed February 19, 2018, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=coo.31924085376600;view=1up;seq=462>

<sup>83</sup> Gorgas, *The Journals of Josiah Gorgas*, 153.

<sup>84</sup> O.R., ser. 1, vol. 47, pt. II, 794-795, accessed December 27, 2017, <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cache/w/a/r/waro0099/00796.tif100.gif>.

phase of his operation. The next phase was to march his army to Goldsboro and to rendezvous with Major General John Schofield's Twenty-third Corps. Sherman also anticipated Confederate General Joseph Johnston to resist his march toward Goldsboro. Sherman wrote, "Johnston may try to interpose between me here and Schofield" and "concentrate his scattered armies at Raleigh."<sup>85</sup>

Schofield and his Twenty-third Corps were a part of Sherman's army during the Atlanta campaign but Sherman tasked him with defending Tennessee from Confederate General John Bell Hood's Army of the Tennessee. Schofield was successful in his defense of Tennessee, and subsequently, in February 1865, received orders from Grant to move his corps from Nashville to Wilmington, North Carolina. On January 15, 1865, Schofield was tasked with taking command of the newly-secured Fort Fisher and clear the rest of Wilmington of Confederate forces. Schofield took command of Fort Fisher on February 11<sup>th</sup> as the first of his corps began to arrive. Major General Alfred H. Terry, commander of Tenth Corps, was responsible for the army forces that secured Fort Fisher in a joint operation with the Navy blockade fleet. On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, Schofield had driven the remaining Confederate forces, led by Lieutenant General Braxton Bragg, from Wilmington to Goldsboro. This operation closed the last port to the Confederacy and denied the Confederacy's ability to import goods and supplies from foreign states. The success at Wilmington also provided Grant and Sherman options. Terry and his Tenth Corps were placed in command of Wilmington while Schofield and his Twenty-third Corps were in position to support both Sherman's march through the Carolinas or, if needed, Grant's operations against Lee.<sup>86</sup>

Due to the Confederacy's inability to hold Wilmington, Confederate President Jefferson Davis decided a change in leadership was needed. On February 23, 1865, Davis appointed

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> United States Army Center of Military History, "The Wilmington Campaign 1864-1865: The Battle for Fort Fisher, 13-16 January 1865," last modified September 26, 2017, accessed February 19, 2018, [https://history.army.mil/news/2016/160100a\\_wilmington.html](https://history.army.mil/news/2016/160100a_wilmington.html) and Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 658-661 & 666.

General Joseph Johnston commander of Confederate forces in North Carolina. Johnston was in command for the sole purpose of stopping Sherman's army.<sup>87</sup> According to Gorgas the composition of Johnston's forces in North Carolina were "30,000 men, besides artillery and say 4,000 cavalry."<sup>88</sup> As anticipated by Sherman, Johnston did not hesitate in his attempt to resist Sherman's march.

On March 16<sup>th</sup>, Union and Confederate forces fought the Battle of Averasborough. At this time, the Confederates realized Sherman was headed toward Goldsboro, not only to resupply his forces, but also to meet up with Union General John Schofield and his 30,000 soldiers.<sup>89</sup> Averasborough lies thirty miles south of Raleigh, North Carolina. At Averasborough, Johnston with two divisions fought four of Sherman's divisions in a delaying action. The importance of this battle is not in who won or lost, but in the information Johnston gained. He learned that Sherman's army was separated by twelve or more miles.<sup>90</sup> This important piece of information directly led to the Battle of Bentonville, which occurred on March 19-21.

Johnston saw an opportunity to fight Sherman on equal terms. With the two wings of Sherman's army separated by at least a dozen miles, or one-day hard march. Johnston could take his numerically inferior force and concentrate them against half of Sherman's army. Thus, on March 19<sup>th</sup>, Johnston concentrated approximately 17,000 men to ambush about the same number of Sherman's forces spread out along the road.<sup>91</sup> Over the next two days, Union forces, engaged with Johnston's army, would dig defensive positions while the remainder of Sherman's army rushed to reinforce them. Johnston's army assaulted the Union defensive positions multiple times but was repelled each time. On March 21<sup>st</sup>, Sherman was in a position to destroy Johnston's army

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<sup>87</sup> Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 667.

<sup>88</sup> Gorgas, *The Journals of Josiah Gorgas*, 153.

<sup>89</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 830.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

but did not. With an approximate three to one advantage, one Union division drove into the Confederate left but Sherman called off the attack and allowed Johnston to slip away.<sup>92</sup> Historians have pondered why Sherman allowed Johnston to get away instead of destroying his army.

There are three reasons why Sherman did not decisively engage Johnston's army. First, his mission was not to destroy Johnston's army but to destroy Confederate infrastructure, specifically railroads, in order to support Grant in his operations against Lee. Second, the potential casualties from further fighting would affect Sherman's operational tempo along with Sherman's desire to reduce needless casualties with the end of the war in sight. Third, Sherman wanted to get his army into Goldsboro to rendezvous with Schofield and resupply his army for follow on operations.<sup>93</sup>

Sherman's mission was a supporting operation to Grant's against Lee's army. The destruction of Johnston's army would not have had a strategic or operational effect against Lee. While tactically, the press coverage would have praised Sherman and his army. The destruction of Johnston's army would not have caused the effect Grant tasked Sherman to create. The focus of Sherman's campaign was to destroy the Confederate rail lines and infrastructure in the Carolinas in order to disrupt the supply capabilities of the Confederacy to Lee's army.

The casualties caused by any further actions against Johnston's army would have created more casualties for Sherman to evacuate. These additional casualties would have forced Sherman to dedicate more resources and time to move the casualties from the battlefield to Goldsboro. The reported casualties for Sherman's army from his engagements with Johnston's army totaled 2,209 soldiers, and the number would have been higher had he pressed his advantage.<sup>94</sup> While Sherman

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<sup>92</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 830.

<sup>93</sup> Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 830 and Sherman, *Memoirs*, 544.

<sup>94</sup> O.R., ser. 1, vol. 47, pt. II, 66 & 76, accessed February 19, 2018, <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=moawar;cc=moawar;q1=no.%203;rgn=full%20text;idno=waro0098;didno=waro0098;view=image;seq=98;page=root;size=100>.



would have had to dedicate resources to evacuate casualties, there was a moral element to this. Sherman felt the end of the war was near and there was no reason to risk the lives of his men in a battle that did not have any operational or strategic value.

Sherman was careful with the lives of his soldiers. He was confident the war was nearly over and his destruction of enemy resources had done much to win it.<sup>95</sup> Sherman did not see the need to destroy Johnston's army not only for the logistical concerns but also for the good of his men. It was not necessary to ask his soldiers who had fought with him for years to give their lives for a needless tactical victory when the end of the war was near.

The destruction of Johnston's army was not important to Sherman's mission but Goldsboro was. There he would link up with Schofield's Twenty-third Corps, integrate this 30,000 man corps into his army for a total combat strength of 90,000 soldiers.<sup>96</sup> While Sherman's army was gaining strength, Confederate forces were losing strength.

Sherman's decision not to destroy Johnston's army was a tactical decision with operation impacts. While he did not know at the time that he had a three to one advantage over Johnston's army, he did regret not taking advantage of his superior position. Sherman reflected, "I think I made a mistake there, and should rapidly have followed Mower's lead with the whole right wing."<sup>97</sup> Yet, his decision not to destroy Johnston's army had operational impacts. This decision allowed Sherman to maintain his tempo and march his army to Goldsboro so he could establish his basing to resupply his army and reorganize with Schofield's corps. After his army rested and resupplied, Sherman intended for his army to continue north and assist Grant in destroying Lee's army.

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<sup>95</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 830.

<sup>96</sup> McDonough, *William Tecumseh Sherman*, 614.

<sup>97</sup> Sherman, *Memoirs*, 544.

Unknown to Sherman at the time, he would not have to march his army north into Virginia to support Grant in his campaign against Lee. The effects Sherman intended had a significant effect on Lee's ability to wage war. In April 1865, Grant and Major General Philip Sheridan were able to force Lee to evacuate Richmond and Petersburg, defeat the Army of Northern Virginia, and compel Lee to withdraw and attempt to link up with what was left of Johnston's army.

Due to Sherman's operations in the Carolinas, all of the railroad lines were destroyed except for the Richmond and Danville railroad, far to the west.<sup>98</sup> This rail line was the last line of communication Lee had access to either move his army south towards Johnston or bring Johnston's army north to him. However, Grant and Sheridan did not intend for Lee to be able to use this railroad line to reach Johnston. On April 1, 1865, Sheridan, with two corps under his command, "broke the Southside Railroad and arrived at Lee's rear, with the Richmond and Danville Railroad at his mercy."<sup>99</sup> With the inability to use the Southside Railroad, Lee was placed in a position where he had very few options and chose to march his army toward Appomattox. On April 9, 1865, Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Grant. While Lee had surrendered his army to Grant, Johnston had not surrendered his army. It would not be until April 18<sup>th</sup>, four days after the assassination of President Lincoln, the Johnston and Sherman would agree to initial terms of surrender. Yet, this agreement was not to last long because of the disapproval of President Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's successor to the Presidency, and his cabinet. Eventually, surrender terms between the two armies were accepted on April 26, 1865.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 672; The Richmond and Danville railroad connected Richmond to Greensboro, North Carolina, west of Raleigh where Johnston still had access to a railroad that connected Raleigh to Greensboro.

<sup>99</sup> Hattaway and Jones, *How the North Won*, 673; the Southside railroad line connected Petersburg with Lynchburg, Virginia and to the Richmond and Danville Railroad. Sheridan's ability to deny Lee the ability to use the Southside Railroad forced Lee to continue to march his army west toward the Richmond and Danville railroad line.

<sup>100</sup> Sherman, *Memoirs*, 579 & 589.

## Conclusion

William Tecumseh Sherman's application of total war was operationally necessary to achieve the Union's military end state of ending the Civil War. Sherman understood that his operations in the Savannah and Carolina Campaigns were supporting efforts to Grant's main effort in Virginia. While Grant focused his army's efforts toward defeating Lee's army, Sherman attacked the Confederate support network in Georgia and the Carolinas. The Savannah campaign allowed Sherman to continue what he started in the Atlanta campaign, to destroy the railroad networks. While the railroad networks were important, they were not the only focus of Sherman's army. Destroying the will of the Southern population and destroying the supply base was also a focus of Sherman's army. By destroying the morale of the Southern population, Sherman indirectly affected Lee's army by damaging the morale of the soldiers within his army. The soldiers that deserted Lee's army reduced the capabilities Lee could bring to bear against Grant. However, by destroying the supply base in northern Georgia, Sherman denied the Confederacy a critical supply center in which to draw food and supplies. Sherman's destruction of the Georgian harvest and the railroad network ensured the Confederacy did not have the supplies or the capability to transport those supplies to the Confederate armies farther north.

While the Savannah campaign deeply affected the Confederacy, the effects on Lee's army took a few months to come to fruition. The Carolina campaign helped to seal the fate of the Confederacy. Sherman and his army continued to destroy the railroad networks and ensure the Confederate army could not move supplies and troops throughout the eastern theatre. Sherman's movements through the Carolinas also gave Grant options in force movements. Had Lee not surrendered at Appomattox, Sherman was prepared to continue marching his army north to assist Grant in his pursuit of Lee's army. Yet, due to the actions of Sherman's army, Lee's army was not able to continue the war.

Sherman could not have conducted the Savannah campaign without the will of the people within the Union. They were tired of the war and wanted the war to end. With the promise of Grant and Sherman's success in the western theatre, the hope of a Union victory was within their grasp. This hope allowed Sherman to apply his concept of total war to break the will of the Southern people. Not only did he have the support of the people within the Union, but the enmity within his army toward the Confederacy was important. His soldiers were tired of the war and they felt the Confederacy had no right to start the war. They used their enmity toward the Confederacy and the people who supported the Confederacy and brought the war into the heart of the Confederacy's supply base.

While the Savannah campaign had a significant effect on the Confederacy as a whole and its armies, it was not ready to surrender. The Carolina campaign allowed Sherman to continue to apply his concept of total war against the Confederacy. While marching through South Carolina, Sherman's army enacted their enmity toward the population due to the war originating in South Carolina. The reputation Sherman's army earned led to the Mayor of Columbia to surrender the city to Sherman in an attempt to save the city from destruction. Throughout the Carolinas, Sherman's army not only destroyed the railroad infrastructure, they destroyed the will of the people of the Carolinas. All of these actions had a significant effect on Lee's army, which allowed Grant to force Lee to surrender.

Modern military planners need to understand that the decision to use total war is not a decision that should be taken lightly. Sherman had to convince not only Grant but also President Lincoln on his plan. However, because of the will and enmity both the people and the soldiers of the Union allowed Sherman to execute his total war philosophy against the South. This is an important concept for modern day planners to understand if the concept of total war is considered. It is critical that the enmity and the will of the people is in such a state that the home front and the military will support a total war campaign. Total war cannot be applied in a war of limited

political aims. Only in a war where the political end state is total victory. Without both enmity and the will of the people, a campaign designed around total war will not be an acceptable option.

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