

Sherman and American Total War: The March to the Sea Campaign

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ABSTRACT

General William T. Sherman's March to the Sea was a vital and decisive military Civil War campaign. It resulted in the desired outcome and earned Sherman the label of the father of American total war. Shortly after capturing Atlanta in the summer of 1864, Sherman and his army marched to Savannah, Georgia. During this march, Sherman's army engaged in total warfare, and the destructive campaign helped end the Civil War quicker, with fewer casualties than a more protracted war would have yielded. However, due to the Lost Cause Mythology, many continue to view him negatively, despite his decisive and effective military tactics. Even so, the March to the Sea campaign and the strategies utilized have been studied in detail for modern war campaigns.

Keywords: General William Tecumseh Sherman, total war, Lost Cause Mythology, March to the Sea, General Ulysses Grant, Sherman's neckties, Atlanta Campaign, Union, Sir Henry Basil Liddel Hart, tactical, logistics

Sherman y la guerra total estadounidense: la marcha hacia el mar

RESUMEN

La marcha al mar del general William T. Sherman fue una campaña militar vital y decisiva de la Guerra Civil. Resultó en el resultado deseado y le valió a Sherman la etiqueta del padre de la guerra total estadounidense. Poco después de capturar Atlanta en el verano de 1864, Sherman y su ejército marcharon hacia Savannah, Georgia. Durante esta marcha, el ejército de Sherman participó en una guerra total, y la campaña destructiva ayudó a terminar la Guerra Civil más rápido, con menos bajas de las que hubiera producido una guerra más prolongada. Sin embargo, debido a la Mitología de la

Causa Perdida, muchos continúan viéndolo negativamente, a pesar de sus tácticas militares decisivas y efectivas. Aun así, la marcha hacia el mar y las estrategias utilizadas han sido estudiadas en detalle para las campañas de guerra modernas.

Palabras clave: General William Tecumseh Sherman, guerra total, Mitología de causa perdida, Marcha hacia al mar, General Ulysses Grant, Corbatas de Sherman, Campaña de Atlanta, Unión, Sir Henry Basil Liddel Hart, táctica, logística

谢尔曼将军与美国全面战争：向大海进军战役

摘要

威廉·特库赛·谢尔曼将军领导的向大海进军 (March to the Sea) 战役是美国内战中一场至关重要且具有决定性的军事战役。该战役产生了预期的结果，并为谢尔曼将军赢得了美国全面战争之父的称号。在1864年夏天占领亚特兰大后不久，谢尔曼和他的军队进军佐治亚州萨瓦纳。在这次行军中，谢尔曼军队进行了全面战争，该破坏性战役帮助更快地结束了内战，并且造成的伤亡人数少于一场旷日持久的战争（所造成的伤亡）。不过，由于败局命定论，许多人继续对他持负面看法，尽管其采取了果断且有效的军事策略。即便如此，向大海进军战役和所使用的战略被加以详细研究，以用于现代战争活动。

关键词：威廉·特库赛·谢尔曼将军，全面战争，败局命定论，向大海进军，尤利西斯·格兰特将军，谢尔曼领带（摧毁铁轨战术），亚特兰大战役，合众国，巴塞尔·亨利·李德哈特爵士，战术，后勤

General Sherman's March to the Sea was a decisive military aspect of the Civil War that provided the desired outcome and earned him the label as the father of American total war. In 1864, upon orders from General Grant, Sherman, and his army stormed approximately 300 miles from

Atlanta to Savannah, Georgia. In this campaign, General Sherman engaged in a destructive tactic known as total war. He and his army burned land and structures, destroyed railroads, supplies, tunnels, and bridges, and lived and foraged off the land as they marched. While destructive, the March to the Sea Cam-

paigned helped end the Civil War quicker, with the least amount of lives lost on both sides. Since the campaign, the portrayal of a brilliant military tactician or war criminal has been applied in describing General Sherman and his March to the Sea. Sherman's tactics have been credited as crucial to bringing about the end of the war. However, some in the South continue to view him as a war criminal. Nevertheless, the campaign and the methods employed have been studied in detail and have provided a blueprint for modern war.

Ulysses Grant reflected in his memoirs, "In time of war the President, being by the Constitution Commander-in-chief of the Army and Navy, is responsible for the selection of commanders."¹ In March of 1864, President Lincoln changed the course of the Civil War when he appointed Grant General-In-Chief of all the armies of the United States. A few days later, on March 18, William Tecumseh Sherman was promoted to Commander of the Division of Mississippi.² In April, as part of a spring campaign, Grant intended to move all parts of the army together and "somewhat towards a common centre."³ Grant proposed to Sherman, "You I propose to move against Johnston's army, to break it up and to get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their war resources."⁴ For Sherman, Atlanta was a strategic point and he observed it was "full of foundries, arsenals, and machine-shops, and I knew that its capture would be the death-knell of the Southern Confederacy."⁵

As Sherman began the general movement toward Atlanta, he was careful not to assault positions that were well fortified unless there was no other option. Notably, in his approach to Atlanta, he only attempted a frontal attack once to avoid a wearisome and dangerous march across rain-soaked roads in an attempt to pull the opposing army from an entrenched position.⁶ Sherman moved his army multiple times to flank the enemy and rear-flanked the opposing forces in Dalton and Resaca. Numerous times the cautious General Joseph E. Johnston was forced repeatedly to fall back and lose ground to Sherman's advancing army. Grant said, "The campaign to Atlanta was managed with the most consummate skill, the enemy being flanked out of one position after another all the way there."⁷ After one too many cautious retreats after yet again being flanked out of his position, Johnston was replaced by General John Bell Hood on June 17, 1864. When Sherman became aware of this change in command, he reached out to Hood's former West Point classmate, General John McAllister Schofield, and "learned that he was bold even to rashness."⁸ Sherman relayed this information throughout the army, and "every division commander was cautioned to be always prepared for battle in any shape."⁹

The change of commanders indicated a change in policy, although Grant believed that Johnston's Fabian-style tactics were the right choice. "Anything that could have prolonged the war a year beyond the time that it did finally close would probably have exhausted

the North to such an extent that they might then have abandoned the contest and agreed to a separation.”¹⁰ After the change in command, as expected by both Sherman and Grant, Hood went on the offensive only two days later, resulting in the bloodiest fighting to date in the campaign. Sherman’s army repelled Hood’s attempt, but Hood tried again immediately. On July 22, he sent a corps on an all-night march to expose the south flank of the Army of the Tennessee, led by General James Birdseye McPherson. The Union men repulsed the surprise attack and “inflicted half as many casualties on Hood’s army in one afternoon as it had suffered in ten weeks under Johnston.”¹¹ Unfortunately, McPherson was shot and killed when he rode into Confederate lines.

Sherman mourned his friend but kept to his skillful maneuvering, which lured Hood into reckless attacks. Military historian Sir Henry Basil Liddel Hart said about Sherman, “to force an opponent acting on the strategic defensive into such a succession of costly tactical offensives was an example of strategic artistry rarely seen in history.”¹² Sherman also had a mastery of logistics and learned a valuable lesson in his advance on Atlanta, as he temporarily cut loose from his railway supply line. As a result, he could supply and feed not only his armies and the animals supplying his armies but also hold the advantage while doing so.¹³ He would utilize this logistical strategy repeatedly to benefit the Union. Despite Sherman’s ability to supply his army and repel and withstand Hood’s attacks as he closed in upon Atlanta, the Southern press

predicted the defeat of Sherman’s army, and the Northern press did not offer much more hope.¹⁴

Toward the end of August, Sherman surprised Hood with a move that appeared to be a retreat from trenches but was instead destruction of railroads and roads to the South, beyond the opposing army defenses. When Hood realized Sherman had not retreated but was pursuing a different tactic by destroying supply lines, Hood attacked Sherman twenty miles south of Atlanta at Jonesboro. Hood’s army suffered heavy losses, and Sherman counterattacked. Finally, on September 1st, Hood destroyed everything of military value in Atlanta and abandoned the city.¹⁵ Sherman sent a telegraph to Halleck stating “Atlanta was ours, and fairly won.”¹⁶

The capture of Atlanta by General Sherman’s forces on September 2nd, 1864, had an immense impact. Across northern cities, 100-gun salutes echoed, and northern newspapers praised Sherman and called him “the greatest general since Napoleon.”¹⁷ Sherman’s success in Atlanta was also a political necessity, enabling Lincoln to secure victory in the forthcoming 1864 November presidential election. In a letter of thanks to Sherman, Lincoln bestowed his gratitude and that of the nation and said, “the marches, battles, sieges, and other military operations, that have signalized the campaign, must render it famous in the annals of war, and have entitled those who have participated therein to the applause and thanks of the nation.”¹⁸ Grant’s letter of thanks included an action that would impart a psychological

impact upon the combatant army; he wrote: "I have ordered a salute to be fired with shotted guns from every battery bearing upon the enemy."¹⁹

In Atlanta, Sherman spent a few weeks preparing for his next moves. The Union wanted Sherman's forces to proceed from Atlanta to Mobile, Alabama, yet Sherman rejected this proposal.²⁰ He believed that the port in Alabama was no longer significant. Instead, he thought it better to move towards Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia. Also, with General Hood and the Confederate army spread across the South, it would be cumbersome for Union forces to hold the railway and roads. The Confederate army could surprise attack targets, and the continual pursual of Hood's army would be a cat-and-mouse game that could last a long time. Sherman was weary of this type of warfare that cost lives on both sides on a continual basis.²¹ He told Grant that over 1,000 men per month could be lost if this continued.²² Sherman proposed something different, a march to the sea to "divide the Confederacy, to come upon the rear of Lee."²³ In a telegraph to Grant, he wrote, "Until we can repopulate Georgia, it is useless for us to occupy it; but the utter destruction of its roads, houses, and people, will cripple their military resources. By attempting to hold the roads, we will lose a thousand men each month, and will gain no result. I can make this march, and make Georgia howl!"²⁴

Grant initially hesitated about Sherman's plan to smash through to the sea and go on the offensive versus de-

fensive. Yet this type of campaign's psychological effect helped convince him.²⁵ Sherman also convinced Grant that it was possible to travel through the terrain in wintertime. President Lincoln was skeptical of this plan as he did not think it was a good idea for Sherman and his forces to press into enemy-held regions before the presidential election in November. Grant interceded on Sherman's behalf and persuaded Lincoln to agree with the proposed plan. Lincoln agreed, but only if the plan would be implemented after election day. General Sherman spent the next few weeks perusing the census records of the area in detail. These records helped him to determine which route would provide enough food and supplies for his army.

The campaign would become the most destructive one waged against the civilian population during the Civil War. General Sherman did not practice cruelty and was not spontaneous in his campaign. He was not fond of harming citizens and did not want to hurt or kill Confederate soldiers, though he did so while pursuing his goals. Many of these soldiers had been his friends before the war.²⁶ The purpose of the Union in the campaign was to break the spirit of the South's people and obliterate their ability to maintain the war. In 1863, Sherman stated,

War is upon us, none can deny it. It is not the choice of the Government of the United States, but of a faction; the Government was forced to accept the issue, or to submit to a degradation fatal and disgraceful to

all the inhabitants. In accepting war, it should be “pure and simple” as applied to the belligerents. I would keep it so, till all traces of the war are effaced; till those who appealed to it are sick and tired of it, and come to the emblem of our nation, and sue for peace. I would not coax them, or even meet them halfway, but make them so sick of war that generations would pass away before they would again appeal to it.²⁷

According to Sherman, the will to resist needed to be devastated, which included the devastation of the farms, railroads, and factories of the South. As he said in correspondence to General Henry W. Halleck on December 24, 1864, “we are not only fighting hostile armies, but a hostile people, and must make old and young, rich and poor, feel the hard hand of war.”²⁸ What he described was a total war philosophy.

On November 15th, 1864, Sherman and his soldiers left Atlanta, Georgia, to wage a campaign that lasted 20 days and spanned over 300 miles.²⁹ Before they left, Sherman requested the safe removal of citizens from the city and had the soldiers put to torch nearly all General Hood had left standing in Atlanta. In a letter to Sherman, General Hood protested this approach to warfare, writing, “And now, sir, permit me to say that the unprecedented measure you propose transcends, in studied and ingenious cruelty, all acts ever before brought to my attention in the dark history of war.”³⁰ In his response, Sherman

stated, “Talk thus to the marines, but not to me, who have seen these things, and who will this day make as much sacrifice for the peace and honor of the South as the best-born Southerner among you!”³¹

The army was split into two wings, and their destination was kept shrouded in secrecy.³² They marched across Georgia to Savannah with the purpose of crippling the Confederacy.³³ The total war strategy that Sherman and his army engaged in was brutal and devastating not only psychologically to civilians of the South but also in material devastation. He did not meet the army head-on with his army on a battlefield but in an indirect approach. As Sherman moved south, General Halleck offered advice to burn and salt the ground. Sherman’s response showed the sheer brutality he and his army were utilizing. He responded, “The truth is the whole army is burning with an insatiable desire to wreak vengeance upon South Carolina. I almost tremble at her fate, but feel that she deserves all that seems in store for her.”³⁴ South Carolina was the first state to secede from the Union on December 20, 1860.³⁵ It was also where the war began, with the bombardment of Fort Sumter in April of 1861. Sherman had stated, “We then knew that the war was actually begun, and though the South was openly, manifestly the aggressor, yet her friends and apologists insisted that she was simply acting on a justifiable defensive, and that in the forcible seizure of, the public forts within her limits the people were acting with reasonable prudence and foresight.”³⁶



"Old Tecumseh" Himself. Stereograph shows General William T. Sherman on horseback on the Union line near Atlanta in 1864. [Barnard, George N, photographer. "Old Tecumseh" Himself. United States, 1864. Hartford, Conn.: The War Photograph & Exhibition Company, No. 21 Linden Place Sept. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003653366/>.]

Sherman's army destroyed approximately 317 miles of the Central Georgia Railroad between Atlanta and Savannah.³⁷ As the soldiers ripped up the railroad ties, they used the wooden ties to make bonfires, around which they twisted the metal ties into bow shapes that became known as "Sher-

man's neckties."³⁸ This destruction ensured the railroad ties could not be used again. They also destroyed and burned the railroad depots, station buildings, bridges, and warehouses.³⁹ Communications were obliterated as the soldiers destroyed telegraph equipment. Cotton storehouses, gins, flour and salt mills,



Maj. Gen. Sherman and staff. This view was taken in the trenches before Atlanta, Ga. Stereograph shows Sherman standing with officers next to cannon before siege of Atlanta in 1864. [E. & H.T. Anthony , Publisher, Brady's National Photographic Portrait Galleries, photographer. Maj. Gen. Sherman and staff This view was taken in the trenches before Atlanta, Ga. United States Atlanta Georgia, None. [New-york: published by e. & h.t. anthony & co., american and foreign stereoscopic emporium, 591 broadway, photographed 1864, printed between 1869 and 1875?] Photograph. [https://www.loc.gov/item/2015647574/.](https://www.loc.gov/item/2015647574/)]

factories, workshops, sawmills, and tanneries that could be used for military purposes were also torched and destroyed. Not only did it cause the collapse of the Confederacy's ability to make gunpowder, but it also caused an inability to resupply the army.⁴⁰ Live-stock was bayoneted, and thousands of mules and horses were shot.

This widespread destruction and slaughter continued as Sherman's army marched through the South. It caused a psychological effect on the people as they witnessed and experienced the devastation. "As far as the eye could reach, the lurid flames of burning buildings lit up the heavens. I could

stand out on the veranda and for two or three miles watch them as they came on," said a Georgia woman.⁴¹ Foraging also caused a psychological impact on the civilian population. The soldiers robbed civilians of jewelry, pistols, silk dresses, family heirlooms, watches, silver plates, and anything of value.⁴² In addition, forests and woodlands were burned to prevent the timber from being used for supplies.

Once Sherman arrived in Savannah, he requested an audit of the destruction caused by his army to provide to his superiors. This audit showed his army had taken 13,294 heads of cattle, 10.4 million pounds of grain, 10.7 mil-



General William Tecumseh Sherman, seated at center, with his staff, including Oliver Otis Howard, John A. Logan, William B. Hazen, Jefferson C. Davis, Henry Warner Slocum, Joseph A. Mower, and Francis P. Blair Jr. [C.M. Bell, photographer. General Sherman and staff during Civil War. , ca. 1916. [Between 1873 and] Photograph. [https://www.loc.gov/item/2016712972/.](https://www.loc.gov/item/2016712972/)]

lion pounds of fodder, and 6,781 mules and horses, and it inflicted more than \$100 million in damages to the Georgia economy.⁴³ These actions were only one component of his total war strategy. The crushing of morale by inflicting fear and dread was another part of the strategy. Sherman stated his intent was to “whip the rebels, to humble their pride, to follow them to their innermost recesses, and make them fear and dread us.”⁴⁴ The estimated lives lost, wounded, or missing during Sherman’s March to the Sea numbered approximately 1,170 for the Union and 2,300 for the Confed-

erate forces.⁴⁵ The number of Union soldiers killed while foraging in Georgia is harder to tabulate, but the number of bodies found in an executed manner is approximately 64.⁴⁶ In comparison, at Gettysburg, the Union suffered approximately 23,000 casualties, and the Confederacy suffered a higher number, with approximately 28,000 wounded, killed, or missing.⁴⁷ Compared to many other battles in the Civil War, there were much fewer casualties overall during this campaign.

Sherman recognized the impact the March to the Sea had upon the peo-



Sherman's March to the Sea by Alexander Hay Ritchie. Engraving after F.O.C. Darley [Ritchie, Alexander Hay, Engraver, and Felix Octavius Carr Darley. Sherman's march to the sea / F.O.C. Darley fecit. United States, ca. 1868. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003679761/>.]

ple of the South. In his memoirs, he reflected, "Were I to express my measure of the relative importance of the march to the sea, and of that from Savannah northward, I would place the former at one, and the latter at ten, or the maximum."⁴⁸ Joseph Johnston said of Sherman's army, "when I heard that Sherman had not only started, but was marching through those very swamps at the rate of thirteen miles a day, making corduroy road every foot of the way, I made up my mind there had been no such army since the days of Julius Caesar."⁴⁹ However, Johnston would again face Sherman in the Carolinas as the war drew to a close. General Robert E. Lee convinced Confederate President

Jefferson Davis to reinstate Johnston as commander of the Confederate troops in Carolina in February of 1865.

This method of total war helped bring about a more expedient close to the Civil War. The March to the Sea and the scorched earth policy devastated the Confederacy physically and psychologically. Military supplies had been destroyed, and supply lines were devastated. The crushing of Southern morale and willpower to continue the war played a decisive role in the Confederate war effort.⁵⁰ When he brought his troops deep into enemy territory, Sherman demonstrated that the Confederacy could not protect the South's civilian population. The hard hand of war had been brought



Portrait of Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman, officer of the Federal Army [Brady's National Photographic Portrait Galleries, photographer. Portrait of Maj. Gen. William T. Sherman, officer of the Federal Army. United States, None. [Between 1860 and 1865] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2018666487/>.]"

to the homes and neighborhoods of the Southerners.⁵¹ It was profoundly damaging to the psyche of the people in the South. Liddell Hart observed, "No longer would the people of Georgia or any neighboring State credit the confident assurances of their leaders and press. To loss of faith the sequel is loss of hope, and then, in turn, lack of 'fight.'"⁵² General Sherman knew Southern resistance was fierce and set out to destroy it as he knew it would lead to success.⁵³ The war ended in May of 1865, five months after the March to the Sea.

Different interpretations of the war appeared in literature and print after the war ended, varying from viewing Sherman as a war criminal to a brilliant military tactician. Both Northerners and Southerners endorsed their version of the events of the war. Specifically, after the Confederacy was defeated, there was a movement Southerners began where they prolifically wrote their translation of the war. This movement and version of events became known as the "Lost Cause" history.⁵⁴ As stated by Gallagher and Nolan, "the Lost Cause was expressly a rationalization, a cover-up."⁵⁵ The Southern historian Edward A. Pollard coined the lost cause term in 1867 and was one of the progenitors of this history.⁵⁶ Other chief writers included both Jefferson Davis and Jubal Early.⁵⁷ Their motivation was to create a version of the Civil War that explained why the Confederacy was defeated. A distinctive element of this version of history was that it was written not by the winners but by the losers. In this accounting, they wanted to justify their motivations and actions

for themselves and other Confederates.⁵⁸ Their narrative put a positive spin on the motives, goals, and the defeat of the Confederacy, and their works achieved credence, as many in the South and the North believed the accountings. They vilified the Union generals, such as Grant and Sherman.⁵⁹ The Confederate generals were given higher status and possessed chivalrous behavior.⁶⁰ Other Union generals, such as Sherman, were labeled as butchers and portrayed as having taken cruel liberties with the Southern civilians. As such, they were viewed as war criminals. The "Lost Cause" history was passed on to future generations by the actions of white Southern women and veterans. They pushed the narrative to help cause remembrance of the war and honor those that died for the Southern cause.⁶¹

The Northern accountings portrayed Sherman differently. In some Northern newspapers, he found widespread acclaim.⁶² In an article published in the *New York Daily Tribune* in 1912, Sherman's March to the Sea received a positive, almost glowing portrayal. The author explains how Sherman's movement through the South was humane, and he tried to be careful with the property.⁶³ Sherman was concerned with successfully moving his men through swamps and other terrains. According to the author, the movements were skillful, and he viewed Sherman as an unconquerable general.⁶⁴ The Confederates were described as fleeing and an army that put up little resistance. The Northern account varied greatly from the Southern accountings of the war

events, and both portrayed Sherman's March differently.

William T. Sherman's total war strategy inspired future generations of war. Military historian Sir Basil Henry Liddell Hart's research and study of Sherman and Sherman's harsh, hard-war tactics helped make William Sherman famous as the father of modern total war. Liddell Hart considered William Sherman a military genius with a blend of contrasting qualities.⁶⁵ Sherman lacked faith in his vision and doubted his abilities until they could be realized and was both logically ruthless and compassionate.⁶⁶ The military brilliance of Sherman was realized in how as a general, he was able to take advantage of war conditions that were being changed by scientific advancements. While the Civil War began with antiquated weapons and military concepts, new types of communication and movement were accessible. The Civil War was the first war with the available electric telegraph, steamships, and railroads.⁶⁷ Advancements in technology led to muzzle muskets and breech-loading rifles, which stagnated more traditional battlefield tactical movements.

Transportation occurred on a large scale on railroads, which became unwieldy when amassed and the enemy cut off the lines. Once a rail line of supply was raided, this affected the integrity of the army and the civilian population. Sherman studied and learned how the growth of industrialization and the population in certain areas were dependent on weapons, supplies, transportation, and communication.⁶⁸ If certain areas

were targeted, it created an economic and moral vulnerability, and striking at these centers harmed the army more than striking at their forces.⁶⁹ This evolution in Sherman's thinking was made clear in his letter-writing of the time. This type of thinking pushed him far ahead of his time. It would foreshadow wars to come.⁷⁰

Liddell Hart drew a great comparison between Grant and Sherman as commanders. When Grant was given command in the West, and Sherman achieved command of his army, they succeeded with victories that opened Georgia to the Union army. Lincoln appointed Grant as supreme commander of the Union, and Grant succeeded as chief commander of the West. Sherman was provided ample men for offensive campaigns, and the capture of Atlanta was a victory for not only Sherman but Lincoln and the North.⁷¹ However, both Grant and Sherman differed in their visions of command. Grant applied practicality to his tactics; his primary objective was the enemy's army.⁷² Sherman started the war well-versed in original military tactics but learned from his experience to apply his original thoughts to his tactics. While Grant was focused on the enemy's army and the overall battle, Sherman focused his vision on more strategic points to gain victory without too many battles and fighting. The capture of Atlanta gave the Union Army control over important railways, machine shops, foundries, and arsenals. Sherman knew the city's importance to the Confederacy as a psychological symbol and meant to exploit it.⁷³

While armies are tied to supply lines as they move, Sherman showed his skill in cutting away from supply lines to move his army through Georgia. He allowed each of his men a few rations to carry and reduced all supply trains, clerical work in the field, tents, and ambulances.⁷⁴ Doing this significantly altered the maneuverability of Sherman's army. He ensured his army maintained a rigorous schedule and gave no excuse to delay movements.

In researching Sherman's tactics, Liddell Hart found that Sherman was confident in the psychological impact of his actions on the people and army.⁷⁵ Sherman knew that wrecking the railway system and moving quickly and destructively through the South with the minimum amount of supplies and foraging what his army needed would collapse the Confederacy's resistance.⁷⁶ Within four weeks, Sherman moved from Atlanta to the outskirts of Savannah. Liddell Hart quoted the Confederate commander General E.P. Alexander as saying, "[T]he moral effect of this march ... was greater than would have been the most decided victory."⁷⁷ Sherman's tactics demoralized many in the Confederate army and caused soldiers to desert the Confederacy and return to their homes at a high rate. In waging the March to the Sea campaign, Sherman proved to be a strategist who not only diagnosed causes for previous army paralysis but found remedies.⁷⁸ His new means of mobilization were strategic and converted his army into a mobile machine that was highly flexible.

Liddell Hart explained how Sherman's strategy foreshadowed the bomb-

ing campaign the Allies pursued in the Second World War.⁷⁹ People cannot surrender or escape from an attacker in the sky, which damages the psyche. The systematic bombing campaign and the land invasion of Germany worked towards the destruction of Germany's ability to wage war.⁸⁰ General Eisenhower had an order for the total defeat of Germany. The Allied airpower and large-scale bombing campaigns were critical to success. Not only did the bombing harm the economy that was used to wage war, but it also brought the horrors of war home to the people of Germany.⁸¹

World War II also saw a Pacific campaign by Admiral Nimitz that utilized strategies similar to Sherman's total war philosophy. He used the new technology of submarines to assist with his campaign and relied upon the most innovative information gained through technologically advanced intelligence from Fleet Radio Unit, Pacific (FRUPAC).⁸² The information provided indicators of an imminent Japanese strike. Using this information, Nimitz positioned his fleet to do the maximum amount of damage to the Japanese fleet. In addition, he utilized deception techniques which also helped lead to success.⁸³ Another tactic similar to Sherman's was the physical destruction of information-related targets to assist in cutting communication, eliminating crucial Japanese leadership.⁸⁴ Nimitz also supported the raid by Doolittle into enemy territory, which struck at the Japanese civilian population on a psychological level. The effect was shocking; it was the first time the Japa-

nese homeland and people had been attacked.⁸⁵ When the two atomic bombs were dropped, the final result on the people's psyche was devastating.

Sherman's total war influence is present in modern warfare and the United States' campaigns in the Middle East. The United States Strategy of war in Iraq includes Liddell Hart's strategy from Sherman, "fighting power is but one of the instruments of grand strategy—which should take account of and apply the power of financial pressure, of diplomatic pressure, of commercial pressure, and, not least, of ethical pressure, to weaken the opponents will".⁸⁶ The United States applied air warfare and financial and economic pressures on Iraq to weaken its morale.⁸⁷ The battle was not the primary goal; similarly, Sherman's main goal was not the army and battle. It was a means to produce decisions without serious fighting, as was done with Sherman's March to the Sea. Another strategy influenced by Sherman through Liddell Hart's research and writing is the indirect attack used in Iraq by the United States. A flanking movement through the desert cut off the Iraqi lines of communication and created a sense of dislocation that caused both physical and psychological effects for the Iraqi troops.⁸⁸

The continuous and heavy bombing also contributed to the physical and psychological crushing of morale before contact with troops on the land. It also jeopardized the supply and resupply ability of the enemy. Cruise missiles and stealth aircraft that could not be seen caused a max sense of confusion, cru-

cial to the psychological effect of the total war strategy.⁸⁹ The doctrine is known as shock and awe, which drew inspiration from Sherman's tactics. As he was the harbinger of psychological tactics utilized in modern warfare, he is rightly the American father of total war.⁹⁰

The March to the Sea that spanned over 300 miles and wreaked physical and psychological devastation to the South was a military success. Sherman soldiers lived off the land, moved quickly, and burned and destroyed infrastructure and supplies critical to the enemy. Even though it devastated both the land and the people, fewer lives were lost compared to many more significant battles. The March to the Sea and the methods of total war have been studied by historians, and the strategies have been used in modern warfare. While the tactics Sherman employed were brutal, it was a critical component of the Civil War that helped achieve success and bring about the end of the war. General Sherman became known as the father of American total war and inspired future generations with his tactics. The North applauded Sherman as a hero, and the South demonized him as a butcher.

About the Author

Gilda Bour is an independent historian, focused on Civil Rights, the early American colonial period, and the Civil War. She has an MA in History (2021), and a BA in Psychology (2020) and enjoys traveling for the purpose of visiting historical societies and archives when possible.

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