

TOTAL WAR

by Susan J. Hofstetter

Major
General
William T.
Sherman



General
Joseph E.
Johnston



Lieutenant
General
John B.
Hood



Despite the growing distaste for war in 1864, Union major general William T. Sherman was committed to seeing it through to the end. His beliefs were simple: The South had seceded and started the war. War must be made so painful to Southerners that they would never try it again.

When Ulysses S. Grant became commander of all Union armies, he left Sherman in charge of the Western Theater of the war. Grant directed Sherman to “move against [Confederate general Joseph E.] Johnston’s army, to break it up, and get into the interior of the enemy’s



country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their war resources." How Sherman carried out those orders were up to him.

Sherman proposed to move east from Chattanooga, Tennessee, to the Atlantic Ocean. His initial destination was Atlanta, the capital of Georgia. Atlanta was a major industrial and transportation hub. If Sherman could take the city, it would be a major blow to the Confederacy's ability to fight.

In early May, Sherman set out. Under his command were about 110,000 troops from three separate

armies: the Army of the Tennessee, the Army of the Ohio, and the Army of the Cumberland.

Johnston and about 55,000 Confederate troops tried to stop Sherman's movement through Georgia. Johnston knew he was outnumbered. He believed that if he could keep his army intact and let the war drag on, the North would sue for peace. So he assumed a defensive position in Sherman's path and put up only light resistance before slowly retreating.

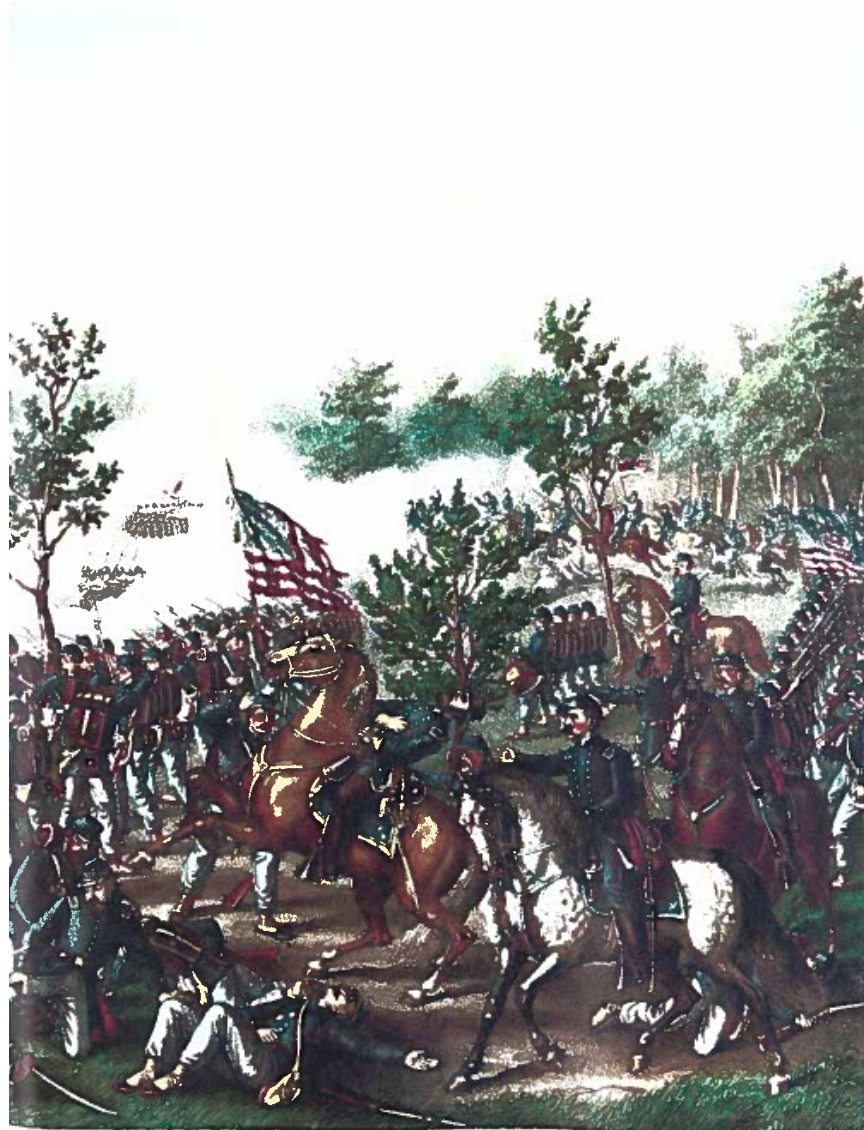
Throughout May, Sherman and Johnston met at Rocky Face Ridge, Resaca, New Hope Church,

Pickett's Mill, and Dallas. Sherman refused to launch a large-scale attack and instead tried to flank each of Johnston's positions—until the two armies reached Kennesaw Mountain. There, on June 27, Sherman believed that Johnston had spread his line too thin. He ordered an assault on Johnston's entrenched troops. But the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain was a Confederate victory. Within a week, however, Sherman resumed moving his troops around Johnston and heading toward Atlanta.

Johnston's failure to aggressively attack the enemy frustrated Confederate president Jefferson Davis. In mid-July, Davis replaced Johnston with Lieutenant General John B. Hood. By this time, Sherman had reached Atlanta's city limits. Although Hood tried to engage Sherman—at Peachtree Creek, Ezra Church, and Jonesboro—Sherman began destroying the railroads leading to Atlanta. He then planned to surround Hood's army within the city and annihilate it.

On the evening of September 1, Hood abandoned Atlanta rather than be captured in it. Before leaving, he blew up his supplies so that they would not fall into the Union army's hands. Sherman occupied Atlanta the next day. His telegram to President Abraham Lincoln stated: "Atlanta is ours, and fairly won." After declaring the city a Union military base, Sherman forced its citizens to leave.

In mid-September, Hood tried to draw Sherman out of the city by threatening Union supply lines to Chattanooga. But Sherman refused to take the bait. Instead, he split up



his force. He sent Major General George H. Thomas to Nashville to deal with Hood (see page 38) while he focused on the next leg of his campaign: continuing east until he reached Savannah on the Atlantic Ocean.

For two months, Sherman made Atlanta his base of operations. On November 15, he began his March to the Sea. In order for his 62,000 remaining soldiers to move quickly, Sherman severed his supply and communication lines. His army cut a path more than 60 miles wide and 300 miles long through the heart of the Confederacy.

Sherman permitted his troops to forage for supplies from the countryside. Although he gave strict orders not to *pillage*, his men took anything that would assist them

Pillage means to plunder or rob of goods by force.

on their march. This included cattle, sheep,

poultry, bacon, coffee, and other rations. What the Union soldiers did not take, they often burned or destroyed. They also ripped up rail lines, bridges, and culverts. Sherman estimated that his soldiers inflicted \$100 million of damage in Georgia. Sherman's prediction to Grant that he would "make Georgia howl" was realized.

Union soldiers were within view of Savannah by December 3. The army met no resistance until one of Sherman's officers stepped on a land mine. Sherman then ordered Confederate prisoners to the front of the line to ensure the safety of his men.

By December 10, Sherman was laying siege to Savannah. Within another week, the Confederate general in charge of defending the city, William J. Hardee, slipped away rather than surrender. By December 21, Sherman occupied

Savannah. Since departing from Atlanta and cutting his lines of communication, Sherman had not been heard from for more than a month. He sent a telegram to Lincoln that read, "I beg to present you as a Christmas gift the City of Savannah." His total war, scorched-earth approach left the South devastated and made the outcome of the Civil War almost inevitable. ★

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BEFORE WILLIAM T. SHERMAN LEFT FOR HIS MARCH TO THE SEA, HE ORDERED THE MILITARY INSTALLATIONS IN ATLANTA BURNED. WHEN THE FIRE GREW OUT OF CONTROL, MUCH OF THE CITY WAS DESTROYED.

As Sherman's army marched through Georgia, the countryside felt the pain of war as soldiers seized food and supplies from citizens.

