

**TITLE**

Grant and Sherman  
and Their Campaigns of  
1864-65

By  
David Weader

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Honors in History:

Samuel The Leveney  
Bennett R. Bean  
Joel F. Bunch

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## Introduction: The State of the Union War Effort, 1864, and Planning for Victory

One of the biggest misconceptions regarding the American Civil War is that because of the superior manpower and resources of the North, total Union victory was simply a matter of time. As the fourth year of the war began in 1864, however, the Union had failed to gain ultimate victory. Even after the successes of 1863--major victories at Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and Chattanooga--the Union still faced major problems; success of the Northern war effort remained in doubt. The Union faced a political situation in which winning the war was likely impossible unless President Abraham Lincoln won reelection in November 1864; the opposition Democratic party leaned toward a cease-fire and negotiations for a restoration of the Union--however, since the Confederacy was committed to independence negotiations were bound to fail, with the prospect of restarting the war implausible. Lincoln's reelection effort relied heavily on successful military ventures during 1864. Thus, the Northern armies needed to conduct military campaigns to inflict serious blows on the Confederacy, and by succeeding assure the reelection of Lincoln.

The officers leading the two main Union forces when the spring campaigns of 1864 began were Lieutenant General Ulysses Simpson Grant, who attached himself to the Army of the Potomac in the eastern theater, and Major General William Tecumseh Sherman, with a force that comprised the armies of the Cumberland, the Tennessee, and the Ohio, in the western theater. Their experiences over the war's first three years led Grant, Sherman, and Lincoln to conclude

that total victory could come only through a policy of exhaustion. A big obstacle to gaining total victory previously was that by the middle of the 19th century complete destruction of an opposing army had become virtually impossible. Technological improvements in the instruments of war improved firepower so that much greater damage was inflicted on opposing armies. As a result, decisive victories were difficult to achieve on the field; surprised or outnumbered troops gained the ability to hold their own while inflicting heavy casualties. When a sound victory was achieved it was not followed up because the victor was too bruised and disorganized; as a consequence, defeated armies were able to get away and recuperate.

Thus, the policy of exhaustion seemed to offer the best possible recourse. It required continuous pressure by all Union forces on enemy armies and deep penetration into Southern territory, the latter to destroy the logistical support of the Confederate military. By denying the main Confederate armies food, clothing, weapons, and ammunition these armies would be rendered ineffective; also, the constant pressure on all fronts would check the movement of troops from one Confederate army to another. The strategy also aimed at wearing down the will of the Southern people to fight and uphold their government. Finally the strategy proposed to threaten railroad hubs and manufacturing areas so that Confederate armies would be forced to attack advancing Union forces. Such defensive-offensives by Confederates would enable the larger Union armies to inflict heavy casualties on the attackers. "The strategy of exhaustion...was

aimed at wrecking the South politically, economically, and militarily."<sup>1</sup>

The strategy of exhaustion also posed problems for the North. It called for deep penetration into Southern territory, which meant that huge amounts of supplies would be needed. Advances against resistance, like Grant against Lee and Sherman against Johnston and Hood, required massive logistical support. By driving deeper into the South, the Union would move past usable rivers--like the Tennessee and Cumberland, which had aided the invasion of Tennessee, and the Mississippi. This meant that long, vulnerable railroad supply lines through hostile country would be required. This in turn meant that these lines would have to be guarded by increasing numbers of troops--the deeper the penetration, the longer the supply line, hence the need for more troops to defend it. Thus, the numerical superiority of the Union forces would be diminished by the defensive necessity of guarding supply lines.<sup>2</sup>

Due to these problems and the virtual indestructability of mid-19th century armies, Grant and Sherman decided that the strategy of exhaustion could best be implemented and supported through a policy of raids in strength. Large forces were to move rapidly to objectives, destroy them, and quickly move on to other objectives. Occupation forces would not be necessary because enemy territory would not be occupied. These strikes would not be like the spectacular, but often transitory, cavalry raids; infantry, in large

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<sup>1</sup>McDonough and Jones, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup>McDonough and Jones, p. 15.

numbers and with engineers, was capable of much more thorough destruction of war resources.<sup>3</sup> Grant and Sherman felt that they had come up with a realistic way finally to close the door on the possibility of Confederate independence; and they were the two men who would lead the effort. As it turned out, Sherman attached himself to the idea of raiding, especially after Atlanta, while Grant stuck to engaging Lee's army; each carried out a different part of the strategy of exhaustion

In the final analysis, Grant's and Sherman's campaigns of 1864-65 depended on the close personal relationship between the two Union generals that underlay their working relationship; that working relationship, vital to the success of the Northern effort, cannot fully be understood without appreciating their ties of trust and friendship. In a situation where they might have been natural rivals--they had become the two most important men in the Union army--they remained perfect friends. The relationship was unique because of that situation and because of the profound differences in their personalities; they were virtual opposites of each other in almost every way.

Sherman was a tall, sharp featured, angular man, 44 years of age, with flashing eyes. His speech was rapid, augmented with constant gesticulation, and his mind was always working on ideas that he was eager to express. Witty, eloquent, and logical, he was incessantly moving around, talking, smoking, or giving orders. He inspired one observer to remark that he "perspired thought at every

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<sup>3</sup>McDonough and Jones, pp. 17-19.

pore;"<sup>4</sup> another said of him: "every attribute of person or temper or intellect indicate genius."<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Grant, age 42, was shorter, stouter, and slightly stooped. His speech was slow and almost embarrassed but always very direct. Unimpressive in appearance, he almost seemed to convey an air of carelessness; to a casual observer there seemed to be no sign of greatness in the man.<sup>6</sup>

These two men were as different as night and day, yet they were drawn to each other. Grant was charmed, interested, and fascinated by Sherman, while Sherman relied confidently on the strength and judgment of Grant.<sup>7</sup> General O. O. Howard, who served under both men, offered keen insight into their personalities and their relationship. "Their unusual friendship...was always evident and did not grow from likeness, but from unlikeness. They appeared rather the compliments of each other...It was a marriage of characters, in sympathy, by the adjustment of differences."<sup>8</sup>

This friendship also drew on a base of similar prewar experiences. Neither man had experienced any lasting success prior to the war. Sherman had served an undistinguished term in the army after graduation from West Point--he did not serve in the Mexican War; he had tried his hand in banking and law, failing in each attempt. Grant had left the army in 1854 after serving in the Mexican War; he had also failed in farming and in business. In the early years of the war, both men suffered under public scrutiny for

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<sup>4</sup>Williams, p. 49.

<sup>5</sup>Burne, p. 71.

<sup>6</sup>Williams, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup>Macartney, p. 292.

<sup>8</sup>Macartney, p. 284.

exaggerated personal problems--Sherman was labeled insane, Grant a drunkard. The sense of common hardship and unjust persecution contributed to the attraction between the two men and helped cement their relationship.

The working relationship between the two Union leaders began during Grant's operations against Forts Henry and Donelson in Tennessee. Their friendship soon blossomed. During the siege of Fort Donelson, Sherman, Grant's senior in rank at the time, commanded the zone in Grant's rear. Sherman cooperated with Grant extremely well, asking Grant to "call upon him for any assistance he could render and saying that if he could be of service at the front...he would waive rank."<sup>9</sup> Shortly after Donelson, Grant was promoted and Sherman began to serve under him. Over the next two years, through Shiloh and the Vicksburg and Chattanooga campaigns, the trust and friendship continued to grow. By the time 1864 began, Grant and Sherman were the best of friends and had absolute confidence in each other.

### The First Moves of 1864

Although the major campaigns of 1864 developed subsequent to Grant's appointment as general-in-chief of all Union armies, Grant and Sherman had been making plans and begun to conduct operations before Grant's promotion. During the winter of 1863-64,

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<sup>9</sup>Grant. p. 213.



Grant sat in Chattanooga as commander of all Union forces between the Mississippi River and the Allegheny Mountains. With Sherman's counsel, he devised a campaign strategy for his forces in the West that embodied the principles of the strategy of exhaustion. Grant chose the obvious direction for the campaign's main thrust. He had split the Confederacy down the Mississippi River the previous summer; he now planned to split it again, this time along a line from Chattanooga through Atlanta to some point on either the Gulf or Atlantic coast. In support of the main drive from Chattanooga, Grant proposed a thrust from New Orleans to Mobile, Alabama, and eventually northward toward Montgomery and the manufacturing areas of Alabama.

Grant planned that both forces would smash railroads and consume or destroy food supplies. His forces were to advance and destroy along a strategic line rather than attempt to occupy vast stretches of Confederate territory.<sup>10</sup> After Shiloh, and especially during the Vicksburg campaign, Grant and Sherman realized that this war was different, there was no great gulf between civilian and military; they began to develop a concept of total war. Both believed the rebellion could not be suppressed short of complete conquest. In the words of Bruce Catton: "Rebel armies had to be destroyed; with them must be destroyed the ability to keep armies in existence," and that "one must be utterly ruthless in seizing or destroying...property, if that property might be used to support the Confederate armies."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>McDonough and Jones, p. 19

<sup>11</sup>Catton, p. 106

Grant saw an advantage in utilizing a two-pronged advance. He had achieved his brilliant success at Vicksburg by totally confusing two enemy forces. He hoped for the same kind of result here; he felt that if he could confuse the Confederates and advance unopposed for several days he might achieve the success of Vicksburg. Grant planned two separate thrusts so that they would serve as diversions and support for one another--if the Confederates concentrated to block one force, which was all their numbers would really allow them to do, the other force would be able to continue advancing unopposed.<sup>12</sup>

Before putting this plan into action, Grant and Sherman decided to send a combined force of cavalry and infantry on a raid into Mississippi, with Meridian its objective. They wanted to test the principle of raiding in force, which was vital to their policy of exhaustion. Such a raid would also provide an opportunity to wreck transportation and supplies in an area of the Deep South that had yet to be scarred by war and in turn deny those resources to the main Confederate army facing them, the Army of Tennessee, based in northern Georgia.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the Confederates still had a substantial force in Mississippi, which threatened the Mississippi River; Grant and Sherman wanted to check this threat with the move through the state.

Early in January 1864, Sherman went to Memphis, in the Department of the Tennessee, which he commanded, to gather troops and organize the raid into Mississippi. According to Sherman's

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<sup>12</sup>McDonough and Jones, p.19

<sup>13</sup>McDonough and Jones, p. 19

Memoirs, the immediate military objective of the "expedition was to strike the roads inland, so to paralyze the rebel forces that we could take from the defense of the Mississippi River the equivalent of a corps of twenty-thousand men, to be used in the next Georgia campaign."<sup>14</sup> To accomplish this he planned to take the bulk of his force to Vicksburg and drive eastward across the state, through Jackson to Meridian. In conjunction with this move, Sherman wanted his main cavalry force, numbering over eight thousand men under the command of General Sooy Smith, to move south on Meridian from Memphis and destroy the Mobile and Ohio Railroad and its connections east, engage enemy cavalry, and join Sherman near Meridian on February 10. During this sweep, Smith was to employ the ideas of the raid in force and the policy of exhaustion, destroying not only communications but resources, as well. In a dispatch to Smith on January 27, 1864, Sherman said:

"From Okolona north you will find abundance of forage collected along the railroad, and the farmers have corn standing in the fields. Take liberally of all these, as well as horses mules, cattle, etc. As a rule respect dwellings and families as something too sacred to be disturbed by soldiers, but mills, barns, sheds, stables, and such like things use for the benefit or convenience of your command."<sup>15</sup>

Sherman reached Vicksburg on February 1 and spent several days gathering details about the interior and defenses of Mississippi. The Confederate force opposing Sherman consisted of two divisions each of cavalry and infantry, which were divided between Canton and Brandon and unaware of the impending strike. On February 3,

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<sup>14</sup>Sherman, p. 422

<sup>15</sup>Sherman, pp. 452-453

the Union force moved out of Vicksburg in two columns, the right led by General James McPherson and the left by General Stephen Hurlbut. Sherman issued orders to his officers intended to make sure the strike would be in the spirit of the strategy of exhaustion and raid in force. In his Special Field Orders, No. 11, Sherman stated:

"The expedition is one of celerity, and all things must tend to that. Corps commanders and staff officers will see that our movements are not encumbered by wheeled vehicles improperly loaded. Not a tent, from commander-in-chief down, will be carried."<sup>16</sup>

Moving through Jackson on February 6, Sherman's force entered Meridian eight days later. It stayed there for five days.

According to Sherman:

"We at once set to work to destroy an arsenal, immense storehouses, and the railroad in every direction...a large force of infantry was kept at work all the time on breaking up the Mobile & Ohio Railroad south and north; also the Jackson & Selma Railroad, east and west. I was determined to damage these roads so that they could not be used again for the rest of the war."<sup>17</sup>

On February 20, the Union force withdrew from Meridian and slowly fell back to Vicksburg, concluding the raid. Although General Smith failed in his mission, Sherman and Grant both felt that this raid had been very successful. Their objectives had been achieved: Confederate forces were confused and slow to react; Confederate President Jefferson Davis, revealing his failure to understand the objectives of the Union campaign, announced that Sherman had retreated in defeat; Confederate transportation lines were badly damaged; and valuable supplies had been set aflame. Sherman

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<sup>16</sup>Sherman, p. 451

<sup>17</sup>Sherman, pp. 420-421

proved that the raid in strength was possible, which meant that he and Grant would be able to implement the policy of exhaustion with confidence. Another equally significant result was that Grant's confidence and trust in Sherman's command capabilities, already great, were strengthened even more. <sup>18</sup>

In March 1864, before Grant was able to carry out his well devised plan for Georgia and Alabama, Lincoln promoted him to lieutenant-general and named him general-in -chief of all Union armies. Sherman wanted Grant to stay in the Western theater and from there direct all Union operations. Grant preferred this idea but felt it was necessary to go to Washington and then into the field against General Robert E. Lee. Regardless of the importance of the Western theater of operations, the Confederacy would not be defeated if Lee's army was not pinned down and defeated. Grant placed little faith in the ability to the Army of the Potomac, the main Union army in the East, to pin down Lee without himself there in person; therefore Grant found it necessary to move east.

Grant pushed hard for Sherman to succeed him as head of the Western theater. His friendship and faith in Sherman's command capabilities played a crucial role in Sherman's appointment. At this time Sherman was not particularly well regarded by most political leaders in Washington. He was basically known only for his failure at Chickasaw Bluff in the December 1862 Vicksburg campaign and his rumored insanity early in the war. Grant's determined efforts

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<sup>18</sup>McDonough and Jones, p. 20

guaranteed Sherman's promotion--he "urged the appointment and said he would stake his own reputation on Sherman's success."<sup>19</sup>

An exchange of private letters between Grant and Sherman shortly after Grant's promotion revealed the depth to which their friendship had grown. Writing to Sherman on March 4, 1864, Grant credited his success to the diligent work of his subordinates, most notably Sherman:

"Whilst I have been eminently successful in this War...no one feels more than me how much of this success is due to the energy, skill, and harmonious putting forth of that energy and skill, of those who it has been my good fortune to have occupying a subordinate position under me...What I want is to express my thanks to you...whom, above all others, I feel indebted for whatever I have had of success...How far your advice and suggestions have been of assistance you know. How far your execution of whatever has been given you to do entitles you to the reward I am receiving you cannot know as well as me. I feel all the gratitude this letter would express, giving it the most flattering construcion."<sup>20</sup>

Sherman's reply to this letter was very revealing:

"You are now Washington's legitimate successor, and occupy a position of almost dangerous elevation; but if you can continue as heretofore to be yourself, simple, honest, and unpretending, you will enjoy through life the respect and love of friends, and the homage of millions of human beings who will award to you a large share for securing to them and their descendents a government of law and stability."

Sherman went on to say:

"Until you had won Donelson, I confess I was almost cowed by the terrible array of anarchical elements

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<sup>19</sup>Macartney, p. 290

<sup>20</sup>Grant, p. 1046

that presented themselves at every point; but that victory admitted the ray of light which I have followed ever since."

Sherman continued:

"I believe you are as brave, patriotic, and just, as the great prototype Washington; as unselfish, kind-hearted, and honest as a man should be; but the chief characteristic in your nature is the simple faith in success you have always manifested, which I can liken to nothing else than the faith a Christian has in his Saviour.

This faith gave you your victory at Shiloh and Vicksburg. Also, when you have completed your best preparations, you go into battle without hesitation, as at Chattanooga--no doubts, no reserve; and I tell you that it was this that made us act with confidence. I knew wherever I was that you thought of me, and if I got in a tight place you would come--if alive."<sup>21</sup>

Obviously, each of these men felt very close to the other; believed his own success was due, in large part, to the other; and showed great respect for the abilities of the other. Sherman's reference to George Washington demonstrated his great respect for Grant; Washington had been dead for barely sixty years; the memory of him was still very real and any comparison with him was a compliment of the highest order. With this personal and working relationship of such great mutual respect, Grant and Sherman entered the major offensives of spring 1864.

### Grant's Plans for 1864

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<sup>21</sup>Sherman, p. 428

When Grant assumed command of all Federal forces, the Union controlled and guarded the Mississippi River from St. Louis to its mouth and held the line of the Arkansas River, giving the Union effective control of territory north of the Arkansas; east of the Mississippi River, the Federals controlled everything north of the Memphis and Charleston Railroad as far east as Chattanooga, i.e., nearly all of Tennessee; in the eastern theater, West Virginia, a state since 1863, was held, as was Virginia north of the Rapidan River and east of the Blue Ridge Mountains; finally the Union held points all along the Southern seacoast. The balance of southern territory remained in the hands of the Confederates. But Grant was not concerned with controlling this territory. He was now in a position, as head of all Union forces, to do what he had always wanted to do: strike through the deep South, cutting the Confederacy into smaller pieces and destroying the war potential that kept its armies in the field.<sup>22</sup>

In order to gain the results he desired, Grant needed to have all his armies move simultaneously and continuously. At this time Union forces were divided among nineteen departments, although four of the western departments had been combined into one military division. The Army of the Potomac formed a separate command and had no territorial limits. Thus, Grant had to coordinate and deal with seventeen separate commanders. According to Grant:

"Before this time these various armies had acted separately and independently of each other, giving the

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<sup>22</sup>Catton, p. 117



enemy an opportunity of often depleting one command, not pressed, to reinforce another more actively engaged. I determined to stop this."<sup>23</sup>

Grant believed that all the parts of the Union force had to work together to succeed. He devised his plans for action accordingly:

"My general plan now was to concentrate all the force possible against the Confederate armies in the field... Accordingly I arranged for a simultaneous movement all along the line. Sherman was to move from Chattanooga, Johnston's army and Atlanta being his objective points. Crook, commanding in West Virginia, was to move to the mouth of the Gauley River...the Virginia and Tennessee Railroad to be his objective...Sigel was in command in the Valley of Virginia. He was to advance up the valley. Butler was to advance by the James River, having Richmond and Petersburg as his objectives...Banks, in the Department of the Gulf, was ordered to assemble all troops he had at New Orleans in time to join in the general move. Mobile to be his objective."<sup>24</sup>

Grant designed all these moves with the objective of defeating the Confederacy. The main military goal in this quest was the engagement and defeat of Lee in Virginia. According to Grant:

"Lee, with the capital of the Confederacy, was the main end to which we were all working. Johnston, with Atlanta, was an important obstacle in the way of our accomplishing the result aimed at, and was therefore almost an independent objective. It was of less importance only because the capture of Johnston and his army would not produce so immediate and decisive a result in closing the rebellion as would the possession of Richmond, Lee and his army. All other troops were employed exclusively in support of these two movements."<sup>25</sup>

Grant here illustrated his belief in overriding importance of the defeat of the main enemy army and capture of its capital.

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<sup>23</sup>Grant, p. 477

<sup>24</sup>Grant, pp. 477, 478, 481

<sup>25</sup>Grant, p. 489

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### Grant and His First Moves Against Lee

Grant was, and has been, seen by many as a plodding, unimaginative general. This view of his leadership resulted from the picture his appearance and personality seemed to paint. But Grant was certainly not a plodder who could only win with great advantages in his favor. His greatest campaign, Vicksburg, was one of military brilliance; it was one of finesse, daring decisions, fast movement, and the ability to see and exploit an opening before it closed.<sup>26</sup> He also learned from his previous military experiences in the war. At Shiloh he assumed the enemy would do what he expected and afterwards he would never again underestimate the purpose of his opponent or neglect the important principle of precaution. At Fort Donelson he learned, in the words of T. Harry Williams, "in every battle there came a time when both sides paused in exhaustion, and that was when the outcome was decided--the general who had the moral courage to continue fighting would win."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Catton, p. 104

<sup>27</sup>Williams, pp. 88, 92

When he first faced Lee in the spring of 1864, Grant brought with him a type of leadership and character in the field not yet seen in the Union. Above all other Northern generals, he grasped the idea that the ultimate objective in war is the destruction of the enemy's principal army. He believed in the value of effective raids but subordinated them to the task of defeating the main opposing army. Until that army was defeated on the field the war could not end; those raids could contribute to the demise of the opposing army but could not bring about its defeat singlehandedly.

Grant's theory of war was, in his own words: "Find out where your enemy is. Get at him as soon as you can. Strike at him as hard as you can and as often as you can, and keep moving on."<sup>28</sup> His singleness of aim and ability to keep one overriding vision in focus at all times set him apart. What distinguished him further was that in his focus on his goal he did not tie himself down to the traditions, rules, and doctrines of waging war--his development, along with Sherman, of the strategy of exhaustion and raids in strength illustrated that point. Grant viewed his success and others' failure in this way:

"Some of our generals failed because they worked everything out by rule. They knew what Frederick did at one place and Napoleon at another. They were always thinking about what Napoleon would do. Unfortunately for their plans, the rebels would be thinking about something else. I don't underrate the value of military knowledge, but if men make war in slavish observance of rules they will fail...even Napoleon showed that; for my impression is that his first success came because he made war in his own way, and not in imitation of

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<sup>28</sup>Williams, p. 105

others."<sup>29</sup>

Grant certainly waged war like no general before him, possessed character, and, as Sherman said, a simple faith in success, not yet seen in the North. With this character and faith Grant entered the Virginia campaign to face the Confederacy's greatest general and army, Robert E. Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia.

Grant's first objective in Virginia was to engage Lee's army. The capture or defeat of Lee's army would result in the fall of Richmond. Grant's problem was to devise a way to draw Lee into the open field for battle and keep him from falling back into his defenses around Richmond. In the spring of 1864 the Army of the Potomac was concentrated north of the Rapidan River near Brandy Station, where it had spent the winter. The Army of Northern Virginia was concentrated near Orange on the southern bank of the Rapidan, about 25 miles southwest of Brandy Station.

Grant had three possible ways to draw Lee into the open: he could pretend to be withdrawing and lure Lee into crossing the Rapidan in pursuit of him; he could make a move around Lee's left flank and threaten his communications with Richmond; or he could make a move around Lee's right flank and threaten Lee's communications from that direction. Grant never seriously considered the first option; the political situation in the North dictated that he start his campaign by moving forward, not backward, in addition, Lee would not fall for the bait. But both of the other two strategies had attractive as well as negative aspects. The move around Lee's left would provide Grant with open country,

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<sup>29</sup>Macartney, pp. 282-83

which would accentuate Grant's numerical advantage, and especially his edge in artillery; and it would cut off Lee's supplies from the Shenandoah Valley. But this move was vulnerable to being quickly spotted and moved against; it would increase the distance between Grant and General Benjamin Butler's army on the James River.

Operating in conjunction with Grant, Butler was to move on Richmond and its supply lines from the southeast. The move around Lee's right would enable Grant to shift his supply base to one of the several inlets or rivers of Chesapeake Bay and also provide open ground for battle once the wooded terrain south of the Rapidan was passed; but that wooded terrain posed the big problem for this move--travel through it was difficult; Lee was familiar with it; and Grant's superior artillery would be wasted if fighting started there. In addition, Grant's original supply line would be uncovered while in the woods.<sup>30</sup> Grant was well aware of the positives and negatives of each possibility.<sup>31</sup>

On May 4, 1864 the Army of the Potomac moved south across the Rapidan River into the wooded terrain known as the Wilderness(see the maps at the end of the paper). This was to be the first step in the move around Lee's right flank. Grant had under his command a force of 121,000 men, divided into four corps of infantry and one corps of cavalry. Three of those infantry corps, the Second, the Fifth, and the Sixth, formed the Army of the Potomac and hence remained under the direct command of General George Meade, still that army's commanding officer. The other infantry corps, the Ninth,

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<sup>30</sup>Burne, pp. 7,8

<sup>31</sup>Grant, pp. 481-83

was under command of Grant. This arrangement produced some problems throughout the campaign; while the Ninth corps marched and worked side by side with the other three corps, it was not part of the same command structure, which complicated coordination during battle. The situation that produced this situation--Grant's presence in the field with the Army of the Potomac--also created some tension. Grant left the handling of the Army of the Potomac in battle and other detail to Meade, but in essence the Army of the Potomac was led by Grant.

Lee's army consisted of approximately 61,000 men, only half Grant's number. These men were divided into three corps of infantry, First, Second, and Third, and one corps of cavalry. While the Army of Northern Virginia was significantly outnumbered, it enjoyed the advantage of having able, experienced commanders operating in familiar territory. In addition, Lee was well aware of the political situation in the North and what he could do to exacerbate it. He said:

"...if we could keep the Confederate Army between General Grant and Richmond, checking him for a few months longer...some crisis in public affairs or change in public opinion, at the North might induce the authorities at Washington to let the Southern States go."<sup>32</sup>

Grant sought to avoid a fight in the Wilderness if at all possible and therefore wanted to move quickly through the Wilderness because his right flank would be exposed, an inviting target for Lee. By striking the leading element of Grant's army, the Fifth Corps, on May 5, Lee forced Grant into a battle he did not want in the

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<sup>32</sup>Burne, p. 9

Wilderness. The battle lasted two days, with each side suffering heavy casualties.

The Wilderness was certainly not a victory for Grant. He engaged his whole army, suffered heavy casualties, and gained nothing. Grant could now retreat across the Rapidan, continue to bang away at Lee on the same ground, or continue around Lee's right flank. It was really not much of a decision for Grant; he would not retreat--he was made of sterner stuff than previous Union generals--and it was impractical to continue fighting in the Wilderness. By electing to continue moving around Lee's right he could get into more open country, change his base to another river, and show Lee and his own army that he had not been diverted from his purpose. The drawback was that he had already tipped his hand to Lee by originally trying to get around Lee's right; Lee might very well anticipate this next move and block. Still, Grant felt this was his best, indeed his only real, option. <sup>33</sup>

Grant's next objective was Spotsylvania. He said:

" My object in moving to Spotsylvania was twofold: first, I did not want Lee to get back to Richmond in time to attempt to crush Butler before I could get there; second, I wanted to get between his army and Richmond if possible; and, if not, to draw him into the open field."<sup>34</sup>

Lee quickly realized Grant's intentions and moved to beat him to Spotsylvania. The force that arrived first would be between the other army and Richmond. Lee reached Spotsylvania just before Grant and firmly blocked his path.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Burne, p. 21

<sup>34</sup>Grant, p. 540

<sup>35</sup>Burne, p. 26

Lee's army was firmly entrenched in a horseshoe shaped line that formed a sharp salient at its northern end. Grant decided to attack Lee's position rather than try to move around his flank again. Grant wrote a letter to Chief of Staff General Henry Halleck on May 11 succinctly stating his position: "I am now sending back to Belle Plain all my wagons for a fresh supply of provisions and ammunition, and purpose to fight it out on this line of it takes all summer."<sup>36</sup> This statement of intent was significant; it signaled Grant's willingness to settle into operations that meant heavy casualties--the war of attrition had begun in earnest. Grant did not abandon the idea of flanking Lee--it was to remain the major feature of his campaign--but if he could not turn Lee's flank decisively he was willing to slug it out with Lee--Grant could afford to do this and he knew it.<sup>37</sup> But he also ran the risk of suffering heavy enough casualties to jeopardize the Lincoln administration.

Constant fighting raged at Spotsylvania from May 10 to May 20, with Lee thwarting all Union thrusts. While Grant was meeting with little success at Spotsylvania, he did not become discouraged. He said: "But this was no time for repining. I immediately gave orders for a movement by the left flank, on towards Richmond, to commence on the night of the 19th."<sup>38</sup>

Grant broke away from Lee and Spotsylvania on May 20. When Lee ascertained that Grant was again moving south in a flanking attempt he quickly dropped back along a course parallel to the

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<sup>36</sup>Grant, p. 551

<sup>37</sup>Burne, p. 28

<sup>38</sup>Grant, p. 558



Federal move and was therefore able to reach the south bank of the North Anna River first. By the morning of May 23, Lee held a strong defensive position near Hanover Junction south of the river. Lee again blocked Grant's path; he continued to frustrate Grant's efforts with his brilliant leadership.

Lee's position at North Anna was excellent. His line formed a horseshoe, with the tip resting on the tip of a loop in the river, so that it was like two U's touching at their bases. Grant's lines roughly paralleled Lee but had to cross the river twice because of Lee's position relative to the loop in the river. This put Grant at a distinct disadvantage, for in an attack his troops would have to cross the river twice in any move to reinforce his army's other wing

Grant decided an attack on Lee's position at North Anna would be ill-advised. He stated his opinion and his idea for his next move in a letter to Halleck on May 26:

"To make a direct attack from either wing would cause a slaughter of our men that even success would not justify. To turn the enemy by his right...is impossible on account of the swamp upon which his right rests. To turn him by his left leaves Little River, New Found River, and South Anna River...to be crossed. I have determined therefore to turn the enemy's right by crossing at or near Hanover Town[on the Pamunkey River]. This crosses all three streams at once, and leaves us still where can draw supplies."<sup>39</sup>

Grant started the move on the night of May 25. Lee again detected it and anticipated Grant's intention. He marched eighteen miles to positions at Atlee's Station and then Cold Harbor to block Grant's path again. Lee accomplished this move before Grant because

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<sup>39</sup>Grant, p. 569

he was able to march in a relatively straight line while Grant's move was more of a looping action. By June 3, the two armies had been in touch and sparring with each other but not come to serious blows in almost two weeks. This situation was fine for Lee but not what Grant wanted. He wished to smash Lee's army before it could fall back into Richmond's defenses. Lee, now only several miles from Richmond, was far from smashed. Grant felt he had to employ a massive frontal assault despite Lee's strong position before Lee could fall back into Richmond.<sup>40</sup>

On June 3, after three days of inconclusive sparring, Grant launched his massive head-on assault on Lee's center and right. The furious fighting was extremely one-sided in its outcome. Union forces suffered over 7,000 casualties in the assault while the Confederates suffered only about 1,500.<sup>41</sup> Sharp fighting continued along the line through June 12, when Grant pulled out to move south again. The cost of the first month of Grant's campaign was staggering to both sides: Grant had lost well over 50,000 men while Lee's losses approached 30,000.

Grant's situation appeared to be disadvantageous. He had tried to flank Lee four times but all four thrusts had been expertly parried by Lee. After one month and enormous casualties Grant appeared no closer to defeating Lee than before the campaign started. After Cold Harbor, according to Alfred Burne, "So gloomy was the military outlook, and to such a degree by consequence had the moral spring of the public mind become relaxed, that there was at this time great

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<sup>40</sup>Burne, p. 47

<sup>41</sup>Burne, p. 48

danger of the collapse of the war."<sup>42</sup> Despite gloomy appearances, Grant's efforts of the first month had achieved something of great significance, something no other Union commander had done: Grant retained the initiative, not Lee. Lee recognized that his own situation was not very good. He needed to defeat Grant soon and feared the outcome if he could not beat Grant: "We must destroy this army of Grant's before he gets to the James River. If he gets there it will become a siege, and then it is a mere question of time."<sup>43</sup>

### The Crossing of the James River to Petersburg

Due to the continuous flow of reinforcements, Grant had at his disposal 120,000 men after Cold Harbor. Lee had at his disposal 60,000 men, including the 7,500 within Richmond's defenses. Grant now proposed to move south of the James River and towards Petersburg and Richmond from the south. In his Memoirs Grant stated, "Lee's position was now so near Richmond, and the intervening swamps of the Chickahominy so great an obstacle to the movement of troops in the face of an enemy, that I determined to make my next flank move carry the Army of the Potomac south of the James."<sup>44</sup> He also planned for General David Hunter to move up the Shenandoah Valley to Lynchburg at the same time. Grant outlined his thinking to Halleck in a letter on June 5:

"Once on the south side of the James River, I can cut

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<sup>42</sup>Burne, p.51

<sup>43</sup>Burne, p. 53

<sup>44</sup>Grant, p. 590

off all sources of supply to the enemy except what is furnished by the canal. If Hunter succeeds in reaching Lynchburg, that will be lost to him also..."<sup>45</sup>

Grant recognized the dangers of his proposed move --these dangers made this move one of the boldest of the war. He actually had to cross two rivers--the Chickahominy as well as the James--with no remaining bridges intact. Lee possessed good roads and a shorter route to oppose the crossing. Grant had to disengage his whole army from the front while trying to deceive Lee about his intentions. And the move temporarily separated Grant from General Benjamin Butler's force at Bermuda Hundred by over fifty miles, which would present Lee with the opportunity to move on Butler and crush him before Grant could come to Butler's aid.<sup>46</sup> But, according to Grant, "the move had to be made."<sup>47</sup>

Grant selected Wilcox's Landing, about twenty miles southeast of Richmond, as the point at which to cross the James River. He began pulling his troops from Cold Harbor on June 13, shielding the move with cavalry screens. By June 17 all Grant's army, except for a handful of wagons and guards, was on the south side of the James. Grant's complex and dangerous plan had been executed flawlessly.<sup>48</sup>

While most of Grant's force was south of the James and threatening Petersburg by June 15, the bulk of Lee's army was still on the north side. Lee discovered Grant's movement on June 13, but due to the cavalry screens could not determine if Grant was crossing his whole army. Lee therefore chose to keep his army on the north

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<sup>45</sup>Grant, p. 591

<sup>46</sup>Grant, p. 591

<sup>47</sup>Grant, p. 591

<sup>48</sup>Woodhead, p. 171

side of the James until June 18, when he knew for sure that Grant's entire army had crossed.<sup>49</sup> Portions of Grant's army reached the Petersburg defenses on the evening of June 15 but were held off by a small force of Confederates under the command of General P.G.T. Beauregard. With the help of a trickle of reinforcements, Beauregard held off the Federals until Lee arrived with the main body of his army. The two sides now settled into a siege that would last nearly ten months. Grant's advance ground to a halt and prospects for renewing the advance did not seem bright.

Grant's campaign up to this point had produced some good results. The Army of the Potomac saw that it now had a leader with a new intensity of purpose and as a result the army was infused with an ardor that had previously been missing. Lee no longer commanded both armies in northern Virginia--he had been placed permanently on the defensive.<sup>50</sup>

But these results had come at a tremendous cost. Grant had lost over 60,000 men. The effect on the Northern people was profound. The will to fight in the North was impaired. A writer said at the time, "The campaign must be pronounced a failure."<sup>51</sup> Grant's inability to soundly defeat Lee placed the war effort in serious jeopardy. Without Lincoln's reelection the prosecution of the war could not be guaranteed--in all likelihood the war would stop, then end with de facto, if not de jure, recognition of Confederate independence. Many, including Lincoln himself, seriously doubted a Republican victory in

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<sup>49</sup>Burne, pp. 53 and 59

<sup>50</sup>Burne, p. 65

<sup>51</sup>Burne, p. 66

November. Union hopes of finishing off the war in Virginia, or at least seriously hurting Lee, before the presidential election in November appeared to be dashed. Those hopes now turned farther south--the efforts in Georgia could make or break the Union war effort.

### The Plans for Georgia

The plans Grant had for the Western theater of operations in the spring of 1864 were much the same as those he had devised with Sherman's help the previous winter. Sherman commanded all troops in the territory between the Alleghenies and the Mississippi River and north of Natchez, Mississippi. The large, mobile force he had around Chattanooga constituted the bulk of his command. Grant wanted to split the Confederacy again along a line from Chattanooga through Atlanta to a point on either the Gulf or Atlantic coast with Sherman's force. Opposing Sherman was the Confederate Army of Tennessee, commanded by General Joseph Johnston. In support of this move Grant had proposed an operation from New Orleans against Mobile and then a subsequent thrust into the manufacturing areas of Alabama.<sup>52</sup> The supporting move against Mobile presented a problem for Grant and Sherman. The force that was to be employed for this expedition was that of General Nathaniel Banks. Banks, however, was in the midst of an ill-fated campaign up the Red River

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<sup>52</sup>Grant, p. 472

in Louisiana. He had started that expedition before Grant's appointment to general command. But he had gotten so far that he was unable to get back to New Orleans to fulfill his role in the plan; moreover, he had about 10,000 of Sherman's men. Grant and Sherman had originally expected Banks to execute his part. The problem turned out to be, in Grant's words, that "the expedition was a failure. Banks did not get back in time. The services of forty thousand veteran troops...were thus paralyzed."<sup>53</sup> Sherman would have to accomplish his objectives without Banks's support.

After Grant's promotion in March 1864, he and Sherman met in Cincinnati to further discuss the military situation in general and plans for Sherman. The two men reached a general agreement on what would be done. Grant put down in writing what they had agreed upon in a letter to Sherman on April 4:

"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.

"I do not propose to lay down for you a plan of campaign, but simply lay down the work it is desirable to have done and leave you free to execute it in your own way...I know you will have difficulties to encounter in getting through the mountains to where supplies are abundant, but I believe you will accomplish it."<sup>54</sup>

Grant's willingness to give Sherman a free hand to carry out the campaign in his own way through difficult terrain and his belief in Sherman's prospect for success illustrated the strength of the

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<sup>53</sup>Grant, p. 484

<sup>54</sup>Grant, pp. 479-80

working relationship between the two men. A clear understanding of what was expected existed between the two men.

In a passage in the same letter discussing the question of Banks's support, Sherman foreshadowed the type of campaign his thrust would ultimately become:

"Georgia has a million of inhabitants. If they can live, we should not starve. If the enemy disrupts our communications, I will be absolved from all obligations to subsist on our own resources, and will feel perfectly justified in taking whatever and wherever we can find."<sup>55</sup>

### Sherman and the Atlanta Campaign

Atlanta, the city Johnston and his Army of Tennessee defended, held great strategic value as well as great morale value. It was one of the Confederacy's few manufacturing centers; its machine shops and foundries produced a large proportion of the war material without which the Confederacy could not survive. It was also the Confederacy's largest and most important rail center in 1864. Four main railroad lines converged on Atlanta, connecting areas of the Confederacy with one another. Almost all manufactured goods produced in the Deep South passed through Atlanta on the way to the battlefronts in Virginia.<sup>56</sup> Atlanta therefore stood high on the list of Union objectives for 1864; its fall could break the backbone of the Confederacy.

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<sup>55</sup>Sherman, p. 492

<sup>56</sup>Liddel Hart, p. 233



This campaign, then, was of paramount importance to the Union. In addition to military value to the campaign it was also decisive in the attempt to humble the Confederacy--the presence of Sherman's huge army driving relentlessly through the Deep South would offer a striking demonstration of the strength of the Union and its military. In addition, the fall of Atlanta could affect, perhaps decisively, the presidential election in the fall, especially with Grant stalled in front of Petersburg. Just as important was the possibility of dealing a serious blow to Confederate morale and will to fight.<sup>57</sup>

Sherman, the man who was to lead this vital campaign, remains a controversial figure. Many have called him a prophet of total war, a master strategist whose strategy was so brilliant that tactics and actual fighting became unnecessary, and a planner ahead of his time. Others have pointed out his tactical weaknesses--never having commanded in a battle in which he engaged his entire force--and have dismissed him as just a raider on a large scale.<sup>58</sup> But Sherman, like no one before him, grasped the nature of total war. In the words of T. Harry Williams:

"More than any other general of his time, he understood that the will of a nation to fight rests on the economic and psychological security of its people and that if these supporting elements are destroyed all resistance may collapse."<sup>59</sup>

The Atlanta campaign, and the subsequent marches through Georgia and the Carolinas, showed the practice of a new kind of warfare, one that had yet to be practiced on such a large scale.

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<sup>57</sup>McDonough and Jones, p. xix

<sup>58</sup>Williams, p. 47

<sup>59</sup>Williams, p. 77

Sherman was able to put into practice the ideas about war that he had been developing for several years. In a letter to the Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase on August 11 1862, Sherman stated his view on how civilians should be treated:

"...when one nation is at war with another, all of the people of the one are enemies of the other: then the rules are plain and of easy understanding...The Government of the United States may now safely proceed on the proper rule that all in the South are enemies of all in the North."<sup>60</sup>

Sherman justified destruction of civilian property in a letter to the editor of a Memphis newspaper on September 21, 1862:

"Again, armies in motion or stationary must commit some waste...it is the natural consequence of war, chargeable on those who caused the war...and generally war is destruction and nothing else."<sup>61</sup>

In a letter to Union chief-of-staff General Henry Halleck on September 17, 1863 Sherman stated his views on how the war should be prosecuted:

"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 half-way, but make them so sick of war that generations will pass away before they would again appeal to it."<sup>62</sup>

It was with this attitude that Sherman embarked on his campaign(see maps at the end of the paper).

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<sup>60</sup>Sherman, p. 286

<sup>61</sup>Sherman, p. 301

<sup>62</sup>Sherman, p. 365

The task facing Sherman and his army was daunting. The terrain in northwest Georgia was mountainous, thickly wooded, and cut sharply by swift streams--ideal for defense but not offense. The logistical situation also posed problems for Sherman. Over 150 miles separated his main supply base, Nashville, from his starting point in Chattanooga; and over 180 miles separated Nashville from Louisville, his main source of supplies. As he advanced into Georgia along the Western & Atlantic Railroad, this line would be further extended. The long supply line was vulnerable to attack by Confederate cavalry and guerrilla units. Sherman had to make provision for defense of this line as well as coordinate repair and maintenance.<sup>63</sup>

Sherman's force consisted of about 100,000 men and comprised three separate armies: the Army of the Cumberland, the largest of the three, led by General George Thomas; the Army of the Tennessee, led by General James McPherson; and the Army of the Ohio, led by General John Schofield. Johnston's Confederate Army of Tennessee consisted of about 60,000 men: it lay concentrated around Dalton, Georgia. <sup>64</sup>

Johnston's army took up defensive positions along Rocky Face Ridge, a formidable eminence that runs north and south for a number of miles to the west of Dalton. The position was very imposing. Sherman was well aware of this and chose to attempt to move around Johnston's left flank with the hope of forcing Johnston to abandon his strong position by threatening his supply and

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<sup>63</sup>Liddell Hart, p. 234

<sup>64</sup>Liddell Hart, pp. 238 and 241

communication line, the same railroad Sherman used in the opposite direction.

Sherman's plan of action called for McPherson's 25,000 men to carry out the flanking move. McPherson's force was still in Chattanooga and would march south behind Taylor's ridge, hiding it from Johnston's view, and turn east through Snake Creek Gap; this would place McPherson in position to advance on Johnston's rail line back to Atlanta. While McPherson marched, Thomas and Schofield were to keep Johnston busy by demonstrating against his right and center. Johnston would have to fall back to protect his supply and communication lines or be trapped between the two parts of Sherman's army. <sup>65</sup>

On May 7 all parts of Sherman's army were in motion. Thomas demonstrated aggressively in front of Johnston, keeping him in the dark about McPherson's movement. Late on the evening of May 8, McPherson reached Snake Creek Gap, which he found undefended. He was in position to advance to Resaca and cut Johnston's lines to Atlanta. The next morning McPherson advanced to Resaca, where he hoped to cut Johnston's supply line to Atlanta, and found it defended by about 4,000 troops solidly dug in. Making an uncharacteristic error in judgment, McPherson concluded that the position was too strong to take by himself, whereupon he fell back toward the gap. Confederate reinforcements soon arrived from Johnston; the opportunity to cut Johnston off from Atlanta had been lost.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup>McDonough and Jones, p. 99

<sup>66</sup>McDonough and Jones, p. 105

Despite the missed opportunity, the result was still positive for the Union. Johnston had been flanked out of a formidable position and forced to fall back towards Atlanta at a very small cost in casualties. This marked the beginning of a series of flanking maneuvers and Confederate withdrawals that would continue for over one hundred miles to the outskirts of Atlanta.

Sherman moved around Johnston, forcing him to fall back from positions at Resaca, Kingston, Cassville, and Allatoona Pass. After three days of sharp fighting at Dallas and New Hope Church, from May 25-28, Sherman again compelled Johnston to fall back by threatening his flank. The two armies continued to parry for position through the first weeks of June. On June 27 at Kennesaw Mountain, Sherman mounted his only massive frontal assault of the campaign. His men fell back from the assault with heavy losses. But Sherman remembered what had gotten him to this point. He extended his right by sidestepping Schofield to the south and on the night of July 2 he pulled McPherson from his left and swung him around to the opposite end of the army once more; this compelled Johnston to fall back the next day.<sup>67</sup>

Johnston dug in on the west bank of the Chattahoochie River. Sherman assessed the situation:

"I knew that Johnston would not remain long on the west bank of the Chattahoochie, for I could easily practice on that ground to better advantage our former tactics of intrenching a moiety in his front, and with the rest of our army cross the river and threaten his rear or the city of Atlanta itself, which city was of vital importance to the existence not only of his own

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<sup>67</sup>Liddell Hart, p. 268

army, but of the Confederacy itself."<sup>68</sup>

Sherman did just as he said he could. On July 8 he took up position in front of Johnston while Schofield crossed the river several miles upstream. By the evening of July 9 the threat to Johnston's right flank was too great for him to accept, leading him to withdraw across the Chattahoochie. Sherman's plan had worked well.<sup>69</sup>

Having grown tired of Johnston's continuous and ineffective retreat, the Confederate government replaced him with General John Bell Hood on July 17. Hood's rise to power signaled a change in the complexion of the campaign. He was an extremely bold and aggressive scrapper, bordering on reckless; he would fight.

It should be noted that by the time of Johnston's removal, a trend had emerged, that of skillfully maneuvering Johnston back rather than dealing him a serious blow. Sherman seemed to have abandoned , or at least subordinated, his first objective--the Army of Tennessee-- in favor of the second--getting into the enemy's interior--and seemed to be interpreting that second objective as the capture of Atlanta.<sup>70</sup> But none of this appeared to have any negative effect on Sherman's troops. Rather, their confidence in him and their morale had increased as he continued to advance deeper into Georgia while suffering relatively few casualties.<sup>71</sup>

Sherman's plan for getting at Hood and Atlanta involved another flanking movement. He wanted to turn Hood's right and approach Atlanta from the east; he again had McPherson's force

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<sup>68</sup>Sherman, p. 539

<sup>69</sup>McDonough and Jones, p. 198

<sup>70</sup>Burne, p. 95

<sup>71</sup>Burne, p. 98

move behind the army from the extreme right to the extreme left. McPherson made a wide sweep to the northeast, cut the railroad seven miles east of Decatur and closed on Atlanta along that railway from the east. Thomas served as the pivot of the movement: he would hold his position at first, then advance on Atlanta from the north. Schofield provided the link between Thomas and McPherson northeast of the city.<sup>72</sup> On July 19, Sherman's whole army was again on the move.

Hood interrupted Sherman's move the next day with the first in a costly series of three large-scale counterattacks. Hood drove into Thomas north of the city with two corps at Peachtree Creek. Hood had planned to catch Thomas crossing the creek, but he started late; Thomas had his whole force across when Hood hit. The Confederates were thrown back with terrible losses. Hood's first attack had failed.<sup>73</sup>

On July 22 Hood struck again, this time at McPherson, on Sherman's left flank east of the city. During fierce fighting McPherson, one of the brightest young stars on the Union side, was killed. The attack was eventually beaten back; Hood had suffered his second costly setback in three days--he had lost over 8,000 men and gained nothing.<sup>74</sup>

Sherman refused to sit long after this battle. He planned yet another turning movement, this time to the west. General O.O. Howard, McPherson's replacement, pulled his force behind the army

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<sup>72</sup>Burne, p. 121

<sup>73</sup>McDonough and Jones, pp. 212-13

<sup>74</sup>McDonough and Jones, p.228

on July 27 and moved to the extreme Union right flank west of the city. Sherman sought to capture the two remaining railroads leading into Atlanta, the Atlanta & West Point and the Marion & Western. Just as Howard's troops were taking up position, Hood attacked yet again, at Ezra Church, only to be beaten back with relative ease and at great cost to the Confederates, Hood's third defeat in three tries. Since he had taken command, the Army of Tennessee had lost 15,000 casualties and 8,000 more men as prisoners; Sherman had yet to lose 25,000 men over the entire campaign.<sup>75</sup>

Sherman settled into a siege of Atlanta that lasted until August 25. It was not a conventional siege, though. Sherman had no intention of completely investing the city. Instead, he trained his 223 artillery pieces on the city. Sherman revealed his aims in an August telegraph to Halleck, saying that he intended "to make the inside of Atlanta too hot to be endured...One thing is certain, whether we get inside of Atlanta or not, it will be a used-up community when we are done with it."<sup>76</sup> Sherman was putting into practice the message he had been preaching for several years--wage war on the entire enemy population; make them tire of war. The end of his Atlanta turned into a prelude for his marches.

Sherman also tried cavalry raids to knock out the remaining rail lines but they proved ineffective. By the end of August Sherman decided one more turning movement was necessary to finish the job. He continued the counterclockwise movement that he had started a month before, with the objective Jonesboro on the Macon & Western

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<sup>75</sup>McDonough and Jones, p. 263

<sup>76</sup>Sherman, p. 575



Railroad south of the city. It was here on September 1 that the last of the battles for Atlanta took place. On September 3 the first Union troops entered Atlanta, bringing the campaign to a successful conclusion for the Union. The total losses for the Federals came to about 32,000, those of the Confederates losses about 35,000.<sup>77</sup>

The news of Sherman's capture of Atlanta electrified the North. Up to this point, to many Northerners it seemed like the war would drag on with no end in sight; Banks had failed in Louisiana and more significantly Grant had stalled in front of Petersburg. Sherman's success lifted the spirits of the war weary Northern populace and helped restore faith in the war effort. Lincoln's reelection seemed assured and with it the continued prosecution of the war. According to Grant, Sherman's success:

"...probably had more effect in settling the election of the following November than all the speeches, all the bonfires, and all the parading with banners and bands of music in the North."<sup>78</sup>

Grant further espoused his praise in a congratulatory letter to Sherman on September 12:

"...it is hardly necessary for me to say that I feel you have accomplished the most gigantic undertaking given to any general in this war, and with a skill and ability that will be acknowledged in history as unsurpassed, if not unequaled. It gives me as much pleasure to record this in your favor as it would in favor of any living man, myself included."<sup>79</sup>

Grant's deep feeling of respect and friendship clearly issued forth from this letter. That relationship between the two, so important to

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<sup>77</sup>Sherman, p. 607

<sup>78</sup>Grant, p. 511

<sup>79</sup>Sherman, p. 587

the cooperation of the Union movements to this point, was to become even more important in the next several months.

### The March to the Sea

After Sherman occupied Atlanta, the question remained as to what to do next. Hood's army, though battered and beaten, was still intact and a significant force. Grant wanted Sherman to continue to press Hood. As he put it in a telegram on September 10:

"So soon as your men are sufficiently rested, and preparation can be made, it is desirable that another campaign should be commenced. We want to keep the enemy constantly pressed to the end of the war. If we give him no peace whilst the war lasts, the end cannot be distant. Now that we have all of Mobile Bay that is valuable, I do not know but it will be the best move to transfer Canby's troops to act upon Savannah, whilst you move on Augusta. I should like to hear from you, however, on this matter."<sup>80</sup>

Grant sent Sherman a letter two days later, updating him on the situation in Virginia and elsewhere and asking Sherman's opinion of what should be done next: "...My object now...is not so much to suggest operations for you, as to get your views."<sup>81</sup> Grant showed his

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<sup>80</sup>Grant, p. 634

<sup>81</sup>Grant, p. 635

faith and confidence in Sherman's abilities and opinions by asking for his suggestions here, as he often did.

Sherman's ideas as to what should be done next quickly matured over the two months following Atlanta's fall. Hood had moved back into northwest Georgia, threatening Sherman's rail line to Chattanooga. Out of necessity Sherman chased him and protected his supply line, but he had no desire to continue to chase Hood over the Deep South. Sherman had a bolder plan in mind; he wanted to send Thomas and 30,000 men back into Tennessee, where they could concentrate with all the scattered Union troops there and from the Mississippi, while Sherman took 60,000 men and cut loose from Atlanta to march through Georgia, live off the land, and wreak havoc. Sherman later said:

"I have often been asked...when the thought of that march first entered my mind. I knew that an army which had penetrated Georgia as far as Atlanta could not turn back. It must go ahead, but when, how, and where depended on many considerations. As soon as Hood had shifted from Lovejoy's to Palmetto, I saw the move in my 'mind's eye;' and after Jeff. Davis's speech at Palmetto, of Septmeber 26, I was more positive in my conviction...When General Hood first struck our railroad above Marietta, we were not ready, and I was forced to watch his movements further till he had 'carromed' off to the west of Decatur. Then I was perfectly convinced, and had no longer a shadow of a doubt. The only possible question was as to Thomas' strength and ability to meet Hood in the open field."<sup>82</sup>

Sherman continued to give Grant his views throughout September and October. In a stream of letters and telegrams to Grant, Sherman presented the case for his proposed move. In an

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<sup>82</sup>Sherman, pp.641-42

October 9 telegraph typical of this correspondence, Sherman explained:

"It will be a physical impossibility to protect the roads, now that Hood, Forrest, Wheeler, and the whole batch of devils, are turned loose without home or habitation...I propose that we break up the railroad from Chattanooga forward, and that we strike out with our wagons for Milledgeville, Millen, and Savannah. Until we can repopulate Georgia, it is useless to occupy it; but the utter destruction of its roads, houses, and people, will cripple thier military resources. By attempting to hold these roads, we will lose a thousand men each month, and will gain no result. I can make this march and make Georgia howl!"<sup>83</sup>

Sherman was confident in his plan. Grant, however, was not as sure of the prudence of this move. He wanted Sherman to finish off Hood before embarking on such an ambitious operation. On November 1 Grant telegraphed Sherman:

"Do you not think it is advisable, now that Hood has gone so far north, to entirely ruin him before starting on your proposed campaign? With Hood's army destroyed, you can go where you please with impunity...If you can see a chance of destroying Hood's army, attend to that first, and make your other move secondary."<sup>84</sup>

Sherman held firmly to his position and replied on November 2: "...I regard the pursuit of Hood useless."<sup>85</sup> In another telegram on the same day Sherman continued to hammer his point: "If I turn back, the whole effect of my campaign will be lost...I am clearly of the

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<sup>83</sup>Sherman, p. 627

<sup>84</sup>Sherman, p. 639

<sup>85</sup>Sherman, p. 640

opinion that the best results will follow my contemplated movement through Georgia."<sup>86</sup>

Grant finally acceded to Sherman's requests. He telegraphed later on November 2:

"I dispatched you...advising that Hood's army...ought to be looked upon now as the 'object.' With the force, however, that you have left with General Thomas, he must be able to take care of Hood and destroy him.

"I do not see that you can withdraw from where you are to follow Hood, without giving up all we have gained...I say, then, go on as you propose."<sup>87</sup>

Grant's approval of Sherman's plan resulted from the strength of their relationship and strong bonds of trust. While Grant saw worth in the strategy of exhaustion and raiding in strength, he valued above everything else continuously engaging, pressing, and eventually defeating the principal armies of the enemy. Utilization of other strategies could help defeat the enemy but Grant believed that they alone could never bring about total victory, which could come only when the armies of the enemy were defeated in the field. Grant's willingness to allow Sherman to embark on a campaign that departed from this mindset spoke volumes on the strength of their relationship. Without the deep level of trust that existed between them Grant would not have approved of such a plan.

Sherman truly believed that this campaign would produce great results even though he did not expect to engage any major Confederate forces. He felt the march would have a great impact on the South economically, logistically, and personally and hasten the

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<sup>86</sup>Sherman, p. 640

<sup>87</sup>Sherman, pp.640-41

end of the war. He pointed out what he thought the march would accomplish:

"I propose to act in such a manner against the material resources of the South as to utterly negate Davis' boasted threat and promise of protection. If we can march a well appointed army right through his territory, it is a demonstration...that we have a power which Davis cannot resist...people abroad and in the south who reason this: 'If the North can march an army right through the South it is proof positive that the North can prevail.'"<sup>88</sup>

Sherman succinctly summed up his purposes afterwards: "My aim then was to whip the Rebels, to humble their pride, to follow them to their inmost recesses, and to make them fear and dread us."<sup>89</sup>

Sherman started on the march on November 16, dividing his 62,000 men into four corps, which marched in separate but roughly parallel columns. The troops moved virtually unchallenged across the state in a front that stretched nearly sixty miles. They reached Savannah on December 10 and found it defended by about 18,000 Confederates under Hardee. With the help of Federal naval forces Sherman forced Hardee out of the city on December 20 and completed the march by entering the city the next day. During the march to Savannah Sherman's troops had wreaked unprecedented destruction on the state of Georgia. They destroyed over 265 miles of railroad and essential resources. Starting from Atlanta with five thousand head of cattle they arrived in Savannah with over ten thousand; in addition, they had consumed vast amounts of beef, poultry, sheep, and pork consumed along the way. They replaced all

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<sup>88</sup>Williams, pp. 73-74

<sup>89</sup>Williams, p. 74

the mules, approximately fifteen thousand, for their twenty-five hundred wagons. The cavalry found remounts for all its horses while nearly all officers in the infantry collected three or four horses.<sup>90</sup> Sherman estimated the damage his troops had inflicted at one hundred million dollars; the moral damage meted out was inestimably greater.<sup>91</sup> Grant praised Sherman for work he had done.

Sherman again faced a decision about his next course of action. And again he and Grant at first entertained different ideas. Sherman wanted to turn north through the Carolinas on a campaign similar to that which he had just completed. Grant, on the other hand, wanted Sherman to leave an adequate force at Savannah and bring the bulk of his command to Virginia by sea to finish off Lee.

These two different plans for action highlighted the difference in the way the two men tried to reach the same ultimate goal--Union victory. Grant always kept the objective of the principal enemy army, Lee's, in focus and in the forefront of his thinking. All his decisions were directed toward that end. Sherman focused more on the less traditional aspects of the prosecution of war. He had the same ultimate end in mind as Grant but was less concerned with the engagement of the enemy army. He moved toward the end through an economic type of warfare--the destruction of resources, transportation, and production capabilities--and through war on the mind of the Southern citizen.

As was the case before the march through Georgia, Sherman persuaded Grant to approve of his planned march. The relationship

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<sup>90</sup>Sherman, p. 684

<sup>91</sup>Liddell Hart, p. 346

between the two was crucial again to the final decision as was the success of Sherman's first march. Sherman's troops moved north from Savannah on January 19-20, 1865. The four corps took various courses through South Carolina, spreading destruction more thoroughly than ever before. Columbia, South Carolina, was captured on February 17 and burned soon after.

Sherman's troops then moved into North Carolina, where the only significant battle of the march took place. At Bentonville, a sizeable Confederate force, under the command of Sherman's old opponent, Joseph Johnston, attacked Sherman on March 19-20 and actually gave him a little scare before being beaten back.<sup>92</sup> Sherman followed Johnston's army to Raliegh, where he accepted Johnston's surrender on April 17, eight days after Lee's capitulation to Grant.

Sherman's success drew unmitigated praise from Grant. He proclaimed that:

"The march of Sherman's army...was magnificent in its results, and equally magnificent in the way it was conducted. It had an important bearing, in various ways, upon the great object we had in view, that of closing the war..."<sup>93</sup>

Sherman's marches undoubtedly accomplished much. Hundreds of miles of railroad had been irreparably damaged, along with scores of bridges, farms, arsenals, manufacturing facilities and foodstuffs. His presence in the Deep South certainly contributed to the increasing desertions from Confederate armies as word spread among the troops of devastation on the homefront. And just as significantly, if

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<sup>92</sup>Woodhead, p. 285

<sup>93</sup>Grant, p. 765



not more so, was the effect Sherman had on the mindset of the Southern people; Confederate President Jefferson Davis said, "Sherman's campaign produced a bad effect on our people."<sup>94</sup> Despite the significance and importance of Sherman's marches, total victory for the North was not, and could not be, achieved until the Confederacy's principal army, led by Lee, was defeated.

### Petersburg to Appomattox

By July 1864, the scene at Petersburg was one of trench warfare. Grant made a number of attempts to break through the Confederate line, most notably late in July by detonating explosives underneath the opposing line and two months later at Fort Harrison. None of the efforts met with success, but Grant periodically extended his lines to the southwest, stretching Lee's defenses while at the same time threatening the last remaining roads to Lee and Richmond.

When spring 1865 came, Lee found himself in poor shape. Outnumbered almost three to one, lacking ammunition, food, clothing, and other supplies, and losing troops daily to desertion, Lee was decided to break the siege by escaping to join Johnston. On March 25 he attacked Fort Steadman but was beaten back with severe losses. Lee's intention had been to divert attention from Grant's left so that when Lee broke away the Federals would not be in good position to hinder his move.

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<sup>94</sup>Burne, p. 147

Grant responded by turning up the pressure on Lee. On March 29 Grant started the series of movements that ended the war. During these final days Grant was most himself and at his best; he doggedly pursued his objective until the end and never lost sight of what he needed to do. After a number of flanking movements to the southwest of Richmond that caused Lee to abandon Petersburg and Richmond, resulting in sharp clashes at Five Forks and Sayler's Creek, Grant finally pinned Lee down at Appomattox Court House. On April 9 Grant accepted Lee's surrender, which signaled the effective end of the Confederacy.

### Conclusion--Grant and Sherman

Through the course of the war Grant and Sherman became the two most important men in the Union army and its two best commanders. Their leadership and prosecution of the war resulted in ultimate victory for the Union. The campaigns each led were vital to the outcome of the war, yet, they were strikingly dissimilar. Sherman's Atlanta campaign and subsequent marches lacked a significant battle on the scale of those in Grant's Virginia campaign. This resulted from Sherman's emphasis on geographic goals and economic, logistic, and psychological warfare. Sherman accomplished much in his campaigns despite he absence of a major battle. At the end of Sherman's three campaigns, his troops had covered over 1,500 miles and laid waste to significant portions of three states in the

heart of the Confederacy, destroying transportation, manufactures, foodstuffs, and supplies and had left an indelible mark on the minds of the Southern people.

Grant's campaign was indicative of Grant's view of the war. He felt the most important thing to do was to find the enemy's main army and defeat it. From the first week of his campaign Grant latched onto Lee and kept continuous pressure on him for nearly a year. His constant pressure on Lee allowed Sherman to carry out his work in the Deep South relatively untouched.

In the end, Union victory resulted from the close cooperation of Grant and Sherman. The strength of the Union moves of 1864 and 1865 came from the unified and consistent effort of the two main Federal thrusts; cooperation was the cornerstone of their success. This high level of cooperation resulted from the tight bonds of friendship and mutual respect between Grant and Sherman; their working relationship was enhanced by those bonds. That friendship and respect was best illustrated in a letter from Grant to Sherman on February 1, 1865. At this time many people in Washington were calling for Sherman's promotion to Lieutenant General and elevation to general-in-chief in place of Grant. Sherman wrote to Grant to say that he would not accept such an offer. Grant replied:

"No one would be more pleased at your advancement than I, and if you should be placed in my position and I put subordinate it would not change our personal relations in the least. I would make the same exertions to support you that you have ever done to support me."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Grant, p. 1079

The importance of this friendship should not be overlooked. The feelings between the two were deep and genuine and helped to cement their working relationship. Grant trusted Sherman like no other subordinate. He always asked Sherman's views and opinions of a situation before giving him orders and he always kept Sherman informed as to the progress of the rest of the war effort. Without that trust Grant would not have permitted the marches Sherman undertook. In a letter to Sherman on December 1864, Grant said:

"...I never had a doubt of the result. When apprehensions for your safety were expressed by the President, I assured him with the army you had, and you in command of it, there was no danger but you would strike bottom on salt-water some place; that I would not feel the same security--in fact, would not have intrusted the expedition to any other living commander."<sup>96</sup>

Grant and Sherman understood each other like no other two men in the Union army. Without them and their cooperation the Union war effort could not have been prosecuted so successfully; without them the war effort might have died with the defeat of Lincoln in the presidential election of 1864. Grant and Sherman formed a team of contrasting personalities and leadership styles that directly led the Union to final victory in the American Civil War.

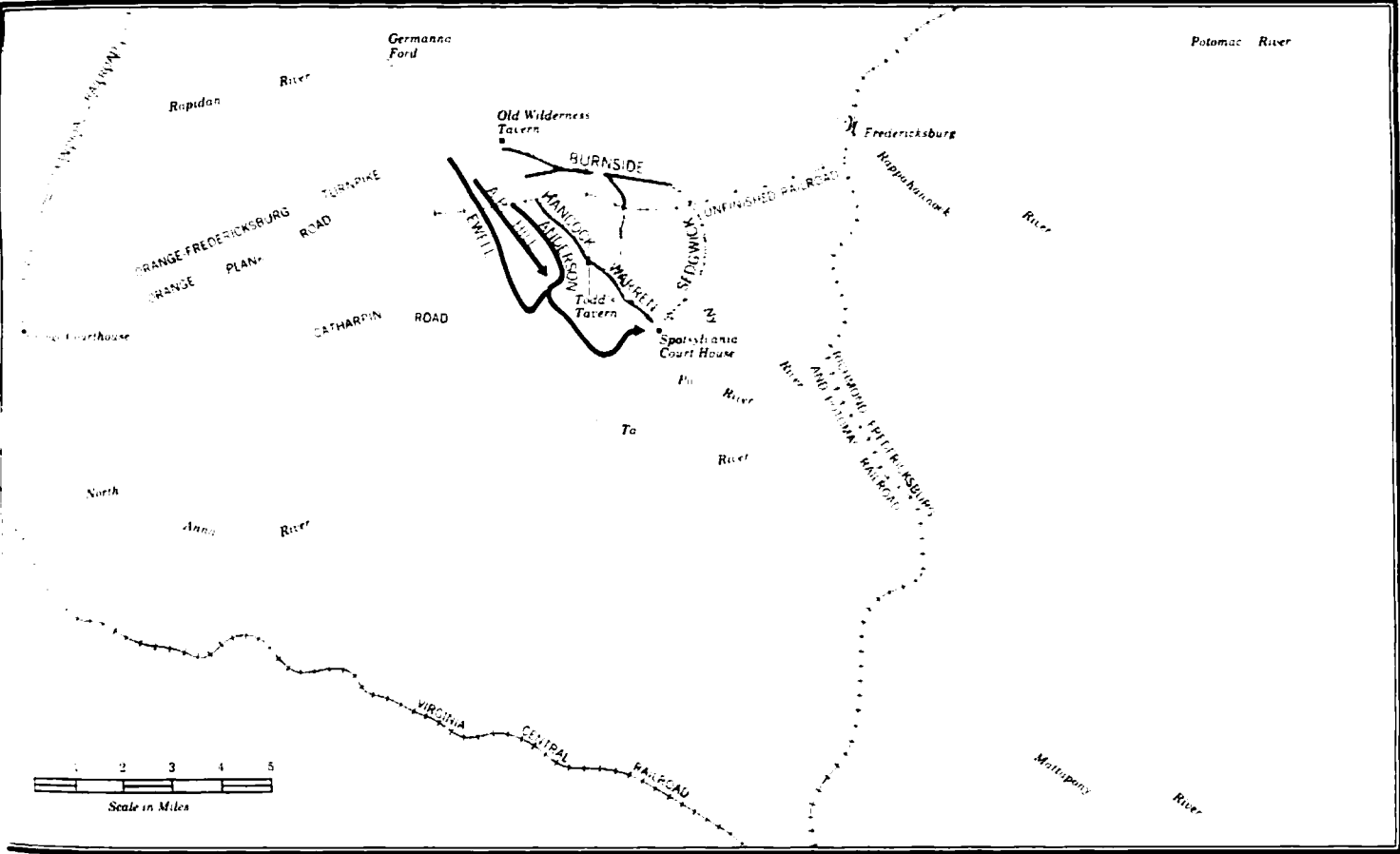
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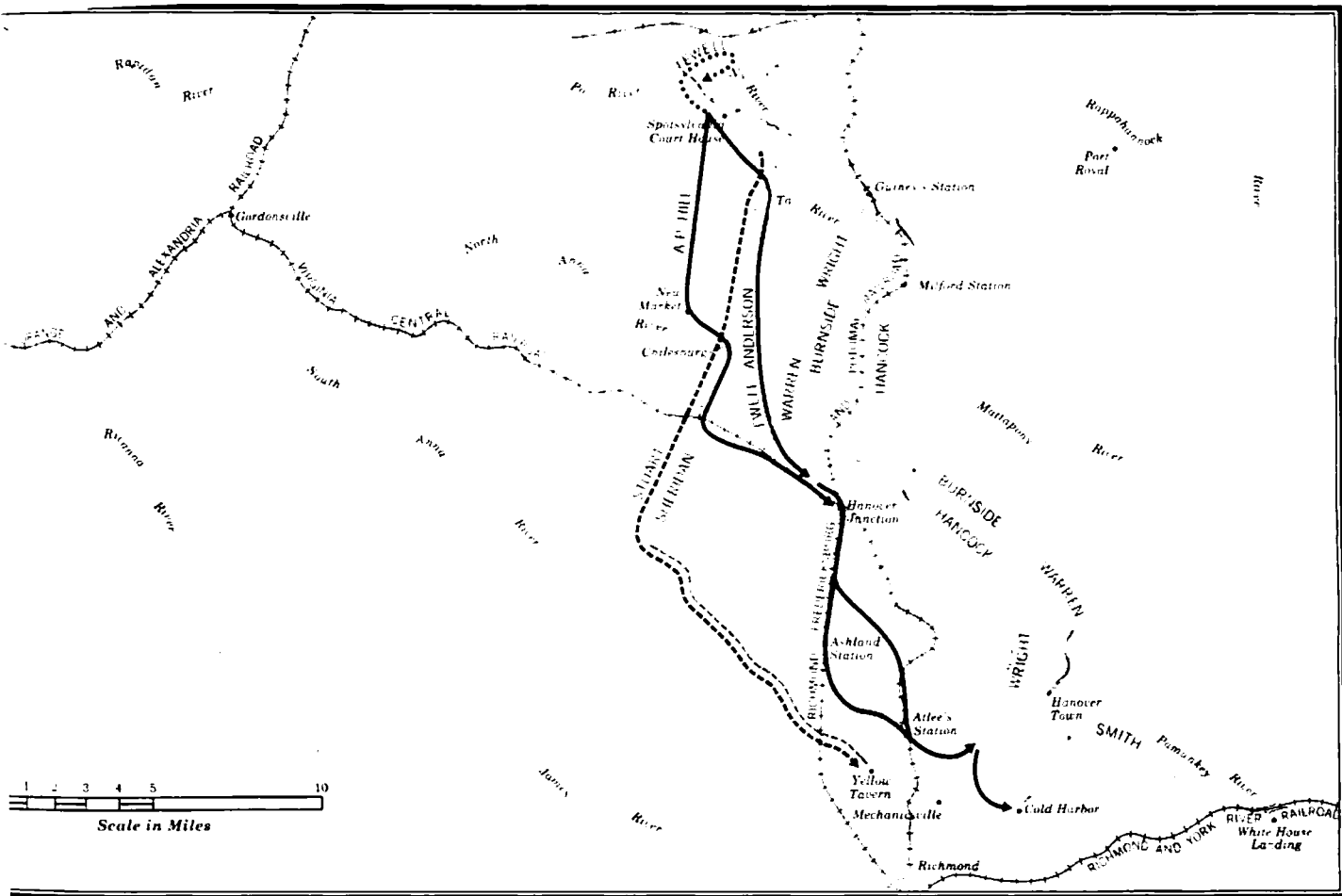
<sup>96</sup>Sherman, p. 701

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— below his left eye.





1 2 3 4 5 10  
Scale in Miles

