

Marsalek, Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order(1993)

1. Unstable Beginnings:

Deals w/ death of father and the impoverishment of the family. Charles Sherman left a family of 11 children. Charles Sherman left a family of 11 children.

Camp Sherman was "farmed out" to a wealthy neighborhood--the Ewings. The rest of the children, except for the youngest 3 who stayed with the mother in Lancaster, Ohio, were separated by going to members of the extended family. Young Sherman, 9 years old, was impacted gravely by this terrible disruption of family life. M argues that his passion for order and stability was rooted in this breakup of the family.

Deals w/ his life at West Point.

2. Making Southern Friends

Sherman's first posting was in Florida where he took part in the Seminole War. Sherman was of opinion that a "war of extermination" was the proper course to follow against the Seminoles.

Sherman learned from the guerrilla-type war levelled by the Seminoles that sometimes the ethics of war had to be dismissed. In this war in the Everglades Sherman saw as a war of not armies against armies but a war between peoples; societies against societies. Military success depended upon food supply and strength of will. / That was had a psychological dimension that was not taught in the West Point textbooks. . . . It would be a valuable lesson for the future.

He also served in Mobile and at Ft. Moultrie in So. Carolina. He enjoyed his service in the South and enjoyed southerners. Also mirrored the same attitude about slavery as his southern hosts.

3. Gold Rush Days

Sherman did not serve in the Mexican War much to his disappointment. He was the adjutant to the military governor of California. Recall the incident of vigilante justice in the Bear State.

5. The Disorder of Financial Life

Discusses Sherman's efforts in private sector as banker in California. His banking career ended in financial disaster but not to any fault of his own. Still he was paralyzed w/ a sense of helplessness and a sense of personal failure.

6. Contented Southern Schoolmaster

Sherman becomes the headmaster of a new military school in Louisiana about 100 miles up river from New Orleans. He loved the job and was a gifted administrator. The school later would be LSU. But he resigned when the South began to secede from the Union.

7. Reluctant Warrior Under Attack

Sherman was commissioned as a Brig. General of volunteers once the war started. He served at First Bull Run. He said afterwards he never wanted a command position again. He was posted to Kentucky to serve under Robert Anderson of Ft. Sumter fame. Anderson was older and the experience of Ft. Sumter critically debilitated him leaving Sherman de facto commander in the pivotal border state.

Sherman's breakdown. Sherman was convinced that unless he received more troops he could not prevent the Confeds. from taking Kentucky and invading Illinois, Indiana, and capturing St. Louis. He asked to be relieved of his command and return to Washington. Stories of his "eccentric behavior" began to circulate

Sherman was certain that the Union war effort was lax and that Northern leadership did not appreciate the danger to the Union. He felt all was lost. He was relieved of his Kentucky command but under a great shadow. The private talk in Washington was that Sherman was on the verge of insanity. The War Department medical examiner declared Sherman as "of such a nervousness that he was unfit for command." He was given leave. . .

The press got onto the Sherman dismissal. The Cincinnati Commercial carried a headline "General Sherman Insane." M explains that he was not insane. He experienced a terrible bout with anxiety and depression that came close to incapacitating him, but he remained whole. His need for Union success caused him to overestimate the enemy and underestimate his own side, resulting in an overly pessimistic evaluation of the military situation. He knew that the problem was disorganization and an unwillingness to face the reality of the crisis. Sherman saw in Kentucky and Missouri, as he had at Bull Run, an unprepared, disorganized Union effort waiting to be overwhelmed. It depressed him to think that he could do nothing.

8. Rebirth at Shiloh

Shiloh was a turning point. He met up with Grant in the West and at Shiloh he witnessed Grant's steady determination and saw that Union forces could, under the right leadership, stand up to the Confeds. The federal army could overcome chaos and be successful.

9. Restoring Order to Memphis

Sherman became the military governor of the newly "liberated" Memphis.

The biggest problem he faced was from irregulars or guerillas who sniped at patrols and Union boats along the Mississippi.

Sherman responded to the guerrilla attacks on his supply lines by holding the citizenry responsible. By arresting hundreds of the most respectable Memphians as hostages. When river traffic on the Mississippi was fired upon from the river front town of Randolph he sent a regiment to destroy the town and issued a family expulsion order from other points along the river used by guerrilla snipers and ambushers. Sherman was treating the civilian population as part of the war effort. He even began talking about a kind of "ethnic cleansing" policy in Kentucky and Tennessee. Removing the native inhabitants and replacing them with Northerners. He was colonizing as the Union war machine moved further into the South. Sherman was more and more influenced by a total war approach.

With Sherman the steeled fist had a softer edge. As in Memphis and in Jackson, Mississippi, he was ready to encourage and reward pro-Union activity among the conquered southerners. Seeing that they received good treatment, food, welfare when needed, especially when they admitted the error of their ways.

He was an early psychological warrior.

11. Practicing Destructive War in Mississippi

Deals with the concept and execution of the Sherman raid on Meridian.

The raid on Meridian took place in Feb. 1864. Sherman took 20,000 men cut loose from his supply base at Corinth and lived out of his wagons and off the land for 10/11 days. He allowed his force to forage off the land. The Meridian raid demonstrated that Sherman could march across the middle of the state of Mississippi in the deep South without significant resistance. The Con. was a hollow shell. He learned that he could march across the South with impunity and feed his army at the expense of its inhabitants. He could wage successful war without having to slaughter thousands of soldiers. Once in Meridian (it was evacuated by Polk's forces before he reached the city) the Federals destroyed all the war-making potential and destroyed Con. forces on the way.

12. Atlanta

Sherman took 100,000 troops from Chattanooga toward Atlanta. His orders were to destroy Joe Johnston's army. Johnston was relieved of command by J. Davis during this campaign. Hood took over the Confed. Army of Tennessee. The siege of Atlanta. Sherman allowed Hood's army to escape the siege. After Kenesaw Mt. he was reluctant to engage in more bloodbaths.

13. March to the Sea

The March: Sherman believed the Union war effort had to be total. The point was not just to throw men at men in battle but to break the will of the South to continue to resist. More slaughter on the battlefield was not the answer. Instead destruction of So,. property to break the South's will made more sense. If he could collapse the So's logistical base, the will to keep fighting would deteriorate. He had first used elements of this strategy in Memphis and later in Jackson. Then put it into small practice in the Meridian raid. he cut loose from his supplies, lived off the civilian population in the countryside, and terrorized them, maintaining total secrecy over his activities. Few people--military and civilian--had died.

After Atlanta fell, Grant wanted Sherman to destroy Hood's army. Sherman thought the pursuit of Hood a waste of energy and time. But to march a Union army through the South's territory was a demonstration to the world that we have the power which Jeff Davis cannot resist:

Sherman wrote Grant: "If the North can march an army right through the South, it is proof positive that the North can prevail in this contest . . . Mr. Lincoln's selection[for a second term], which is assured, coupled with the conclusion thus reached, makes a complete logical whole. Even without a battle, the result operating upon the minds of sensible men would produce fruits more than compensating for the expense, trouble, and risk." . . . "I can make Georgia howl!"

Sherman slimmed his army down to the fittest soldiers. (The finest army on the planet). He took 65,000 seasoned warriors who had seen it all. He divided his army into two marching columns. The army would be cut loose from all supplies from Chatanooga. They were issued 1.2 million rations, enough for 20 days, over 3,000 beef cattle. The army was accompanied by 2500 hundred wagons, 6,00 ambulances, 65 guns, and 17,000 horses and mules. If stretched out along a line the army would cover fifty miles along a road with 30 miles of wagons to the rear.

When it left Atlanta the two-columns covered a width of 20 to 60 miles.

M notes that Sherman did not burn Atlanta to the ground. Much of the destruction was done by hood before escaping and some was done by civilian looters, etc.

The march from Atlanta to Savannah was about 3,00 miles. The march to the sea was one of the major events of the CW. The impact of the event on the Con. Army under Lee was fatal. The desertion rates increased and the life went out of the resistance. For many in the trenches outside of Richmond and Petersburg the soul sunk in anguish and hope perished.