

History 225

Re: Notes w/ Sherman & Hard War

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Comments that these raids of 1864-5 played the military purpose they were supposed to--to wit, ending the Civil War. But what about the impact on civilians, noncombatants. Did America begin down the slippery slope toward "total war." Is there a direct connection between Sherman's march and My Lai?

It wasn't just Sherman. There was Sheridan's and Hunter's forays or raids in the Shenandoah Valley at the end of the war.

The kind of question a Norman Mailer would raise.

See James Reston. Sherman's March and Vietnam (1984)

The fact was, for the most part, that these were controlled acts of destruction; discriminatory severity was the plan. The destruction levelled and the foraging were defined by strict orders as to what was eligible and what was not.

(note about Hunter in burning down VMI and then former Va. Governor Lechter's home. South realiation by burning down Chambersburg. Pa. This brought critical press comment from Republican papers in the North about Hunter's operations in the Valley).

In the wake of Sherman's legions there were no reports of murdered civilians; no reports of rape of white women; a few sketchy reports of rapes of slave women and abuse of blacks.

The incident by general Jefferson C. Davis and Ebenezer Creek (Ga.) episode. This act of cruelty was not unanimously popular with Sherman's troops.

Grimsely opines that the March through Georgia may not have been any more destructive (including wanton destructiveness) in proportion to its length than the earlier burning of Jackson, Mississippi during the Vicksburg campaign of 1863 or the Union raiding in the Shenandoah Valley.

Contrast Georgia campaign with Sherman in South Carolina. Here that the "bummers"--use this to designate random and wanton destruction--became not just the stragglers and marginal soldiers but the bulk of the army. What happened in SC dramatically demonstrated what a Federal army could do when it wanted to wreck indiscriminate havoc.

There was no need to apply "surgical" destruction in this state because the belief of the Yankees was that the whole state was the seedbed of secession and contained nothing but supporters of the Confederacy--all virulent, dedicated disunionists.

To sack and burn and create utter havoc in Calhoun's state--the home of nullification and the spearhead of secession was high policy.

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Halleck's message to Sherman (be caeless w/matches if he got to Charleston). Rememeber that Halleck was Sherman's superior in the chain of command. halleck who earlier wrote a well recived book on war and international law.

Kilpatrick's cavalry when they hit the town of Barnwell--it became "Burnwell" as they laid it waste with fire. But not before they forced the ladies of the town to dress in their finery and "join" the army in a pre-incineration party where they were forced to dance with some of the Union troops.

Barnwell was the pattern throughout the state. Sherman's army of 60,000 left in its 60 mile-wide wake nothing but burned out towns, villages, cities. Where there was community they left a wasteland.

As soon as the army left South Carolina and entered into North Carolina the destruction stopped. North Carolina faired favorably because it was the last state to secede and because it was a sate with a large enclave of Union supporters.

The most lasting and significant effect of these raids was on the morale and the collective psychological state of mind of the Confederacy. Sherman's March mae it indelibly clear that the war was lost. If the Confederacy could not prevent Union forces from marching and foraging (and plundering) at will in the Heart of Dixie then the Confederacy was dead.

We've read that this helped to accelerate the desertions of Lee's troops outside of Richmond-Petersburg.

it also persuaded Lee not to revert to guerrilla warfare as the last desperate hope of staving off defeat. this would only have led to the wholesale destruction of the South.