

SHERMAN'S MARCH TO THE SEA

IN October, 1864, soon after he had evacuated Atlanta, Hood began a movement on Sherman's communications and broke up the railroad in his rear. He marched west and reached Gadsden, Alabama, October 20. He shunned a battle with Sherman, who was eager to bring one on, but Hood did not trust his troops, so impaired were their fighting qualities. In getting into the rear of the Union army he had made an adroit and audacious movement causing irritation to Sherman and anxiety to the authorities in Washington which was increased by his eluding the pursuit of the Federal commander. Leaving one corps in Atlanta Sherman began his march northward with the rest of the army October 4; on the twentieth he was at Gaylesville, Alabama. "The month of October closed to us looking decidedly squally," writes Sherman. He had already sent Thomas to Nashville to protect Tennessee while he studied and reflected how he might checkmate Hood. He decided on a march through Georgia to the sea and endeavored to obtain Grant's consent to this plan.

October 30, Hood began to cross the Tennessee river with the intention of invading Tennessee. This caused Grant apprehension, which was allayed by the reasoning of Sherman, and finally Grant sent him a despatch saying "Go as you propose."

The march to the sea, the advance northward from Savannah, and the operations of Thomas in Tennessee, are a combination of bold and effective strategy, only possible after the Chattanooga-Atlanta campaign and a fit sequel to it. A hundred persons may have conceived the design of marching to the ocean but the genius of the general lay in foreseeing the possible moves of his adversary, in guarding against them and in his estimate of the physical and moral result of cutting the Confederacy in twain. Not underrating the venture, wise in precaution, Sherman showed the same boldness and tenacity as Grant in his Vicksburg campaign in sticking to his purpose when others shook their heads. No general, who lacked qualities of daring and resolution, would have persisted in his determination to advance through Georgia after Hood had crossed the Tennessee river, especially when Grant for a time doubted the wisdom of the movement. As he was the commander,

knew his men and comprehended the conditions, he could lay no claim to success unless Thomas should defeat Hood. Therein, as the affair turned out, lay the risk. Sherman knew Thomas through and through. Classmates at West Point they had ever since been friends, and this friendship was cemented during the vicissitudes of the Civil War despite their differences of opinion proceeding from their diverse temperaments. Sherman had implicit confidence in Thomas, thought that he had furnished him a force sufficient for all emergencies and that the defense of Tennessee was not left to chance. "If I had Schofield," Thomas wrote Halleck, November 1, "I should feel perfectly safe." Sherman detached Schofield's corps from his army and sent it northward with instructions to report to Thomas for orders. On the day that Sherman started for the sea Thomas telegraphed to him: "I have no fear that Beauregard [Hood] can do us any harm now, and if he attempts to follow you, I will follow him as far as possible. If he does not follow you I will then thoroughly organize my troops and I believe I shall have men enough to ruin him unless he gets out of the way very rapidly." The opinion of the able and experienced critics, Mr. Ropes and General Schofield, who maintain that Sherman should have given Thomas more men, are refuted by the statements of Sherman and Thomas themselves. Nor must it be forgotten that the Union commanders were at this time uncertain whether Hood would follow Sherman or move north toward Nashville. The conferences between Beauregard, the commander of the Department, and Hood, and Davis's despatch to Hood, which have since been disclosed, attest the wisdom of anticipation and the preparedness for contingencies on the Union side. While Hood before the end of October had won Beauregard's consent to his plan of invading Tennessee, Jefferson Davis was not of the same mind. His telegram of November 7 (which however was not received by Hood until the twelfth) lacks a degree of positiveness and is interpreted differently but there is little doubt that he meant to disapprove an advance into Tennessee before Sherman had been defeated. As events happened the army that marched to the sea was unnecessarily large and 10,000 more men with Schofield might have saved some trial of soul. Nevertheless, as things looked at the time, Sherman must be sufficiently strong to defeat Hood and the scattered forces of uncertain number which would gather to protect Georgia. Moreover, as his ultimate purpose was to "re-enforce our armies in Virginia," he must have troops enough to cope with Lee until Grant should be at his heels. He reckoned that the force left in Tennessee was "numerically greater" than Hood's.

Considering everything that could have been known between November 1 and 12 it seems clear beyond dispute that he made a fair division of his army between himself and Thomas.

Deliberation, care and foresight marked the thoughts of Sherman as he reviewed his decision ; up to within six days of his start southward he held himself ready in a certain contingency to cooperate with Thomas in the pursuit of Hood, the one moving directly against the Confederates and the other endeavoring to cut off their retreat, for it was ever clear to his mind that "the first object should be the destruction of that army," but as the days wore on the advantages of the march to the sea outweighed those of any other plan and the irrevocable step was taken. Stopping at Cartersville, November 12, on his progress southward he received Thomas's last despatch, acknowledged it and replied "all right ;" a bridge was burned severing the telegraph wire and all communication with Thomas and his government. Like Julian who "plunged into the recesses of the Marcian or Black forest," the fate of Sherman was for many days "unknown to the world." No direct intelligence from him reached the North from November 12 to December 14. "I will not attempt to send couriers back," he had written to Grant, "but trust to the Richmond papers to keep you well advised." For these thirty-two days Lincoln and Grant had no other information of this important movement than what they gleaned from the Southern journals.

Sherman's imagination was impressed vividly with the strangeness of the situation : "two hostile armies were marching in opposite directions, each in the full belief that it was achieving a final and conclusive result in a great war." It would be impossible to show an entire consistency in the utterances of this great general ; at times one aspect of the campaign appeared to him to the exclusion of another, and as he was given to fertile thought and fluent expression the idea uppermost in his mind was apt to come out. As with almost all men of action, the speculation of to-day might differ from that of yesterday and vary again to-morrow, yet this did not impair a capacity to make a correct decision nor steadfastness in the execution of a plan. Grant, more reticent and not expansive, is not chargeable in the same degree with inconsistency in his written words. He lacked imagination and was not given to worry. When any comparison is made between the two, the remark attributed to Sherman is pat as indicating the different manner in which they seem to look a situation in the face. "Grant does not care for what he cannot see the enemy doing and it scares me."

While the army was concentrating at Atlanta, the railway station, machine-shops, and other buildings of that city useful to the enemy in its military operations were destroyed. The right wing and one corps of the left wing having started the day before, Sherman rode out of Atlanta November 16 with the Fourteenth Corps; he had in all 62,000 "able-bodied, experienced soldiers, well armed, well equipped and provided, as far as human foresight could, with all the essentials of life, strength and vigorous action." One of the bands happening to play "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave," the men sang the well-known song, giving to the chorus "Glory, glory hallelujah, his soul is marching on," a force and spirit full of meaning as their minds reverted to the events which had taken place since that December day in 1859 when he, who was now a saint in their calendar, had suffered death on the scaffold. When the march to the sea began, the weather was fine, the air bracing and the movement to the south and east exhilarated the men. Many of the common soldiers called out to their general, "Uncle Billy, I guess Grant is waiting for us at Richmond." "There was a 'devil-may-care' feeling pervading officers and men," relates Sherman, "that made me feel the full load of responsibility." The tale of the march is not one of battle and inch-by-inch progress as was the campaign from Chattanooga to Atlanta. "As to the 'lion' in our path," wrote Sherman after he had reached Savannah, "we never met him." "In all our marching through Georgia Hardee [the Confederate commander] has not forced me to use anything but a skirmish line." Officers and men looked upon the march as a "picnic," "a vast holiday frolic." The burden was on the general in command. He was in the enemy's country; he must keep this large army supplied. Two critics, Mr. Ropes and Colonel Henry Stone, who have not a high opinion of Sherman's tactics on the battlefield, testify to his skill in handling an army on the march and to his foresight and care in providing it with food and munitions of war. When the army set out it had approximately supplies of bread for twenty days, sugar, coffee, and salt for forty and about three days' forage in grain; it had also a sufficient quantity of ammunition; all this was carried in 2500 wagons with a team of six mules to each. Drovers of cattle, enough to insure fresh meat for more than a month, were part of the commissariat. The ambulances were 600 in number; the artillery had been reduced to 65 guns. Pontoon trains were carried along as the invading host had many rivers to cross. The right wing was composed of the Fifteenth and Seventeenth Corps, the left wing of the Fourteenth and Twentieth; each corps marched on a separate road. The

division of the wagon trains gave each corps about 800 wagons, which occupied on the march five miles or more of road. The artillery and wagons with their advance and rear guards had the right of way, the men taking improvised paths at their side. The troops began their daily march at dawn and pitched their camp soon after noon, having covered ordinarily ten to fifteen miles. Milledgeville, the capital of the state, was reached by the left wing in seven days. This march through the heart of Georgia alarmed the Confederates lest either Macon or Augusta or both might be attacked, with the result that they divided their forces; and when it became clear that Savannah was the place on the sea aimed at it was impossible for various reasons to concentrate a large number of troops for defense. By December 10 the enemy was driven within his lines at Savannah; the march of 360 miles was over; the siege began.

In the special field order of November 9 it was said, "The army will forage liberally on the country during the march." As the state was sparsely settled and the plan of making requisitions on the civil authorities therefore impracticable, this was the only possible mode of supplying the troops. The arrangements for the foraging were made and carried out with military precision. Each brigade sent out a party of about fifty men on foot who would return mounted, driving cattle and mules and hauling wagons or family carriages loaded with fresh mutton, smoked bacon, turkeys, chickens, ducks, corn meal, jugs of molasses and sweet potatoes. The crop having been large, just gathered and laid by for the winter, the section never before having been visited by a hostile army, the land was rich in provisions and forage. While Sherman was maturing the plan of his march to the sea, he wrote to Halleck: "The people of Georgia don't know what war means but when the rich planters of the Oconee and Savannah see their fences and corn and hogs and sheep vanish before their eyes they will have something more than a mean opinion of the 'Yanks.' Even now our poor mules laugh at the fine cornfields and our soldiers riot on chestnuts, sweet potatoes, pigs and chicken." While Sherman and his officers labored sincerely to have the foraging done in an orderly way the men often took food on their own account in a riotous manner. The general himself relates this incident occurring on the march between Atlanta and Milledgeville: "A soldier passed me with a ham on his musket, a jug of sorghum-molasses under his arm and a big piece of honey in his hand, from which he was eating, and, catching my eye he remarked *sotto voce* and carelessly to a comrade, 'Forage liberally on the country,' quoting from my general orders." Sher-

man reproved the man as he did others when similar acts of lawlessness fell under his observation, explaining that "foraging must be limited to the regular parties properly detailed." Full of pride in his soldiers and elated at their manifestations of confidence in him, he gave when the march was completed this mild report of their infractions of discipline: "A little loose in foraging, 'they did some things they ought not to have done.'" A spirit of fun pervaded the army which exhibited itself in innocent frolics, the most typical of which was the meeting of some of the officers in the Hall of Representatives at Milledgeville where they constituted themselves the Legislature of the State of Georgia, elected a speaker, and after a formal debate repealed by a fair vote the Ordinance of Secession.

Destruction was a part of the business of the march. Lee's army drew its supplies of provisions largely from Georgia. "The State of Georgia alone," said Jefferson Davis in his speech at Augusta, "produces food enough not only for her own people and the army within it, but feeds too the Army of Virginia." It became of the utmost importance to sever the railroad communication between the Gulf States and Richmond and to this Sherman gave his personal attention. The bridges and trestles were burned, the masonry of the culverts was blown up. In the destruction of the iron rails mechanical skill vied with native ingenuity in doing the most effective work. The chief engineer designed a machine for twisting the rails after heating them in the fires made by burning the ties: this was used by the Michigan and Missouri engineers. But the infantry, with the mania for destruction which pervaded the army, joined in the work, carrying the rails, when they came to a red heat in the bonfires of the ties, to the nearest trees and twisting them about the trunks or warping them in some fantastic way so that they were useless except for old iron and the old iron even was in unmanageable shape for working in a mill. About 265 miles of railroad were thus destroyed. This in the heart of Jeff Davis's empire, as Sherman called it, was an almost irreparable damage owing to the lack of factories which could make rails for renewals and to the embargo on imports by the blockade of the Southern ports. Stations and machine-shops along the lines were burned. Many thousand bales of cotton, a large number of cotton-gins and presses were destroyed. At Milledgeville Sherman reports: "I burned the railroad buildings and the arsenal; the State House and Governor's mansion I left unharmed." The penitentiary had been burned by the convicts before the arrival of the army. At Millen the soldiers by orders applied the torch to

“the very handsome depot, railroad hotel and three or four large storehouses.” A negro from whom Sherman asked information regarding the operations of the right wing, thus described what he had seen: “First there come along some cavalymen and they burned the depot; then come along some infantry men and they tore up the track and burned it; and just before I left they sot fire to the well.” It was the policy of the general to forbear destroying private property, but in one important case he deviated from the rule. Stopping for the night at a plantation he discovered to belong to Howell Cobb, Buchanan’s Secretary of the Treasury, he sent back word to the corps commander, “spare nothing.” In nearly all of his despatches after he reached the sea he gloated over the destruction of property, giving in the one to Halleck the most emphatic statement of the damage which had been done. “We have consumed the corn and fodder in the region of country thirty miles on either side of a line from Atlanta to Savannah as also the sweet potatoes, cattle, hogs, sheep and poultry, and have carried away more than 10,000 horses and mules as well as a countless number of their slaves. I estimate the damage done to the State of Georgia and its military resources at \$100,000,000; at least \$20,000,000 of which has inured to our advantage and the remainder is simple waste and destruction. This may seem a hard species of warfare but it brings the sad realities of war home to those who have been directly or indirectly instrumental in involving us in its attendant calamities.” Well might he say afterwards, “War is hell.”

Various orders given from time to time show that there was not only lawless foraging but that there was an unwarranted burning of buildings. A more serious charge against the men of this Western army is pillage. Sherman admits the truth of it and so does General Cox. Since the end of the campaign Sherman had heard of jewelry being taken from women and is of the opinion that these depredations were committed by parties of foragers usually called “bummers.” Cox dubs with that name the confirmed and habitual stragglers to whom he ascribes a large part of the irregular acts. Some of the pilfering was undoubtedly due to the uncontrollable American desire for mementos of places visited which were connected with great events. Moreover while three and one half years of civil war had built up an effective fighting machine, they had caused a relaxation in the rules of right conduct among its members so that it had come to be considered proper to despoil anyone living in the enemy’s country; but there was a sincere desire on the part of the commander and his officers to restrain the soldiers

within the limits of civilized usage. The lofty personal character of most of the men in high command and the severity of the punishment threatened for breaches of discipline are evidence of this; and at least one soldier for a petty theft was sentenced "to be shot to death by musketry." Nor must it be overlooked that there was considerable plundering by bands of Confederates which people were prone to charge against Sherman's men. From the characterization of the Union officers one notable exception must be made. Kilpatrick, the commander of the cavalry, was notorious for his immorality and rapacity, and his escapades, winked at by Sherman on account of his military efficiency, were demoralizing to the army at the time and have since tended to give it a bad name. While extenuating nothing it is a gratification to record some words of Sherman which must be read in the light of his honesty of soul and truthfulness of statement. "I never heard," he wrote, "of any cases of murder or rape."

Sherman's campaign struck a blow at slavery. Everywhere the negroes received the Northern soldiers with joy. Near Covington an old gray-haired negro said to Sherman that he "had been looking for the angel of the Lord ever since he was knee-high" and he supposed that the success of the Northern army would bring him freedom. Another who was spokesman for a large number of fellow slaves said to an aide-de-camp of the General: "Ise hope de Lord will prosper you Yankees and Mr. Sherman, because I tinks and we all tinks dat you'se down here in our interests." At Milledgeville the negroes in their ecstasy shouted "Bress de Lord! tanks be to Almighty God, the Yanks is come! de day ob jubilee hab arribed!" "Negro men, women and children joined the column at every mile of our march," reported General Slocum who commanded the left wing. "I think at least 14,000 of these people joined the two columns at different points on the march, but many of them were too old and infirm and others too young to endure the fatigues of the march and were therefore left in the rear. More than one half of the above number however reached the coast with us." The desire to realize their freedom at once was keen, and the number would have been far greater had not Sherman discouraged the negroes from following the army, as all but the young and able-bodied who were put to use were a serious drawback from increasing the number of mouths to be fed, and from the constant apprehension lest they might hamper the movements of the troops in the event that the enemy in formidable array was encountered. But the tidings that President Lincoln had proclaimed them all free was spread far and wide.

Hardee found his position in Savannah untenable and on the night of December 20 evacuated it. Sherman took possession of the city and sent his celebrated dispatch to President Lincoln, who received it opportunely on the evening of Christmas day. "I beg to present to you," the general said, "as a Christmas gift the city of Savannah with 150 heavy guns and plenty of ammunition and also about 25,000 bales of cotton."

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