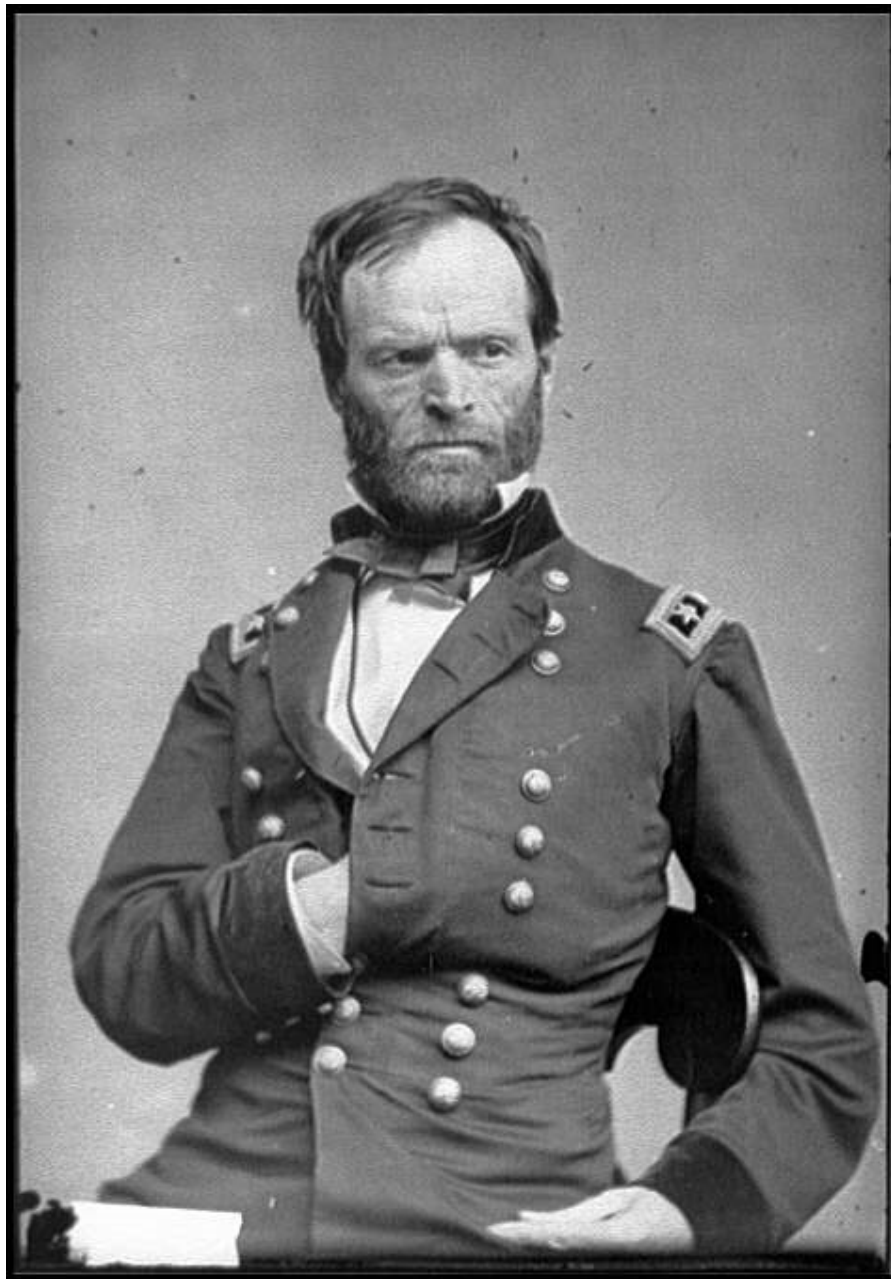


**AMERICAN CIVIL WAR ROUND TABLE OF AUSTRALIA
(NEW SOUTH WALES CHAPTER)**



**GENERAL
WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN**

THE SCOURGE OF THE SOUTH

MARCH 2019

William Tecumseh Sherman

Ohio is renowned for the number of Union generals it produced during the Civil War.

Ten most notable were:

Don Carlos Buell, George Custer, U S Grant, Joseph Hooker, George McClellan, James B McPherson, William Rosecrans, W T Sherman and P H Sheridan.

William Tecumseh Sherman together with U S Grant were arguably the most notable of such distinguished leaders of that war.

Sherman's record as a tactician was patchy as was demonstrated in the Battle of Shiloh and at Chattanooga. However, it is acknowledged his legacy rested on his command of logistics and as a brilliant strategist as in his capture of Atlanta. His practice of total warfare was the subject of much controversy but was endorsed by General Grant and President Lincoln.

Including his time at West Point Sherman spent some forty years in the service of his country. In the Civil War he rose from colonel of a volunteer Regiment at Bull Run to the second most important general of the Union of the surrender of General Johnston's army in North Carolina.

He will be remembered always fondly as one of America's greatest generals both in the Civil War and since.

Terry Cartwright

William Tecumseh Sherman was born in 1820 in Lancaster Ohio. His father Charles Sherman, a successful lawyer who sat on the Ohio Supreme Court, died unexpectedly in 1829. The nine-year old Sherman was raised by a family friend Thomas Ewing a member of the Whig Party as well as a senator from Ohio and the First Secretary of the Interior. His brothers included John who served in the US Congress as a senator and cabinet secretary.

He was given his name of Tecumseh as a result of his father's admiration for a Shawnee Indian chieftain of Ohio.

Senator Ewing secured an appointment for the sixteen-year old Sherman as a cadet in the United States Military Academy at West Point. He roomed with and became good friends with another future great Civil War General George H Thomas. A fellow cadet William Rosecrans remembered Sherman as "a bright-eyed, red headed fellow who was always prepared for a lark of any kind." He graduated sixth in his class in 1840 and was commissioned as a second Lieutenant in the 3rd US Artillery in New York. From there he was posted to Florida where he saw action in the Second Seminole War. He was later stationed in Georgia and Charleston, South Carolina, mainly on garrison duty. However he was able to study the topography of these areas which would be a great assistance to him some twenty years later on his March to the Sea and the capture of Atlanta.

Sherman applied for service in California arriving in Monterey in January 1847. In 1848 he accompanied the military Governor of California, Colonel Richard Mason for an inspection that confirmed gold had been discovered thus starting the California gold rush. Sherman was involved in surveys of the town that would become Sacramento.

In January 1850 Sherman was ordered back to Washington with dispatches for the War Department. He was given leave of absence for six months during which time he married Ellen Ewing whose father was Secretary of the Interior. On 27th September 1850 Sherman was promoted to captain and shortly after was posted to St Louis. In 1853 he resigned his commission and became manager of the San Francisco branch of the St Louis based Bank Lucas, Turner & Co. The bank closed in May 1857 and Sherman relocated to New York on behalf of that bank. This bank failed and he closed it in 1858. Later that year he moved to Leavenworth, Kansas to join a law practice which later he found was not to his liking.

He then applied for the position of superintendent of a military college to be organised in Louisiana. In July 1859 he was notified that he had been elected to the position. Sherman proved an effective and popular head of the institution which later became Louisiana State University. However as more southern states were seceding from the Union he resigned his position and returned to the north. Sherman did not oppose slavery but he was strongly against any attempt to dissolve the Union.

In a letter to a friend in Virginia Sherman wrote: "You people of the South don't know what you are doing. This country will be drenched in blood, and God only knows how it will end. It is all folly, madness, a crime against civilization! You people speak so lightly of war; you don't know what you're talking about. War is a terrible thing! You mistake, too, the people of the North. They are a peaceable people but an earnest people and they will fight, too. They are not going to let this country be destroyed without a mighty effort to save it... Besides, where are your men and appliances of war to contend against them? The North can make a steam engine, locomotive, or railway car; hardly a yard of cloth or pair of shoes can you make. You are rushing into war with one of the most powerful, ingeniously mechanical, and determined people on Earth – right at your doors. You are bound to fail.

Only in your spirit and determination are you prepared for war. In all else you are totally unprepared, with a bad cause to start with. At first you will make headway, but as your limited resources begin to fail, shut out from the markets of Europe as you will be, your cause will begin to wane. If your people will but stop and think, they must see in the end that you will surely fail.”

He accurately foretold the four years of Civil War. In his resignation he declared to the Governor of Louisiana “On no earthly account will I do any act or think any thought hostile to or in defiance of the old Government of the United States.”

After spending a few months as president of a St Louis streetcar company, in May 1861 he offered himself for service in the regular army and his brother John, a senator in Congress, and others lobbied to get a commission for him. On 7th June he received a telegram summoning him to Washington. Earlier he had written “I still think it is to be a long war – very long – much longer than any politician thinks.”

Civil War - Bull Run - Manassas

Sherman was appointed Colonel of the 13th US Infantry Regiment effective 14th May 1861. He became one of the few Union officers to distinguish himself at the first Battle of Bull Run on 21st July 1861 where he was grazed by bullets in the knee and shoulder. He always regretted that while serving in California he missed participating in the American-Mexico War. President Lincoln was impressed by Sherman while visiting the troops on 23rd July and promoted him to Brigadier General of Volunteers effective 17th May 1861 with seniority, senior in rank to U S Grant his future commander.

He was assigned to service under Robert Anderson in the Department of the Cumberland in Louisville Kentucky and in October he took over from Anderson in command of that department. Having succeeded Anderson at Louisville, Sherman now had principal military responsibility for Kentucky, a border state in which Confederate troops held Columbus and Bowling Green and were present near the Cumberland Gap. He became exceedingly pessimistic about the outlook for his command and he complained frequently to Washington DC about shortages while providing exaggerated estimates of the strength of the rebel forces. Critical press reports appeared about him after an October visit to Louisville by the Secretary of War, Simon Cameron, and in early November 1861 Sherman insisted that he be relieved. He was promptly replaced by Brigadier General Don Carlos Buell and transferred to St Louis, Missouri. In December he was put on leave by Maj Gen Henry W Halleck, commander of the Department of the Missouri, who considered him unfit for duty. Sherman went to Lancaster, Ohio to recuperate.

By mid-December 1861 Sherman had recovered sufficiently to return to service under Halleck in the Department of the Missouri. Sherman’s initial assignments were rear-echelon commands, first of an instructional barracks near St Louis and then in command of the District of Cairo. Operating from Paducah, Kentucky, he provided logistical support for the operations of Brig Gen Ulysses S Grant to capture Fort Donelson. Grant, the previous commander of the District of Cairo, had recently won a major victory at Fort Henry and been given command of the ill-defined District of West Tennessee. Although Sherman was technically the senior officer at this time, he wrote to Grant “I feel anxious about you as I know the great facilities the Confederates have of concentration by means of the River and Railroad, but I have faith in you – Command me in any way.”

Shiloh

After Grant captured Fort Donelson, Sherman got his wish to serve under Grant when he was assigned on 1st March 1862 to the Army of West Tennessee, as commander of the 5th Division. His first major test under Grant was at the Battle of Shiloh. The massive Confederate attack on the morning of 6th April 1862 took most of the senior Union commanders by surprise. Sherman had dismissed the intelligence reports received from militia officers, refusing to believe that Confederate General Albert Sidney Johnson would leave his base at Corinth. He took no precautions beyond strengthening his picket lines and refused to entrench, build abatis, or push out reconnaissance patrols. At Shiloh he may have wished to avoid appearing overly alarmed in order to escape the kind of criticism he had received in Kentucky. He had written to his wife that if he took more precautions “they’d call me crazy again.”

Despite being caught unprepared by the attack Sherman rallied his division and conducted an orderly fighting retreat that helped avert a disastrous Union rout. Finding Grant at the end of the day sitting under an oak tree in the darkness and smoking a cigar, Sherman felt in his words “some wise and sudden instinct not to mention retreat”. In what would become one of the most notable conversations of the war, Sherman said simply: “Well Grant, we’ve had the devil’s own day, haven’t we?” After a puff of his cigar Grant replied calmly: “Yes. Lick ‘em tomorrow, though.” Sherman proved instrumental to the successful Union counterattack of 7th April 1862. At Shiloh Sherman was wounded twice – in the hand and shoulder – and had three horses shot out from under him. His performance was praised by Grant and Halleck and after the battle he was promoted to major general of volunteers, effective 1st May 1862.

Beginning in late April a Union force of 100,000 moved slowly against Corinth under Halleck’s command with Grant relegated to second-in-command, Sherman commanded the division on the extreme right of the Union’s right wing (under George H Thomas). Shortly after the Union forces occupied Corinth on 30th May, Sherman persuaded Grant not to leave his command, despite the serious difficulties he was having with Halleck. Sherman offered Grant an example from his own life: “Before the battle of Shiloh I was cast down by a mere newspaper assertion of ‘crazy’, but that single battle gave me new life, and I’m now in high feather.” He told Grant that if he remained in the army “some happy accident might restore you to favour and your true place.” In July Grant’s situation improved when Halleck left for the East to become general-in-chief and Sherman became the military governor of occupied Memphis.

Vicksburg

The career of Sherman ascended considerably after that time. This was in part because he developed close personal ties to Grant during the two years they served together in the West.

Sherman’s military record in 1862-63 was mixed. In December 1862 forces under his command suffered a severe repulse at the Battle of Chickasaw Bayou just north of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Soon after his XV Corps was ordered to join Maj Gen John A McClernand in his successful assault on Arkansas Post, generally regarded as a politically motivated distraction from the effort to capture Vicksburg. Before the Vicksburg Campaign in the Spring of 1863, Sherman expressed serious reservations about the wisdom of Grant’s

unorthodox strategy, but he went on to perform well in that campaign under Grant's supervision.

The historian John D Winters in *The Civil War in Louisiana (1963)* describes Sherman:

"He had yet (before Vicksburg) to display any marked talents for leadership. Sherman, beset by hallucinations and unreasonable fears and finally contemplating suicide, had been relieved from command in Kentucky. He later began a new climb to success at Shiloh and Corinth under Grant. Still if he muffed his Vicksburg assignment which had begun unfavourably, he would rise no higher. As a man Sherman was an eccentric mixture of strength and weakness. Although he was impatient, often irritable and depressed, petulant, headstrong and unreasonably gruff, he had solid soldierly qualities. His men swore by him and most of his fellow officers admired him."

Chattanooga

After the surrender of Vicksburg to the Union forces under Grant on 4th July 1863, Sherman was given the rank of brigadier general in the regular army, in addition to his rank as a major general of volunteers. Sherman's family came from Ohio to visit his camp near Vicksburg; his nine-year old son, Willie, the Little Sergeant, died from typhoid fever contracted during the trip.

Command in the West was unified under Grant (Military Division of the Mississippi) and Sherman succeeded Grant in command of the Army of the Tennessee. Following the defeat of the Army of the Cumberland at the Battle of Chickamauga by Confederate General Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee, the army was besieged in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Sherman's troops were sent to relieve them.

During the Chattanooga Campaign in November, under Grant's overall command, Sherman quickly took his assigned target of Billy Goat Hill at the north end of Missionary Ridge, only to discover that it was not part of the ridge at all, but rather a detached spur separate from the main spine by a rock-strewn ravine. When he attempted to attack the main spine at Tunnel Hill his troops were repeatedly repulsed by Patrick Cleburne's heavy division, the best unit in Bragg's army. Sherman's efforts were assisted by George Henry Thomas's army's successful assault on the centre of the Confederate line, a movement originally intended as a diversion. No doubt this assault was aided by the need for Bragg to send reinforcement to Cleburne in defence against Sherman. Subsequently Sherman led a column to relieve Union forces under Ambrose Burnside thought to be in peril at Knoxville. In February 1864 he led an expedition to Meridian, Mississippi to disrupt Confederate infrastructure.

Meridian was an important rail centre and arsenal and Sherman's attack destroyed the town. This campaign as viewed as a prelude to Sherman's March to the Sea in that a large amount of damage and destruction of infrastructure was inflicted on the Confederate war effort in Mississippi. After the attack the inhabitants of Meridian were without food for several days but the soldiers did not inflict personal injuries on them.

The Battle for Atlanta

When Lincoln called Grant to the East to take command of all the Union armies, Grant appointed Sherman to succeed him as head of the Military Division of the Mississippi which meant command of all Union troops in the Western theatre of the war. Sherman wrote to Grant setting out his strategy to end the war stating: "If you can whip Lee and I can march to the Atlantic I think Ol' Uncle Abe will give us twenty days to see the young folks."

He proceeded to invade Georgia with three armies: the 60,000 strong Army of the Cumberland under Thomas, the 25,000 strong of the Ohio Army under James McPherson and the 13,000 strong Army of the Tennessee under John Schofield. The armies fought a lengthy campaign of manoeuvre against Confederate General Joseph Johnston's Army of the Tennessee, attempting a direct assault only at Kennesaw Mountain which turned out as a disaster with a great loss of life. In July 1864 cautious Johnston was replaced by John Bell Hood who turned out to be an aggressive and headstrong leader who played into Sherman's strength by leading his army in direct battles on open ground. In August Sherman was advised of his promotion to Major General in the regular army.

Sherman's Atlanta campaign concluded in September with capture of the city which Hood had been forced to abandon. This success made Sherman's a household name in the North and helped ensure Lincoln's Presidential election in November. Thus the capture of Atlanta, may have been Sherman's greatest contribution to the Union cause. After ordering almost all civilians to leave the city in September, Sherman gave instructions that all military and government buildings in Atlanta be burned, although many private homes and shops were burned as well. This was to set a precedent for future behaviour by his armies.

March to the Sea

After the capture of Atlanta, Hood's army remained in the general area threatening Sherman's communications to the north. Eventually he gained approval from his superiors to cut loose from his communications and march south having told Grant that he would "make Georgia howl". Some authorities thought that Hood could move into Tennessee. However Sherman left forces under Thomas and Schofield to deal with Hood. Hood's army was severely mauled in the Battle of Franklin and virtually destroyed in front of Nashville.

After the November Presidential elections, Sherman began the march of 62,000 men to the port of Savannah, Georgia living off the land and causing by his own estimate more than \$100 million in property damage.

By this time Sherman was convinced that the Confederacy could only be defeated by the complete destruction of both its military and civilian ability to wage war. Despite his earlier fondness for the south and its people, his strategy of total war bringing devastation to the region earned Sherman a deep level of hatred.

Sherman himself loathed the fighting but realised its necessity, famously saying "War is cruelty. There is no use trying to reform it. The crueller it is the sooner it will be over." Sherman's distrust of the press led him to ban reporters and many Americans had no idea where the Army went after leaving Atlanta.

While in Savannah Sherman learned from a newspaper that his infant son Charles had died during the Savannah campaign. He had never seen the child.

At the end of this campaign his troops captured Savannah on 21st December 1864. Sherman then sent his famous message to Lincoln giving him the city as a Christmas present.

Sherman's success in Georgia received wide coverage in the northern press at a time Grant was criticised for the progress against Lee's army in Virginia. At this time Sherman made his declaration of loyalty to Grant: "Grant is a great general. I know him well. He stood by me when I was crazy and I stood by him when he was drunk, and now we stand by each other."

The Carolinas

During the occupation of Savannah Grant had given orders to Sherman to embark his troops on ships and join the Union forces facing Lee in Virginia. However Sherman persuaded Grant to allow him to march through the Carolinas destroying everything of military value as he had done in Georgia. He was particularly interested in South Carolina, the first state to secede from the Union, because of the effect it would have on the morale of the people. The army proceeded north against little opposition from the troops of General Joseph Johnston. Hearing that Sherman's men were advancing on corduroy roads through the Salkehatchie swamp at a rate of twelve miles per day, Johnston said "there had been no such army in existence since the days of Julius Caesar."

Sherman captured the state capital of South Carolina on 17th February 1865. Fire began that night and most of the city was destroyed. The burning of Columbia has festered ever since, some claiming the fires were accidental, others an act of vengeance, while still others that the retreating Confederates burned bales of cotton on their retreat from town. In North Carolina the Union troops did little damage to civil infrastructure as this State, unlike its southern neighbour, was regarded as a reluctant State, having been the second last state to secede from the Union. Sherman's last significant military clash was a victory at the Battle of Bentonville on 19th to 21st March. He then met up at Goldsborough, North Carolina with Union troops waiting for him after the capture of Fort Fisher and Wilmington. Later in March Sherman travelled to City Point Virginia to consult with Grant and Lincoln who happened to be there at the same time. It is thought that at this meeting the terms of southern surrender were discussed.

Confederate surrender

Following Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox Court House and the assassination of President Lincoln, Sherman met with Johnston in mid-April at Bennett Place in Durham, North Carolina, to negotiate a Confederate surrender. Sherman conditionally agreed to generous terms that dealt with both political and military issues. Sherman thought that those terms were consistent with the views Lincoln had expressed at City Point, but the general had not been given the authority by General Grant, the newly installed President Andrew Johnson or the Cabinet to offer those terms.

The government in Washington DC refused to approve Sherman's terms and the Secretary of War, Edwin M Stanton, denounced Sherman publicly precipitating a long-lasting feud between the two men. Confusion over this issue lasted until 26th April 1865 when Johnston,

ignoring instructions from President Davis, agreed to purely military terms and formally surrendered his army and all the Confederate forces in the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida in what was the largest single capitulation of the war. Sherman proceeded with 60,000 of his troops to Washington DC where they marched in the Grand Review of the Armies on 24th May 1865, and were then disbanded. Having become the second most important general in the Union army, he thus had come full circle to the city where he started his war-time service as colonel of an infantry regiment.

In May 1865, after the major Confederate armies had surrendered, Sherman in a personal letter wrote:

"I confess, without shame, I am sick and tired of fighting – its glory is all moonshine, even success the most brilliant is over dead and mangled bodies, with the anguish and lamentations of distant families, appealing to me for sons, husbands and fathers... 'tis only those who have never heard a shot, never heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded and lacerated....that cry aloud for more blood, more vengeance, more desolation."

Strategy and Total Warfare

Sherman's military legacy was primarily of his command of logistics and his brilliance as a strategist. An influential British military historian and theorist, B H Liddell Hart, rated Sherman as one of the most important strategists in the history of warfare. He credited Sherman with a mastery of manoeuvre in his series of turning movements against Johnston during the Atlanta campaign. Liddell Hart also stated that study of Sherman's campaigns had contributed to the theory of mechanised warfare which influenced the Second World War amongst others, Irwin Rommel and George Patton.

Sherman's greatest contribution of total warfare was endorsed by Grant and President Lincoln and has been the subject of controversy. He downplayed his role saying he was simply carrying out orders to play his part in Grant's master plan for ending the war.

Sherman's advance through Georgia and South Carolina was demonstrated by widespread destruction of civilian supplies and infrastructure. Looting was officially forbidden but it is not known how this order was enforced. Union soldiers who foraged from southern homes became known as bummers. The speed and efficiency of the destruction by Sherman's army was remarkable. The practice of heating rails and bending them around trees, leaving behind what came to be known as 'Sherman's neckties', made repairs difficult. Accusations that civilians were targeted and war crimes were committed on the March have made Sherman a controversial figure to this day, particularly in the south. However he was well regarded in the north and by his troops.

The damage done was almost entirely limited to the destruction of property. Accurate figures are not available but the loss of civilian life appears to have been very small. Consuming supplies, wrecking infrastructure and undermining morale were Sherman's goals. An Alabama-born officer on Sherman's staff commented: "It is a terrible thing to consume and destroy the sustenance of thousands of people but if the scorched earth strategy serves to paralyse their husbands and fathers who are fighting ... it is mercy in the end."

Post-War Service

In June 1865 Sherman received his first post-war command that of the Military Division of the Mississippi which encompassed the territories between the Mississippi and the Rocky Mountains. Initially his efforts were focused on protecting the main wagon trails, such as the Oregon, Bozeman and Santa Fe. Later his main concern was to protect the construction and operation of the Union Pacific and Kansas Pacific railroads. Sherman was no great lover of the American Indian and in 1868 authorised his subordinate in Missouri, Philip Sheridan, to use the hard-war tactics they both used in the Civil War.

On 25th July 1856 Congress created the rank of General of the Army for Grant and promoted Sherman to Lieutenant General. On Grant becoming President in 1869, Sherman was appointed Commanding General of the United States Army and elevated to the rank of General of the Army. Sherman clashed with elements of the people who were critical of the army's killing and treatment of Indians. To escape from these difficulties from 1874 to 1876 he moved his headquarters to St Louis, Missouri.

Much of his time as Commanding General was spent in making the western and plains states safe for settlement. The displacement of Indians was assisted by the growth of railroads and the eradication of the buffalo. Despite his harsh treatment of warring tribes, Sherman spoke out against the unfair way speculators and government agents treated the Indians within the reservations. On 11th April 1880 he addressed a crowd of more than 10,000 at Columbus, Ohio: "There is many a boy here today who looks on war as all glory, but boys, it is all hell." In 1945 President Harry Truman would say: "Sherman was wrong. I'm telling you I find peace is hell."

One of Sherman's significant acts as head of the Army was the establishment of what is now the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth in 1881. He stepped down as Commanding General on 1st November 1883 and retired on 8th February 1884.

Later Years and Death

Sherman lived most of the rest of his life in New York. He loved theatre and painting and was in demand as a speaker at dinners and banquets. He was proposed as a Republican candidate for the Presidential election of 1884 but he declined as emphatically as possible, saying "I will not accept if nominated and will not serve if elected." The rejection of a candidacy is now referred to as a 'Shermanesque statement'.

Sherman's wife Ellen had previously passed away in 1888 after 38 years of marriage when he died of pneumonia on 14th February 1891.

General Joseph Johnston, the Confederate general who opposed Sherman in Georgia and the Carolinas, was a pallbearer in a service in New York. It was a bitterly cold day and a friend of Johnston, fearing he might become ill, asked him to put on his hat. Johnston famously replied "If I were in Sherman's place and he were standing in mine, he would not put on his hat." Johnston caught a serious cold and died one month later of pneumonia.

On Sherman's death President Benjamin Harrison ordered all National flags to be flown at half-mast. The President had served under Sherman in the Atlanta campaign and fought in the Battle of Nashville. In a message to both Houses of Congress he wrote:

"He was an ideal soldier, and shared to the fullest the Espirit du Corps of the Army, but he cherished the civic institutions organised under the Constitution, and was only a soldier that these might be perpetuated in underdiminished usefulness and honor."



Sherman's statue was dedicated by President Theodore Roosevelt on 15th October 1903. Located in Sherman Park it depicts the day of 24th May 1865 when he rode up Pennsylvania Avenue at the head of the Army of the Tennessee.

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