

THE BATTLE CRY



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HAPPY NEW YEAR 2016

WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN

December 20, 1992. Thomas Fleming (History of West Point, and Over There) reviewed John Marszalek's book, *Sherman; a Soldier's Passion for Order*. NY: Free Press, 1992. The following quotes the reviewer:

"In the 1970's and 80's William Tecumseh Sherman was consigned to moral obloquy by books like James Reston Jr.'s *Sherman's March and Vietnam* and John B. Walters's *Merchant of Terror*. Michael Herr and Mary McCarthy also saw in the volatile red-haired Ohioan the prototype of the evil general. In the end-of-history post-ideological 90's, we have had Charles Royster remind us, in his brilliant book *The Destructive War*, that there were many others on both sides of the battle lines who recommended Sherman's policy of total war. Stonewall Jackson was as furiously in favor of ripping up railroads and burning enemy factories and warehouses and living off (plundering) the local populace as Sherman. Abolitionists like Wendell Phillips demanded the merciless use of fire and sword long before Sherman applied it.

Now we have John F. Marszalek, a professor of history at Mississippi State University and the author of a much-admired book about Sherman's stormy relationship with the press, *Sherman's other War*, defending Sherman and his determination to 'make Georgia [and South Carolina] howl.' Mr. Marszalek rests his case on a psychological interpretation of Sherman's early life. His father died when Sherman was 9 years old, leaving his wife and their 11 children virtually penniless. His wealthy neighbor and close friend, Thomas Ewing, adopted the boy and arranged support for the mother and other children.

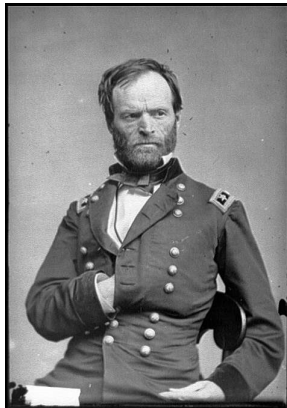
From this experience, Mr. Marszalek maintains in *Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order*, Sherman acquired a dread of social instability, which he saw as incipient anarchy — and he considered almost any measure justified to restore order. Mr. Marszalek also argues that Sherman's ambivalent feelings toward his stepfather added to his anxiety about order, which Sherman often identified with some form of success.

The thesis is unconvincing. Mr. Marszalek offers no evidence that his father's death destabilized Sherman's world. He moved only 100 yards away — often dropping in to see his mother for lunch or dinner — and Mr. Marszalek admits the lost father 'was away from home most of the time in the first place. As for Sherman's attitude toward Thomas Ewing, it seems little different from any son's struggle to escape the looming shadow of a rich, powerful father — compounded, in Sherman's case, by his marriage to Ewing's neurotic daughter, Ellen.

The thesis is also superfluous. In the 1840's Sherman fought in Florida's Vietnam-like Seminole War, which frustrated the United States Army for three decades, and he was exposed, as a banker in the 1850's, to San Francisco's wild-eyed vigilantism. Across the Rio Grande, Mexico was in political and military upheaval for most of his adult life. Here were more than enough reasons for Sherman to detest rebellious disorder — especially when these examples were combined with four years of fierce emphasis on order and obedience at West Point and with the passionately held conservative opinions of his monumental stepfather.

Mr. Marszalek is so busy using Ewing as a psychological foil that he never gives us a coherent

(con't on p.2)



NEXT PROGRAMS

Jan. 19, 2016

John Marzelak

General Sherman

[Event will be at Grace church, regular time]

Feb. 16, 2016

Jeff Seymour

Confederate Navy

Mar. 15, 2016

Wayne Motts

National Civil War Museum, Harrisburg

Apr. 19, 2016

Joe Reinhart

Germans in the Civil War

TRIVIA QUESTIONS

- Other than mailing letters, why did many Confederates buy stamps?
- What ship, built in Philadelphia in 1859, was originally christened Habana?
- Who was the only civilian killed in the Battle of Gettysburg?
- What kind of attire did men of the Ninth Mississippi wear at the Battle of Shiloh?
- Who won the last battle between North and South and where was it located?
- Who commanded the Confederate army of Mississippi at Vicksburg? What was notable about him?



intellectual portrait of this giant, who was a power in state and Federal politics for decades and unquestionably the dominant influence in Sherman's life. Without Ewing, the author loses track of one of the central ideas in Sherman's cosmos, the reverence for the Constitution that permeated the Midwest – and enraged the entire region against those descendants of the original states who dared to break the sacred compact.

There is also no need for reductionist psychologizing to explain why Sherman detested reporters after they described him as a raving madman in late 1861, when he expressed violent doubts about the North's ability to win the war in Kentucky. His emergence from this near disaster and his rapid ascent to fame as the leader of the Civil War in the West depend-

ed almost entirely on his friendship with Ulysses S. Grant. How and why Grant enabled Sherman to flourish should be the heart of any new assessment of the man who ignored conventional ideas of supplies and logistics to march from Atlanta to the sea. Mr. Marszalek links Sherman's renewed self-confidence to Grant's ability to achieve success – hardly a novel notion. He also fails to explore Sherman's relationship with other important generals, notably George Thomas.

What is more important, Mr. Marszalek's narrow focus on Sherman's psychology omits what makes his story still rele-

vant for contemporary Americans – the debate that raged throughout the war on which tactics were permitted and which not. Gen. George McClellan was the military spokesman for the North's numerous Democrats, who wanted to limit the fighting to the rival armies. Sherman, who had spent much of his military career in the South, was an early proponent of the view that the Civil War was a struggle between two peoples, and it could be won only by breaking the spirit of the Confederacy.

Mr. Marszalek defends Sherman's ruthlessness by noting his humane side. For sniping at a steamboat, Sherman could order the razing of an entire Tennessee town. But he was chary of human life. Whenever possible, he avoided pitched battles and heavy casualties. He never massacred civilians in the style of the Mongols, the Nazis or the Serbs.

In his best chapter, Mr. Marszalek describes the improbable climax of Sherman's Civil War – his attempt to win a soft peace for the South. The armistice he signed with Joseph Johnston, commander of the last serious Confederate army left after Lee's surrender, guaranteed political amnesty and the virtual restoration of the prewar status quo, except, of course, for the abolition of slavery. But Lincoln was dead, and the proponents of radical reconstruction swiftly repudiated the deal.

Mr. Marszalek fails to connect this demarche to the profoundly conservative bent Sherman had inherited from Thomas Ewing. His substitution of psychology for a wider historical vision bars him from the only narrative mode that makes sense of Sherman: irony. Sherman saw no place for

blacks in the United States. He opposed using them as soldiers. The man who earned the South's enmity liked Southerners and saw little wrong with slavery. He was at one with his Midwestern troops, who often declared they would rather shoot a New England abolitionist than a Confederate soldier. The same irony pervaded Sherman's postwar life. Married to an intensely pious woman who never stopped trying to lure him into the Roman Catholic Church, Sherman resisted her – but lost his favorite older son to the priesthood. When his friend Grant became President, he abandoned the Army to the politicians. As commanding general, Sherman was little more than a figurehead while the Army fought a series of indecisive wars with a foe infinitely more anarchic than the Confederacy – the Plains Indians. Sherman could have had the Presidential nomination of either party, but America's chaotic politics made his famous refusal of a draft a foregone conclusion.

The order Sherman craved in private and public spheres perpetually eluded him. Mr. Marszalek ruefully notes this fact, but he sees it more as soap opera than as a tragic collision between conflicting visions of America. The life of this master of violence demonstrates, in the end, the limitations of the policy he perfected – and the relentless dynamism of American history.



Atlanta's Union Station



Columbia, South Carolina

MARCHING THROUGH GEORGIA: SHERMAN: A SOLDIER'S LIFE

Between mid-November 1864 and April 1865, William Tecumseh Sherman cut his supply lines and – against standard military orthodoxy and the advice of the president, the secretary of war and General Grant – set off with an army of over 60,000 Midwesterners into "the bowels of the Confederacy." "I can make Georgia howl," he promised his superiors at the outset of the anabasis that shattered the pretensions of the secessionists and ruined the soul of the South.

In his trek into Georgia, Sherman, master of strategy, tactics and logistics, outfoxed one Confederate general, Joe Johnston, and battered another, John Bell Hood, to capture and burn Atlanta. He then turned east to the Atlantic Coast. After traversing 300 miles of Georgia countryside in a 60-mile-wide swath, he claimed to have destroyed \$100 million of property, freed over 40,000 slaves and torched the plantations of the aristocracy and the public buildings of the Confederacy. Enraged Southerners called the charred chimneys of the plantations "Sherman's sentinels" and the iron rails wrapped around trees "Sherman neckties."

They abhorred him as an Attila or Alaric, and promised to slaughter his foragers and scatter his army in the same way the Cossacks had ruined Napoleon's forces retreating from Moscow. But the reality was far different. Nearly 50,000 Confederate troops in four widely separated armies under Generals Hood, Hardee, Wheeler and Bragg either fled from Sherman, ignored his advance or nipped at his heels while avoiding battle, as his dreaded and untouched army pulled into an abandoned Savannah.

In the dead of winter he headed northward through the Carolinas, the hotbed of secession, his army growing, not diminishing, amid the rain, mud and nearly impassable terrain. The war most likely ended at Appomattox not because Grant's army had necessarily whipped Lee's, but because Sherman's army of retribution, led by veterans from Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, with black pioneers flocking in from the plantations, was ap-

proaching Richmond – causing mass defections of Southern soldiers who worried about their families and property, and their own chances of survival sandwiched between Grant and an army of Westerners that had never been defeated.

After leaving Atlanta – Sherman's men saw the march down to Georgia as the first leg of a great crusade that would end in Richmond – Sherman suffered nominal casualties and killed few Southerners. His columns of burners and pillagers committed very few rapes or murders, and his army was larger and in better health when it reached North Carolina than when it began. The Southern public put all that aside and hated Sherman with a fury that it had never shown Grant, the devourer of Southern manhood – thus confirming Machiavelli's dictum that "men more quickly forget the death of their fathers than the loss of their patrimonies."

The contrast between Sherman and Grant and Lee could not be starker. As Sherman went south to discredit the Confederacy at little cost to his army, Grant rammed the Army of the Potomac head-on against Lee's entrenchments for most of the summer of 1864, nearly ruining it in the process, until a horrified Northern public was about ready for a brokered peace.

Lee too had once launched a great invasion across the Mason-Dixon line, but unlike Sherman's, his fated expedition into the enemy's heartland ruined his own army, led to thousands of Union dead and prolonged the war instead of shortening it. Yet the slave-owning and dapper Lee was beloved despite the carnage at Gettysburg, while the slave-freeing and rough-looking Sherman, who ended the war at little cost in human life, was forever labeled a monster. Such is the paradox that any biographer of Sherman – who spoke too candidly and wrote too much – must address.

Besides Lee Kennett's latest portrait, the last decade alone has witnessed three new biographies of Sherman, each seeking to capture the mystery of this strange American who more than any 19th-century figure reinvented the nature of war-making and established the rules of modern conflict as we know it today – as evidenced in the Persian Gulf and Balkan wars, where Americans sought to destroy the infrastructure that fueled the conflict rather than to kill enemy soldiers on the battlefield. John Marszalek's magisterial 1993 study saw Sherman, whose private life was chaotic at best, as devoted nevertheless to "order," a control freak who sought always to curb unruliness. In Michael Fellman's "Citizen Sherman," he is not a brilliant general but largely a racist, sexist and brutal white man who did more harm than good to blacks, American Indians and women. S. P. Hirschson's "White Tecumseh" sought to reconcile the alarming pronouncements of Sherman against the actual record and found him as competent and careful in action as he was reckless and extreme in word.

General Sherman A Comment on Royster

THE DESTRUCTIVE WAR

*William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall
Jackson and the Americans*

by Charles Royster

(Vintage Civil War Library).

Charles Royster argues that each side's conception of nationalism, as well as the personalities of these particular generals, established the Civil War's pattern of wholesale slaughter from the very beginning.

In 1991 [one] reviewer, Iver Bernstein said, "Perhaps the achievement of Mr. Royster's book is not so much its ability to explain, which remains very considerable, but its power to make the reader feel the force of Civil War Americans' idea of violence."



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Sherman: A Soldier's Life, review con't

Still, for all the new interpretations, neither Kennett nor any recent historian has matched B. H. Liddell Hart's brilliant 1929 biography, which rightly saw Sherman as the great strategist of the Civil War, who understood the true connection between the economy of a modern industrial state and its ability to make war. Liddell Hart, veteran of the carnage in the trenches of World War I, offered up the rambunctious and uncouth Sherman as the true humanist, who found a way, by burning rather than killing, to compel a recalcitrant enemy to concede while still alive. "This may seem a hard species of warfare," Sherman sighed at the conclusion of his great march, "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."

Lee Kennett, the distinguished Civil War historian who previously wrote an engaging cultural study of the march through Georgia, offers no grand insights about Sherman's contribution to the Union victory or the history of war in general. But his biography is welcome for unexpected reasons. Kennett, a University of Georgia historian, writes as a Southerner who in re-examining much new archival material finds little atrocity in Sherman's marches and sees his war on property as largely within the confines of civilized conflict -- a far different appraisal than J. B. Walters's polemical "Merchant of Terror," which still vented Southern rage a century after Atlanta and Columbia, S.C., were ignited. As Kennett shows, the sense of restraint is all the more remarkable inasmuch as Sherman's army was run pretty much as a private army, with him its near dictator, careful to exclude reporters, commissioners and outside observers as he saw fit.

While Kennett carefully describes in excruciating detail all of Sherman's flaws -- contradictory positions, occasional sloppiness in tactical readiness and clever efforts to improve his own image at the expense of rivals -- he gives the controversial ravager grudging respect in curtailing rather than expanding the killing of desperate and outnumbered Confederate soldiers. Perhaps historians are recognizing what Sherman taught us: destroying an enemy's ability to wage war is more moral, and expeditious, than slaughtering its youth; civilians to the rear who advocate, plan and sometimes profit from war can be as culpable as conscripts who pull triggers under orders.

To Kennett, Sherman's wild mood swings, tantrums and controversies that have so bothered his biographers were a result of clinical narcissism, a mental illness of sorts coupled with his own strange childhood that fostered lifelong insecurity. Fatherless at 9, Sherman was adopted by the wealthy Ewing dynasty of Ohio. He married his stepsister Ellen, and for the rest of his life sought to please Thomas Ewing, a leading barrister of the day. Until 40, Sherman was guilt-stricken that he had not lived up to his wealthy benefactors or the meteoric success of his own brother, John, a senator from Ohio -- even as he freely used their influence to receive jobs, appointments and a chance at command in 1861. Kennett therein explains, in a sometimes dubious Freudian context, why the ostensibly modest Sherman spoke and acted in such a self-serving, contradictory and often childish fashion, and why he turned cold and uncaring to his family and friends during their deepest personal crises and losses. But explication of subconscious motive is not the same as appreciation of overt deed, and so we still await answers to the far more haunting and important question: How did such an unlikely man in a mere six months devise such a brilliant strategy to bring such a destructive war to a close?

Victor Davis Hanson, the author, most recently, of "Carnage and Culture," wrote about Sherman, Patton and the Theban general Epaminondas in "The Soul of Battle."

This has been a New York Times Book Review of **Sherman: A Soldier's Life**, by Lee Kennett. NY: Harper Collins, 2001.

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