

WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN

Born 8 February 1820 in Lancaster, Ohio

Middle name from father a prominent lawyer & judge who admired the Shawnee chief Tecumseh. , Father died when he was 9, mother left a poor widow with 11 children, most fostered out. Sherman, nicknamed CUMP, was raised by John Ewing (Family friend). Sherman later married his foster sister Ellen and had 8 children.

At 16 Sherman went to U S military Academy at West Point; graduated in 1840, ranked 6th in his class. Did not see action in Mexican American war but stationed in North California, several years as admin officer rising to rank of Captain. Resigned his commission in 1853 but stayed in California.

Before the Civil War

Became a banker but frenetic pace of San Francisco overwhelmed him & bank failed in 1857 so moved to Kansas & practiced law.

Returned to the South in 1859; became Superintendent of Louisiana State Seminary of Learning & Military Academy (now Louisiana State Uni)

Not an ardent opponent of Slavery but against idea of Southern secession over the issue. Repeatedly warned his Southern friends of taking on the more prosperous industrial North but to no avail.

Resigned his position after Louisiana seceded in January 1861.

After Confederate States of America attacked Fort Sumter, Sherman worried President Abraham Lincoln was not committing enough troops to bring war to a swift end. Overcame his doubts & got a commission in the U S Army.

First Battle of Bull Run

Became Colonel of new 13 Infantry Regiment; before that unit fully activated, he led a brigade at First Battle of Bull Run in July 1861. Union suffered surprising defeat but Sherman praised for his actions & Lincoln promoted him to Brigadier General of Volunteers.

Transferred to Kentucky & Army of the Cumberland. Asked for 200,000 men, ridiculed in the press, called him insane. Nov 1861 relieved of his duties, returned to Ohio suffering from depression & nervous breakdown.

Sherman & Grant

Returned to service just weeks later again to the Western Theatre. Supported Ulysses S Grant at successful Battle of Fort Donelson, Kentucky and the two began a close bond.

Served under Grant in Army of West Tennessee & fought at Battle of Shiloh, April 1862. Unprepared for size and placement of enemy troops; rallied his troops for organised retreat preventing a rout and allowed Union forces to secure victory next day.

Promoted to Major General of Volunteers. Grant blamed for losses at Shiloh & considered resigning; Sherman convinced him to stay.

Continued to serve with Grant culminating in capture of Confederate stronghold after siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Grant criticised for his drinking, Sherman provided key logistical support. Vicksburg fell July 4 1863 so Union Gained control of Mississippi River a key turning point in the war. President Lincoln recognised value of both men - Grant in charge of all troops in West, Sherman became Brigadier General of Regular Army. Criticized for performance at Battle of Chattanooga but eventually won & assumed control of Western Armies when Grant transferred East.

Sherman takes Atlanta

May 1864 Sherman set out for Atlanta (centre of Confederate industry) Took 4 months but captured city in early September. Who did the most damage, retreating Confederate troops or Sherman's men? Sherman still loved the South but realised 'total war' only way to stop it. Some hatred of him remains today.

Sherman's March to the Sea

Nov 1864 (supported by Lincoln & Grant) left Atlanta with 60,000 troops bound for coastal port of Savannah. Separated his men into 2 Corps - tore through the countryside destroying military and civilian targets.

Sherman distrusted the Press so apart from people of Georgia many Americans had no clue where he went. Finally in December, troops occupied Savannah & offered the city to Lincoln as a Xmas present! Early 1865 Sherman marched through the Carolinas. Most of City of Columbia was burned to the ground. By Spring the army was in North Carolina when news spread Robert E. Lee had surrendered at Appomattox.

Post Civil War Career

Sherman remained in the U S Army. Assumed command of all U S forces in 1869 when Grant became President.

Retired from active duty 1884 & settled in New York.

Died 14th February 1891 aged 71