

28 William Sherman

Top 100 Americans

William Tecumseh Sherman (February 8, 1820 – February 14, 1891) was an American soldier, businessman, educator and author. He served as a General in the Union Army during the American Civil War (1861–65), for which he received recognition for his outstanding command of military strategy as well as criticism for the harshness of the "scorched earth" policies that he implemented in conducting total war against the Confederate States.

Sherman served under General Ulysses S. Grant in 1862 and 1863 during the campaigns that led to the fall of the Confederate stronghold of Vicksburg on the Mississippi River and culminated with the routing of the Confederate armies in the state of Tennessee. In 1864, Sherman succeeded Grant as the Union commander in the western theater of the war. He proceeded to lead his troops to the capture of the city of Atlanta, a military success that contributed to the re-election of U.S. President Abraham Lincoln. Sherman's subsequent march through Georgia and the Carolinas further undermined the Confederacy's ability to continue fighting. He accepted the surrender of all the Confederate armies in the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida in April 1865.

When Grant assumed the U.S. presidency in 1869, Sherman succeeded him as Commanding General of the Army (1869–83). As such, he was responsible for the U.S. Army's engagement in the Indian Wars over the next 15 years, in the western United States. He steadfastly refused to be drawn into politics and in 1875 published his *Memoirs*, one of the best-known first-hand accounts of the Civil War. British military historian B. H. Liddell Hart famously declared that Sherman was "the first modern general".

Following Lee's surrender to Grant at Appomattox Court House and the assassination of President Lincoln, Sherman met with Johnston at Bennett Place in Durham, North Carolina, to negotiate a Confederate surrender. At the insistence of Johnston and of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, 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, D.C., 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 April 26, 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, D.C., where they marched in the Grand Review of the Armies, on May 24, 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 a non-existent infantry regiment.