

THE

SKIRMISHER

CIVIL WAR TRUST

1864: THE STORM CRESTS

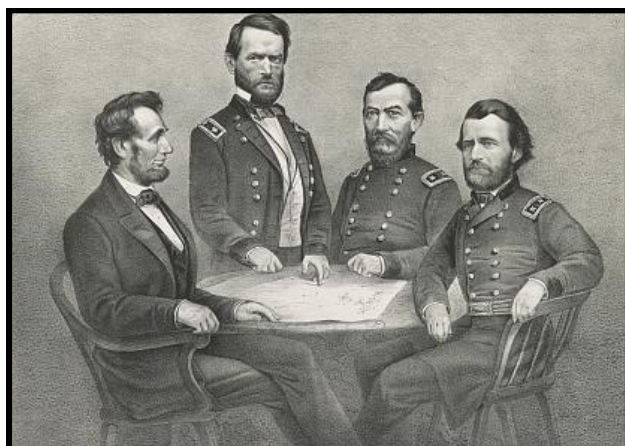
VOLUME 8

DESPERATE TIMES

1864 was a pivotal year in the Civil War. Despite suffering many blows, the Confederacy stood firm in the face of sagging Northern spirits. Abraham Lincoln expected to lose the 1864 election to a candidate who would seek negotiated peace with the Rebels.

They Union Army had suffered heavy losses, but had secured good positions from which to advance into vital areas of the Confederacy. When Ulysses S. Grant was elevated to supreme command of all Union forces in March, he immediately set about planning a grand offensive through the states of Virginia and Georgia. With simultaneous strikes, Grant sought to overwhelm the Confederacy and subdue the rebellion for good.

DESPERATE MEASURES



Lincoln and his commanders. From left to right: Lincoln, William T. Sherman, Phil Sheridan, and Ulysses S. Grant (Library of Congress)



Union siege gun at Petersburg (Library of Congress)

The offensive began in May. The campaign in Virginia proved to be the bloodiest campaign of the entire war. Throughout weeks of almost constant battle, Generals Grant and George Meade finally battered Robert E. Lee into a desperate defense of the heavily fortified city of Petersburg. Grant laid siege to the city, which was the last line of Confederate defense before Richmond, but could not pierce its fortifications. The Northern public wept for 60,000 new casualties and questioned the continuation of the war.

General Sherman, wielding a two-to-one superiority in manpower, made steady progress through Georgia despite suffering several defeats in open battle. He captured Atlanta in September. This victory, along with the naval capture of Mobile Bay, provided a major boost to Northern morale and restored faith in the war effort. Due in large part to these military successes, Abraham Lincoln's re-election was assured.

The Siege of Petersburg dragged on throughout the year. In June, Lee dispatched roughly 20,000 men on a raid through the Shenandoah Valley. The Confederate force reached as far as the outskirts of Washington, D.C., and Southern snipers opened fire on Abraham Lincoln as he inspected the city's fortifications. Nevertheless, the Confederates chose not to assault the Union capital. They fell back into the Valley and were eventually driven back to Petersburg after a vicious campaign.

THE WEST IS WON

In November, General Sherman began the "March to the Sea," a movement of 140,000 soldiers from Atlanta to the Atlantic Ocean. Largely unopposed by Confederate soldiers, Sherman's men cut a path of destruction through military and civilian infrastructure.

Rather than face Sherman directly, western Confederates launched a counter-offensive into Tennessee. They hoped to strike into Kentucky before turning east to unite with Lee's men at Petersburg, drawing Sherman into a wasted pursuit in the process.

Sherman did not give chase. General George Thomas crushed the Confederate army at the Battles of Franklin and Nashville and successfully protected Tennessee, effectively winning the war in the west. Sherman captured the seaport of Savannah, Georgia on December 21.

The United States Colored Troops continued to fill the Union ranks and fight on the front lines. By the end of the war, more than 180,000 African-American soldiers served in the Union Army, earning 17 Medals of Honor. 1864 closed with all eyes on Petersburg, where Robert E. Lee's army held onto the Rebel capital by a thread.

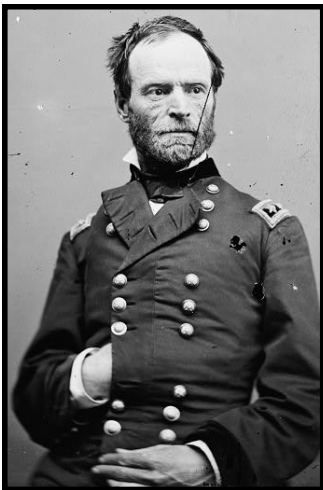


Black soldiers of the 4th U.S.C.T. in Washington, DC (Library of Congress)

VOICES FROM THE STORM

GENERAL WILLIAM. T. SHERMAN

While leading his men on the March to the Sea, General Sherman wrote a letter to Southern civilians who complained that his methods of war were overly harsh.



W.T. Sherman (Library of Congress)

"You cannot qualify war in harsher terms than I will. War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it; and those who brought war into our country deserve all the curses and maledictions a people can pour out.

I know I had no hand in making this war, and I know I will make more sacrifices to-day than any of you to secure peace... But, my dear sirs, when peace does come, you may call on me for any thing. Then will I share with you the last cracker, and watch with you to shield your homes and families against danger from every quarter."

Why do you think this quote is usually condensed to "War is Hell?" Is that an accurate summation of what Sherman is saying?
