

# The March Across Georgia, 1864



Sherman's March Across Georgia

Sherman's "March to the Sea" followed his successful Atlanta Campaign of May to September 1864. He and the U.S. Army commander, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, believed that the Civil War would end only if the Confederacy's strategic, economic, and psychological capacity for warfare were decisively broken. Sherman therefore applied the principles of scorched earth: he ordered his troops to burn crops, kill livestock and consume supplies. Finally he destroyed civilian infrastructure along his path of advance. This policy is often considered<sup>[*according to whom?*]</sup> a component strategy of total war.

The second objective of the campaign was more traditional. Grant's armies in Virginia continued in a stalemate against Robert E. Lee's army, besieged in Petersburg, Virginia. By moving in Lee's rear and performing a massive turning movement against him, Sherman could possibly increase pressure on Lee, allowing Grant the opportunity to break through, or at least keep Southern reinforcements away from Virginia.

The campaign was designed by Grant and Sherman to be similar to Grant's innovative and successful Vicksburg Campaign, in that Sherman's armies would reduce their need for traditional supply lines by "living off the land" after consuming their 20 days of rations. Foragers, known as "bummers," would provide food seized from local farms for the Army while they destroyed the railroads and the manufacturing and agricultural infrastructure of Georgia. In planning for the march, Sherman used livestock and crop production data from the 1860 census to lead his troops through areas where he believed they would be able to forage most effectively. Cotton gins and storage bins were to be destroyed because Southerners used the cotton to trade for guns and other supplies. The twisted and broken railroad rails that the troops heated over fires and wrapped around tree trunks and left behind became known as "Sherman's neckties". Since<sup>[*citation needed*]</sup> the army would be out of touch with the North throughout the campaign, Sherman gave explicit orders, Sherman's Special Field Orders, No. 120, regarding the conduct of the campaign.

**Sherman's March to the Sea** is the name commonly given to the **Savannah Campaign** conducted through Georgia from November 15, 1864 to December 21, 1864 by Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman of the Union Army in the American Civil War. The campaign began with Sherman's troops leaving the captured city of Atlanta, Georgia, on November 16 and ended with the capture of the port of Savannah on December 21. It inflicted significant damage, particularly to industry and infrastructure (per the doctrine of total war), and also to civilian property. Military historian David J. Eicher wrote that Sherman "defied military principles by operating deep within enemy territory and without lines of supply or communication. He destroyed much of the South's physical and psychological capacity to wage war."