

William Tecumseh Sherman

1820–1891



WHY HE MADE HISTORY William Tecumseh Sherman was a Union general during the Civil War. He is known for his brutal but effective military tactic of “total war.”



As you read the biography below, think about the strength William Tecumseh Sherman had in order to accomplish all that he did.

William Tecumseh Sherman fought in the Civil War as a general in the Union army. His strength and determination in combat earned him the reputation as one of the North’s greatest generals, rivaled only by Ulysses S. Grant.

Sherman was born in Lancaster, Ohio. His father died when Sherman was 9 years old, leaving him an orphan. A neighbor, Thomas Ewing, adopted Sherman. Ewing was a wealthy political figure in Ohio, and Sherman later married Ewing’s daughter, Eleanor Boyle Ewing.

Sherman graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1840, and fought in the Mexican War. By 1853, Sherman had resigned from the army to pursue other careers. He was a banker, a lawyer, and president of a railway company. While he tried many different fields, Sherman was faced with failure in every attempt. He returned to the military and became superintendent of a Louisiana military academy. When Louisiana seceded from the Union, Sherman resigned his post and joined the Union army to fight in the Civil War.

By 1862 Colonel Sherman had distinguished himself in battle and was promoted to major general. He was promoted to brigadier general the following year when he captured Vicksburg.



VOCABULARY

razed destroyed

infrastructure the basic framework of society and industry

Sherman was not afraid to take risks. He led his troops to march across Georgia “from Atlanta to the sea.” In 1864, he captured Atlanta and had the city burned to the ground. His army then continued through Georgia then to South Carolina. Along the way, Sherman and his troops **razed** the South’s economic resources, destroying farms, houses, bridges, and railroads. This strategy devastated the supplies that the Confederacy needed, and demoralized both soldiers and civilians.

Because of this, Sherman has been called the first modern general. He was not afraid to wage what he called “total war.” Sherman understood that the destruction of the **infrastructure** was just as important to war as killing soldiers. This concept still exists in warfare today.

Sherman retired in 1884. He was often asked to run for office, but he refused each invitation. He was even quoted as saying, “If nominated I will not accept; if elected I will not serve.” Sherman published his memoirs in 1875, and died in 1891.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. Why was William Tecumseh Sherman called the “first modern general?”

2. **Draw Conclusions** Why do you think Sherman was not interested in politics?

ACTIVITY

3. Use a map or atlas to trace some of the regions where General Sherman led his troops during the Civil War. Draw your own version of this map on a separate sheet of paper.