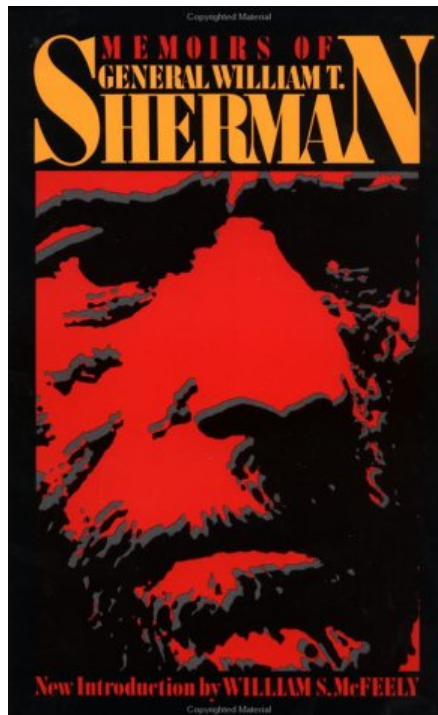




Memoirs Of General William T. Sherman

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William Tecumseh Sherman has been called the first modern general. According to military historian B. H. Liddell Hart, he understood before his contemporaries that wars and battles would be won "more by the movement of troops than by fighting." Also modern is his unsentimental view of combat, epitomized by his famous remark that "War is hell." And he was an able enough historian to realize that the Civil War—and indeed all future wars—would be unlike anything the world had ever seen: a bitter national struggle between free people that would involve a campaign of terror against combatant and non-combatant alike. His *Memoirs*, which rank with Grant's as the greatest of the Civil War, concern for the most part the strategy and fighting at Bull Run, Shiloh, Vicksburg, Chattanooga, Atlanta, and of course the march through Georgia which earned Sherman his reputation for ruthlessness. It is a story packed with incident as well as swift sketches of his opponents, subordinates, and superiors, and it is endlessly instructive about the lessons of the war. Most of all, it is a compelling narrative about a national tragedy.

Memoirs Of General William T. Sherman Details

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From Reader Review Memoirs Of General William T. Sherman for online ebook

Karl says

Sherman's memoirs covers the military occupation of California in the 1840's and 50's, the battle of Bull Run and the organization of the union army, the western campaign from 1861-63, the drive to Atlanta 1863-64, the pillage of Georgia and South Carolina, the controversies surrounding the end of the war, his fights with the Secretary of War, Reconstruction, the Indian Wars, the impeachment of Andrew Johnson, and a short section covering the bureaucratic fights as lieutenant general and General of the Army. His writing is extremely clear and, despite the book running longer than 1100 pages, very concise given the amount of material covered. Like most memoirs, Sherman revisits all the great controversies of his life and why he was right and pure in his motives while his detractors were mistaken and occasionally malicious. The mistakes that Sherman admits are usually on minor points of judgment or preference such as failing to order a general assault when opportunity presented itself or misjudging the character of subordinate officers. Sherman's memoir is an enjoyable read and noticeably different from others of the period for its lack of sentimentality or romanticism regarding war.

Americans tend to think of the great Civil War generals as Grant, or Lee, or Stonewall Jackson. Sherman was mediocre as a tactician, he never understood how to utilize cavalry, and yet he consistently out-generaled his adversaries. When Europeans came to study the American Civil War, they would usually focus their attention on Sherman, who thought and fought differently. Sherman demonstrated how an industrialized nation can push a large army deep into enemy territory using purpose-built railroads and coordinated operation with naval forces. This feat was closely studied by Herbert Kitchener and replicated almost exactly in his conquest of the Sudan. It was later a stratagem employed to great effect on the eastern front of WWI.

Yet, for all the ingenuity he had in establishing it, Sherman was content to sacrifice his road of resupply. When General Hood went west to attack it, Sherman struck east to the unprotected interior of the south, pillaging the land and punishing its inhabitants. The lesson of total war is what modern militaries learned from Sherman. As Sherman explained to the city council of Atlanta while expelling the entire population of the city: "War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it... I want peace and believe it can only be reached through union and war, and I will ever conduct war with a view to perfect and early success." Compare with Helmuth von Moltke's answer, when asked how to make war less cruel in the early days of WWI: "Make it brief." Sherman example went far to convincing the world that cruelty in war is justifiable if it shortens the war's duration.

Sherman's focus on industrial production, modern logistics, and defeating populations rather than armies would become notable in the late 19th century and characteristic of the total wars of the 20th, though Sherman's punishment of the southern people was more restrained and more principled than most of his would-be successors could manage. Sherman's example was actively used in the justification for concentration camps to control civilian populations in the Boer War. General Valeriano Weyler was a liberal administrator and an avowed student of Sherman in all matters military, and it was his Shermanesque conduct in Cuba that entangled the U.S. in the Spanish American war. Sherman's example was used by General Pershing to justify his conduct in the Philippines. By the time of WWI, strategic bombing targeting industrial production and enemy moral was the rule. And George Patton receive a 6-month leave to retrace the path covered by General Sherman from Nashville to Columbia.

Larry says

Sherman's as well as Grant's memoirs are two classic pieces of American 19th century non-fiction. I'd always heard tales of Sherman the beast but Sherman the man comes through in these pages. The man had a fascinating career. Starting as 2nd Lt in Florida in the Seminole Wars, to occupying California during and after the Mexican War. In that capacity, Sherman assays the first gold brought out of Sutter's Mill and performs the initial survey of the gold fields. He later tries banking in San Francisco but the bank fails during the Panic of 1857. He then becomes the first superintendent of the Louisiana State Seminary and Military Academy, now known as LSU.

Early in the Civil War he's considered insane or a fool by many for believing it will take the Union over 200,000 men to defeat the Confederacy. By the end of the war he would be commanding over that amount in the Western Theater alone.

Sherman writing style is extremely easy to read. He knows how to turn a good phrase and tell a humorous story. He's a creature of the Army and suffers no fools. His venom is particular toxic for the press - *I hate newspapermen. They come into camp and pick up their camp rumors and print them as facts. I regard them as spies, which, in truth, they are.*

He relates well his close relationship with other officers such as Halleck, Ord and especially Grant - *Grant stood by me when I was crazy and I stood by him when he was drunk and now we stand by each other.*

And the man who made Georgia howl knew the brutality of war all too well - *I am tired and sick of war. Its glory is all moonshine. It is only those who have neither fired a shot nor heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for blood, for vengeance, for desolation. War is hell.*

He was also generous to a fault. Willing giving to any of his former troopers who came in later years to his door - *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.*

And rare for a successful general, he held no political ambitions - *If forced to choose between the penitentiary and the White House for four years, I would say the penitentiary, thank you.*

As a Cincinnati native, I enjoyed the references to the area, such as when he drops his daughter off at Notre Dame Academy in Reading, Ohio and his planning with Grant the 1864 campaign at the Burnet House. The campaign that would finally win the war.

An amazing life of a colorful man told in his own words. What could be better?

Rick says

This is a terrific book. Sherman was undoubtedly the greatest Union general of the Civil War, and also among the most earnest about the necessity of preserving the Union. In fact, the greatest impression that I got from his memoirs was just how single-minded he actually was about ensuring that the United States, as originally compacted, would endure. Obviously, in his memoirs - written long after-the-fact - he would have taken care to present this impression, knowing well by then of its historical importance. But the many and lengthy contemporaneous letters presented throughout the book document that this was no mere posturing - the man was a true believer at the time that the events occurred.

There is a lot of talk of his being the first "modern general," the first to resort to "total war" in his efforts to break the Confederacy. I know that he is reviled in the South, even to this day. But the sense one gets from his book is that he was just trying to end the war, by whatever means necessary, and the only way he could see to accomplish that was through his destruction of the South's very capability to wage war. He was not conquering territory; his aim was to eliminate the war-making industry that supported the Confederate military. He accomplished this, and in the process he also destroyed much of the South's willingness to continue to wage war.

Brutal, yes, without a doubt. But effective? Also yes, because it's clear that his campaigns in Georgia and the Carolinas not only ended the deeper South's capacity to wage war, but also put pressure on Lee in Virginia as Sherman emerged in North Carolina during March and April 1865. With Sherman to his south, and Grant to his north, Lee had to feel that he was check-mated, and we all know the rest. Sherman simply did what an effective general is supposed to do, given the circumstances.

Sherman provides running commentary throughout much of the two volumes of his memoirs, and also myriad military data, including schedules and tables of troop strength, casualties, prisoners and other items, but the greatest sections are the letters, of which there are many. To most readers, obviously, the Civil War years are of primary significance, and particularly the period from summer 1864 to the end. His recollections and letters from earlier years are interesting, in that you get a sense of American society as it existed in the antebellum era, but most will want to read the general's thoughts and letters as they developed during the war. The letters themselves are the true historical treasures here.

The writing in these letters is remarkable - remember that this was an age in which letter writing was by far the most common means of communication (the telegraph had only recently been invented, and in fact the war itself was the means by which it was greatly expanded throughout the country). Sherman's letters, both outgoing and incoming, are amazing in their literacy and their ability to communicate the very essence of the day. The letters between Sherman and General Hood, for example, in which they argue back and forth - vociferously - over the fate of the residents of Atlanta, are alone well worth the time spent with this book. As well are the numerous letters from President Lincoln, General Grant, and maybe most famously, Sherman's letter to Atlanta's mayor and city councilmen, in which he declared:

"You cannot qualify war in harsher terms than I will. War is cruelty, and you cannot refine it...You might as well appeal against the thunder-storm as against these terrible hardships of war. They are inevitable, and the only way the people of Atlanta can hope once more to live in peace and quiet at home, is to stop the war, which can only be done by admitting that it began in error and is perpetuated in pride. We don't want your negroes, or your horses, or your houses, or your hands, or any thing that you have, but we do want and will have a just obedience to the laws of the United States. That we will have, and, if it involves the destruction of your improvements, we cannot help it... Now you must go, and take with you the old and feeble, feed and nurse them, and build for them, in more quiet places, proper habitations to shield them against the weather until the mad passions of men cool down, and allow the Union and peace once more to settle over your old homes at Atlanta."

All should read this last letter in its entirety, as it is a letter from a man who finds no comfort in causing death and destruction to his fellow Americans, who openly wishes to instead become their protector, but whose deeper and more profound conviction is that the Union must remain whole, and that war must stop.

Daniel Chang says

If you are a civil war buff, this is must reading. Of course Sherman was critical to the story of the Civil War. He had quite an amazing life prior to the Civil War, being part of the Gold Rush in California and being on a couple of shipwrecks. He also worked for a bank which showed how his mind worked and probably why he was so successful as a General. This book does not match Grant's memoirs, but what book does?

William M. says

So good I am sad to have finished it

This compelling book of memoirs is astounding in not only it's span of years in the life of General Sherman, but also in it's breadth of detail.

The insight given into the daily decisions that were to be made during the civil war is amazing to read.

This is a must read for every American and any civil war enthusiast.

Moodleprof says

Excellent

I found these memoirs just as good to read as those by Ulysses Grant. A great insight into the military campaigns of the civil war, along with the political machinations in Washington. Recommended

Nostromo says

Extraordinary book. Ok, this book approaches 1,000 pages in length - yet read faster than most books I've read. The letters in the book are awesome - folks could just write well back in the 1800s. (Unlike this review). Although long, the writing is concise, informative, interesting and compelling. I literally could not put it down and awoke several nights and read till dawn. I loved this book and recommend it to most anyone, not just civil war buffs. In fact his tales of California in the 1840s is fascinating as well as the civil war stuff. I learned a lot about the civil war, General Sherman, America in the 1800s and the human condition. I guess I was most impressed with how commanders make decisive (or don't make) decisions with little information. Today we have a plethora of information - probably too much. But Sherman and his contemporaries were making key - win or lose - decisions based on fragments of information. The pressure must have been extreme. The march to the sea (Atlanta to Savannah) is remarkable. To cut tether from your supply chain and plunge into enemy territory is an enormous gamble. Sherman himself states that if successful, all will share the fruits of his victory, but if the undertaking fails, he alone will bear the massive burden. I read Grant's autobiography years ago and I agree with an earlier reviewer of Sherman's book on this site, that it is even better and more readable.

Joshua Emil says

HAPPY VALENTINES DAY GENERAL SHERMAN! HAAAAHA

Let's start first with the best of General Sherman.

"I prefer to maintain my allegiance to the Constitution as long as a fragment of it survives..."--1861

"The section of thirty pounder Parrott rifles now drilling before my tent is a more convincing argument than the largest Democratic meeting the State of New York can possibly assemble at Albany..."-- 1863

"This I construe as the end of my military career. In looking back upon the past I can only say, with millions of others, that I have done many things I should not have done, and have left undone still more which ought to have been done; that I can see where hundreds of opportunities have been neglected, but on the whole am content; and feel sure that I can travel this broad country of ours, and be each night the welcome guest in palace or cabin; and, as 'all the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players. I claim the privilege to ring down the curtain.'"-- 1884

To me, General William T. Sherman is comparable to the General James N. Mattis (currently Secretary of Defense) of our time. Both of them called it as it is, despised political mingling in military affairs, and did their duty as lawful commissioned officers of the United States. On to the content, Sherman gave a candid, honest, and frank recollection of his military career starting as an officer during the Mexican-American War and to his rise as commander of the 13th Infantry Regiment and then to his position as General-in-Chief (Currently known as Chief of Staff of the US Army).

I would like to particularly highlight his finest hours in Vicksburg in 1863 and his campaign in Georgia in 1864. He explained it with utmost detail in accordance to his recollections and I really saw how he was classified as the "First Modern General". Modern, in the sense that, he emphasized in quick maneuver warfare than a protracted static warfare. The swiftness and violence of actions are complemented by the use of skirmishers to live off the land.

Nevertheless, the Memoirs of General W.T. Sherman provides the insights of early modern warfare and the disdain for politics that can upset operations. ONWARD TO GRANT'S MEMOIRS.

Martin says

I'd been planning to read this 1,000 pager for a while. Sherman has interested me for at least a decade, and I usually stop by his statue in D.C. when I visit.

Interesting notes:

- middle name does come from the Indian leader who Sherman's father admired
- his graduating class at West Point was fewer than 50 men
- first posted to rounding up Indians in Florida, got quartermaster duty right away, indicating high level of trustworthiness. Opined that Indians should have been left in FL.
- almost killed as a child in a riding accident, scarring his face
- badly dislocated (and broke) his arm, leading to a leave of several months
- grew up in The West as son of an attorney (in Ohio)
- introduction written from St. Louis, about as far west as anyone could get and still be connected to the U.S. following the Civil War
- second introduction, 10 years later, still in St. Louis, argues the book is a memoir so should be a complete history of the Civil War and should disagree with thoughts and experiences of others
- got fooled into eating a hot pepper, which he had not seen before going to CA

- was in CA for the gold rush, from the first day through the height of the rush. Describes soldiers and sailors deserting to prospect for gold.
- took short leave from army to work as a surveyor, as the army did not pay enough to live in the SF gold rush days
- became a banker in SF, saw bank runs as the gold panned out
- became an attorney in Kansas despite no legal training. Admitted to bar based on "general intelligence"
- was the first superintendent (dean) of what became LSU and was professor of engineering. Was living in Louisiana when the Civil War broke out. He felt a large majority of Louisianans were opposed to secession. He also felt it was only about slavery and he does not mention "states rights."
- moved to St. Louis to become CEO of a railroad
- offered job as Assistant Secretary of the Army. Turned it down, which irritated people in D.C.
- became regular army officer, many of his soldiers had signed up for only 3 months. Did this lead to the first battle of Bull Run? The need for the north to attack before it lost troops who'd been in for 3 months?
- fought at the first battle of Bull Run. Lost his artillery and his men were routed. He observed neither side was particularly well organized.
- met Lincoln who came out from D.C. to encourage the troops
- did not realize how raw the troops were at Shiloh
- did not know "Sherman's March" was Sherman's idea
- He referred to train cars as just "cars," which threw me
- "Buncombe" means "Bunkum"
- F.X. Aubrey was the "Skimmer of the Plains"
- "viz." means "i.e."
- he learned military tactics from books
- "sinecure" means "a position requiring little or no work but giving the holder status or financial benefit."
- used the phrase "stage of the game"
- used the phrase "forlorn hope," which I knew from the Sharpe books
- "tête de pont" means "bridgehead"
- about 50 officers from both sides went to Egypt following the Civil War to work in the Egyptian army
- used the phrase "poor white trash"
- used the phrase "red-tape"
- erysipelas is a type of skin infection
- hyphenated "pea-nuts"
- "I am convinced that the ingenuity of these younger officers accomplished many things far better than I could have ordered." Unlike today's bureaucracy.
- Often slept on the floor or out doors while campaigning. Did not believe in creature comforts for officers
- "No one can practice law as an attorney in the United States without acknowledging the supremacy of the Government."
- learned what a "corduroy road" is
- of Lincoln, "Of all the men I ever met, he seemed to possess more of the elements of greatness, combined with goodness, than any other."
- used the word "bugbear"
- did not believe there was lost "Confederate Gold" (don't tell Blueberry)
- "pusillanimous" means timid
- praised Wisconsin regiments as equal to an ordinary brigade due to superior organizing
- "antiscorbutic" means a food that prevents scurvy
- "Every attempt to make war easy and safe will result in humiliation and disaster."

The post-war portion of the book is too short. The chapter on Sherman's view for military organization is excellent. The rest is almost entirely focused on political intrigue between Stanton and Johnson, but is too narrowly focused on Sherman's POV to be intelligible to those not intimately familiar with the history.

Curtis says

Inside the mind of one of the greatest military thinkers in history. If nothing else, read the section portraying the letters between Sherman and General Hood. Sherman's arguments in favor of the Federal point of view are brilliant.

Bob Mayer says

Not quite as well written as Grant's memoirs. It is interesting to read this side by side with that book though to see the contrast between the two men. Also, how their paths veered after the war.

Nick Black says

Amazon fulfillment of third-party offering, 2009-09-04. Surely one of the most fascinating and, pound-for-pound, realbadassmuthafuckas America's ever produced. If someone had to burn my hometown, I'm glad it was this guy. What would have been truly epic, in the Achilles/Ajax-and-Hector vein, would have been Sherman mixing it up with Bad Bedford Forrest, Duke of New York and most definitely H.N.I.C.:

A month later, Forrest was back in action at the Battle of Shiloh (April 6 to April 7, 1862). He commanded a Confederate rear guard after the Union victory. In an incident called Fallen Timbers, he drove through the Union skirmish line. Not realizing that the rest of his men had halted their charge when they got to the full Union brigade behind the skirmishers, Forrest charged the brigade single-handedly, and soon found himself surrounded. He emptied his Colt Army Revolvers into the swirling mass of Union Soldiers and pulled out his saber, hacking and slashing. A Union infantryman fired a musket ball into Forrest's spine with a point-blank musket shot, nearly knocking the cavalry man out of the saddle. Placing a Union infantryman on the back of his saddle to use as a shield, Forrest broke out and galloped back to his incredulous troopers. The musket ball was removed a week later without anesthesia.

I think we all need to silently take a moment and realize nothing we'll ever do, or indeed collectively accomplish, will be as outstanding as that story. If Conrad discovers Wittgenstein III, it will be roughly one-third as groin-grabbingly fiercely wonderful as that anecdote. Sigh. Real sailing is dead!

Miles Ford says

I always like the concept of an unreliable narrator in literature. I don't read much non-fiction, but I thought to hear the first person perspective of a general most southerners regard as a monster would offer the same feeling as fiction books where you can't quite trust everything the narrator says. This book does deliver on that. Every passage where he explains what his men did to Georgia is regarded as nonchalant and necessary by Sherman, while history remembers this bit of the Civil War as some of the most gruesome wartime actions.

Sherman definitely downplays all the atrocities his men did commit, but frames the stuff he admits to as necessary evils. He cites examples of times when the Confederates committed similar acts. He mentions destroying civilian farms, but said the men needed sustenance to keep the union together. The really interesting passages are all framed that way. "Yes, our actions may be seen as extreme, but the confederate actions were too, and we absolutely had to do this to end the war."

I found this one hard to rate. If you're looking for a book that keeps you on the edge of your seat this isn't one. There is a lot of military positioning talk, what cities were next, what armies and reinforcements were a few miles away. which is important for a general to know, but does not make for fun reading. I would have liked to hear more about the relationships Sherman built with his fellow generals, as well. This is hinted at, and is even kind of funny at times, but it never goes into the depth that I would have liked.

Were Sherman's actions justified? I still don't know. He sure thought so. It did keep the Union together but in doing so Sherman, a very highly decorated general before the Civil War, will forever be remembered for the actions of this short campaign. He accomplished his goal, but at what cost?

Jeni says

So it was really good. Compared to Grant's, it was better in that Sherman is a more colorful character so it was a more colorful telling, but Grant is the better writer, as I thought Sherman relied too heavily on letters. Though he did include one of my favorite historical documents of all time - his letter to Atlanta.

It's interesting to read memoirs because you can tell what really pissed the person off, especially in this one (though it's in Grant's too) as there were things that Sherman was clearly defensive about. Not surprisingly the most interesting part of his memoir (and a part that showed his defensiveness pretty clearly) were the chapters about his March to the Sea. Fascinating.

Amanda Tero says

Many of my friends saw that I was reading this book and automatically replied with "Ugh! I pity you!" (granted, we are all Southerners)

First off, I found Sherman's text fascinating. He was an excellent writer and brought me into the scenes in which he lived.

Secondly, this was super clean! I think of military as a cussing hole, but I came across next to no curse words (a few uses of God's name in vain when he was quoting others).

Thirdly, Sherman copied many letters and telegrams, so the opinion I formed of Sherman was not made by him presenting himself as an upstanding citizen who never did wrong. Through his letters I got a good picture of who he was and what his view were. Yes, I did find that he was somewhat aloof to the humanity of the army, but then there were times when he did reach out to protect and prevent cruelty from happening. I did not at all find him to be the "monster" that many historians portray him to be.

Fourthly, this was a very political read (in other words, many times went over my head). It was fascinating to

see the brain-work behind the tactics that Sherman and Grant used for their side of the War.

Fifthly, this covers not only the Civil War, but more or less Sherman's life as a soldier--starting with his work in California and ending at his resignation.

Sixth, I did enjoy this read. I can't lie. There were many gems of helpful information throughout these pages and it gave me an overall good view of the war (sometimes for both sides, as letters were shared between enemies). I can't say that I would read it again because of its massive 800-page count, but I don't regret spending my time reading it.

Becky Loader says

General Sherman was a man who knew how to put a sentence together. People often remember him only as the man who rode through Atlanta and left a trail of destruction behind him. They forget he was an educated man, who understood the concept of war and believed wholeheartedly in the cause of preserving the Union. He also was sworn to obey and to honor the office of the President of the United States. Sherman was an honorable man who had a tough role to play at a very disquieting time of American History.

Huzzah!

Donna Davis says

It's important to admit bias up front, and I will tell you that I went into this with a strong sense of near-adulation. Sherman has long been my greatest hero among American generals. I have surely been getting a very different sense of perspective at the same time, because Shelby Foote's trilogy is in the master bathroom, opposite the toilet where it belongs, because it's a huge volume and it fits neatly on the flat hamper there, and because my spouse and I can only read so much of that man (Foote) before our gag reflex kicks in. But I digress.

Sherman's memoir is remarkable. He was one of those rare beings, both a soldier and an incredible scholar, one in the mold of Lewis and Clark, perhaps. He headed a military academy in Louisiana when the South seceded, and after giving a moving farewell speech to his students--the man gives a sense of being capable of really creating personal bonds, while at the same time knowing that if he has to say goodbye forever, he'll do it--and went to Washington to seek orders.

Sherman is an outstanding writer, and his voice comes through loud and clear. I confess my affection for him is marred slightly by his horrific perspective (probably not unusual among Caucasians of the time period, but this guy never did anything halfway) toward the American Indian. I decided enough was enough, and skipped forward to the Civil War. My husband, whom I will call Mr. Computer, was also reading it, as we had accidentally procured two copies, and he did the same.

The opening years of the war are incredibly frustrating to study. McClellan had been a big-deal general during the war against Mexico, and he was initially placed in charge, while Grant and Sherman lingered in the background out west, each having left the military under a cloud, Grant for his drinking during the Mexican war, and Sherman as having been perceived as crazy. (Today I think a nice bottle of Xanax or Valium would've done wonders for the man in peace time years, because I believe he merely suffered from anxiety, and there's a lot of that out there)!

By reading Sherman, one does not get an account of the whole Civil War; he can't rightfully provide such a thing, because this is a memoir, so he writes about the places he went and the battles in which he took part. He is lavish in his praise of competent or even excellent officers, and takes pains to mention as many as possible by name, sending them down in history as heroes alongside himself.

His most famous contribution, the 3-campaigns-in-one march of some 425 miles, from the siege of Atlanta, to its invasion, and his willingness to tell the truth and avoid the senseless pussyfooting of his predecessors, who had stupidly believed that by firing over the heads of the Confederates, they could scare them into submission, is an inspiration. He understood that in order to win a war and have it be over, the gloves must come off, and ugly things had to be done. He limited his attacks to Confederate soldiers until the local population began to sabotage his efforts, at which point, without hesitation, he burnt local homes, measure for measure. Inside the city, he endeavored to destroy any and all infrastructure that would aid the enemy, since Confederate weapons, clothing, and food were nearly all warehoused in this city. He personally supervised the destruction of the railroads that would otherwise keep supplies moving between Atlanta and the field, and cut his own supply line, a gutsy move unheard of previously. He soon learned not to trust Cavalry to destroy the railroads, because they'd just tear the tracks off, and someone else would put them back on. Sherman supervised the heating of the rails till they were white-hot and pliable, and created a tool for bending them around the trunks of trees, or into knots when no trees were nearby, so that no one would ever use them again.

Sherman has an unfairly tainted reputation regarding the Black people of the South, perhaps because he discouraged newly-freed families from following his train. The issue was a logistical one; he had enough food for his soldiers, thanks to their resourcefulness in foraging, and he welcomed single Black men to assist in noncombatant ways in order to free up his soldiers. (He was not willing to arm his Black enlistees, and was pleasantly surprised when he found others had successfully done so later). But when someone from Washington came down and privately interviewed former slaves to see who they trusted and who they didn't, they gave their unilateral trust to Sherman. This is the proof for me, that although he was later unsure they were ready for the ballot before they became literate (with which I disagreed), he treated them with kindness and they revered him, viewing him alongside President Lincoln, as their liberator.

Grant was so eager to have Sherman back to help him fight Lee across the Potomac that he nearly boarded him and all his men onto ships once he reached the sea. Sherman talked him out of it, saying that he must go THROUGH the Carolinas in order for those insulated in die-hard South Carolina to see the might of the American army, and understand that resistance truly was futile. The newspapers of the South printed lies, saying that the South was winning its quest for separation, and Sherman felt that personal experience was the only thing that would really convince those who had first seceded, who had fired on Fort Sumter, and perhaps since they started all this, it was appropriate that they not be spared the privations that the people of Georgia, who were much less enthusiastic toward the Confederacy, had experienced.

Grant was smart enough to listen to him, and let him follow what he considered the best course of action. Lincoln was a true friend and leader who knew when to stop delegating. Again and again, lies came to him about Grant, that he was drinking again, etc. and should be removed, and Lincoln, who was well and truly done with the likes of McClellan, Pope, and Burnside, said, "I can't spare this man. He fights". I mention this, not as a digression but because Grant and Sherman were hand in glove. This partnership, this blending of mind and purpose, is part of what made victory possible.

Sherman and his men fought their way through woods, swamps, over quicksand, through areas previously considered impenetrable, and unlike many high-ranking officers, he gave himself no perks that he did not share with his men, apart from the rare invitation to dinner with a Union family. At the very end of his memoir, he devotes perhaps 20 or 30 pages to what constitutes effective leadership, and one thing I was struck by is that he believes a commanding officer should ride up front, because the men leading it have pride in the fact that they are leading, and that disorder and bad behaviors are limited to the rear. In short, he

is safer with the men in front, and he has to see what is ahead to draw the correct conclusions about what should be done next. He sleeps on the ground, just like his men. At one moving point, he and his men sought refuge from a storm by sleeping in a church, and some of the soldiers found carpets and made him a little bed up by the altar. Sherman told them to give that bed to their division leader, because he was used to sleeping hard. "Then I fell down on a pew and was instantly asleep".

After Lincoln's assassination by a Confederate sympathizer, and attempts upon the lives of Seward, Secretary of War, and others, newly-minted President Johnson suddenly knocked Sherman's legs from beneath him. Without a hint or clue as to why, Sherman was suddenly vilified, and the orders to his subordinates NOT TO OBEY HIM were released to the press. Such lack of appreciation for a man who gave his all to the Union took my breath away. Apparently Secretary of War Stanton, who replaced Steward once he was injured, was filled with paranoia and behaved both irrationally and unfairly. This was primarily his doing, and Sherman knew it. He reported to Grant, and ONLY to Grant.

Upon reaching Washington DC, each leading general paraded with his army before a massive crowd, and Sherman had his rightful place on the review stand once he reached it. He passed down the line, shaking hands along the line of others who'd been seated there...until he reached Secretary Stanton. At this point, he states that he publicly brushed past the outstretched hand offered him, thus returning the public insult that had been dealt him in the press. He snubbed the guy in as public a manner as possible, and I once again wanted to cheer. Well done.

"War is war, and not popularity seeking", he responded to someone who questioned his destruction of Georgia, and the sieges that left rebel cities on the brink of starvation. And he was right. It can't be over until someone has the courage to wage real war. His frankness and his affection for his troops, even though he knew some of them would fall, or maybe even more so because of it, was deeply moving, and I came away feeling that I had read one of the best memoirs ever.

One more thing I'd add, for those who get the edition that I read: if you flip to the last page, it says 490. Hmmm. Yes, but no. This was originally a two volume set. It's less expensive to buy just one book, but it remains two volumes under one cover. Once you reach the FIRST page 409, There is a page that says VOLUME II and then you start on page 1 again, so that you are actually reading over 800 pages.

Put together with Foote's less-apt and rabidly pro-Confederate trilogy, this was a meal, yet I don't regret reading them together, since it provided two perspectives (and I am finishing Burke Davis's book on Sherman's march to the sea, a smaller volume with a third perspective that is closer to Sherman's own).

But if you ask me who I believe when facts collide: I believe Sherman.

Jim Tevnan says

Well constructed narrative of the most contentious era of US history.

Sherman's strong sense of purpose along with his laser like attention to details permeates his memoirs. Amazing amount of personal witness and involvement in a large swath of our history.

Would liked to hear final judgements on Grant, Johnson and Lincoln.

Maps would make chapters and scenes more understandable.

Several misspellings and transposed dates.

Keith Schnell says

William Tecumseh Sherman, notably described by one biographer as being “like Attila the Hun, but less cuddly,” is one of the most fascinating and important characters in American history. Reviled by Tea Partiers as a war criminal and remembered by everyone who didn’t vote for George Wallace as the man who was to American slavery what Sir Arthur Harris was to the Holocaust, Sherman was in fact a complex and highly intelligent man whose memoirs are worth reading on several levels.

Sherman’s Memoirs, being the first-person testimony of one of the major players in the American Civil War, are themselves a valuable primary document. Sherman, having been a college professor as one of his myriad prewar careers, seems to have realized this, and included within it hundreds of pages of personal correspondence, most of it with other prominent generals and politicians and covering events as disparate as the California gold rush and the burning of Atlanta. One consequence of this is that, if the reader has studied American history in any depth at all, Sherman’s Memoirs – where they describe his actual campaigns – initially come off as derivative and boring. Only after some reflection does one realize that this is because nearly all histories of the war are taken more or less directly from this book, and that its lack of new information is rather a testament to its completeness.

Far more interesting, both on an historical and on a literary level, is the look that this rare honest autobiography gives at Sherman’s mental state and attitude towards the war as it progresses. Sherman apparently wrote this book by referring to his contemporary diaries, rather than his memory ten or more years after the fact and, whether he meant it to or not, this shows in the way that his attitude towards the war, the political situation and the people of the South changes as his narrative goes on. Initially an apolitical and somewhat timid man; a professional military manager whose short time in the Army had been spent administering the occupation of gold-rich California and accepting the abject surrender of various starving Indians; Sherman undergoes a number of transformative experiences over the course of the war that gradually render him morally harder, more ruthless, vengeful, and more than a little shell shocked and fed up with the insanity of war that laid waste to his peaceful family life, and with those who had brought the war to his country. When describing his early campaigns in Kentucky and Tennessee, Sherman includes documents emphasizing how much he cared about (in retrospect relatively minor) property damage caused by a small number of his Soldiers, and graciously offering to help bring the perpetrators to justice in the name of good order and discipline. By the last third of the book, Sherman is pasting in letters to local dignitaries in which he literally and very explicitly threatens to execute every single white person in Alabama, so help him, and to confiscate their land and give it to whatever Yankees can stand the climate. Less thirst for blood than utter moral exhaustion at seeing so much blood shed, and frustration at his enemies’ refusal to just quit fighting and go home, Sherman’s attitude transformation transcends his specific historical circumstances and could probably apply just as well to men like George Patton and Douglas MacArthur, which is part of what makes this book so relevant and meaningful.

Yet, Sherman’s letters to Nashville Aldermen deploring his Soldiers’ theft of a chicken or whatnot can not be entirely written off as the naïve record of a man who is not yet as hardened as he should be. For this is very much a political memoir, written in the early 1870s, for a national audience that was still very much traumatized by a war that was proportionately as lethal for Americans as the First World War was for Europeans a half-century later. The national mood, as Reconstruction drew to a close, was unquestionably one of reconciliation, which looked to bind North and South in common nationalism by minimizing both the violence and the moral righteousness that had been characteristic of the war years.

While 21st Century readers may view Sherman as an ultraviolent superhero who gave force to the Emancipation Proclamation, freed America from itself, and promised “40 acres and a mule” as part of the most radical land reform ever proposed by anyone short of Norman Thomas, the William Tecumseh Sherman of 1875 still held high office. As Commanding General of the United States Army and close personal friend of then-President Ulysses S. Grant, he had a very significant interest in playing to the national mood of reconciliation and downplaying the havoc wrought on the South during the winter of 1864-5. Thus, Sherman’s description of his March to the Sea gives the impression that he did only the minimum possible damage to the most clearly identified military resources, and writes off several suspicious urban fires that occurred just after his Army arrived as mere accidents that he did his best to avoid, which were probably the work of fleeing rebel soldiers.

Of course, for all of Sherman’s political hedging and post-facto statements of intent, one comes away with the impression that, behind all of the posturing, he knew exactly what he was doing, and trusted that his readers – at least those who were dues-paying members of the Grand Army of the Republic – would understand as much by reading between the lines. To this end, Sherman deployed what is quite possibly the driest sense of humor in the history of North America, Viz:

“Hearing of certain large Indian mounds near the way, I turned to one side to visit them, stopping a couple of days in 1843 with Colonel Lewis Tumlin, on whose plantation these mounds were. We struck up such an acquaintance that we corresponded for some years, and as I passed his plantation during the war, in 1864, I inquired for him, but he was not at home.”

Yes, Sherman – who, it must be noted, was literally in the process of burning everything too heavy to steal in Colonel Tumlin’s home state -- was purely and simply disappointed that his old friend wasn’t available for a visit.

Sherman’s narrative is peppered with these, most notably the humorous description of one of his Soldiers wandering out of a looted house carrying as much swag as he could physically transport on his person, to include a ham impaled on his bayonet, and reminding Sherman of his orders to “forage liberally on the march.” Sherman notes that he reproached the man, but strangely never mentions returning the property to its rightful owners. In all likelihood, he knew full well that the American Soldier, given authorization to steal by his chain of command, will in the blink of an eye and with tremendous initiative and aggression make off with anything and everything not securely bolted to bedrock, and seems to have implicitly trusted that his readers – the ones to whom his honesty mattered – would understand the literary wink and nudge.

Overall the picture of Sherman that one gains from his memoirs is just that – a man who, despite his lack of involvement in politics or prewar interest in the main questions of the conflict, was extremely intelligent and understood very clearly what was going on in a way that most of his contemporaries did not. Combined with a very readable and modern writing style that has nothing in common with the notoriously long-winded novelists of his era, that makes this a book worth reading – even for those who wouldn’t crack the bindings of Shelby Foote’s life’s work.

Al Maki says

Three aspects of the book interested me. It's an eyewitness account of life, particularly but not only, military life, in the United States in the period before the Civil War, by a fellow who had his eyes open. The stuff on

life early California and Florida alone is almost enough to justify reading the book. It also details the slide toward war of the United States as personal experience.

Finally, it's a detailed account by the man who ran it of the project of deliberately destroying the economy of the South, to deprive the South of the means to wage war and to make them thoroughly sick of it. In my view, Sherman was an intelligent, relatively open, warm human being who was given the job of destroying an area about the size of France and who carried it out thoroughly because he believed it was necessary. One small detail as a sample, the Union forces hunted down and killed blood hounds they encountered in vengeance because they had been used by the Southerners to hunt for their slaves.
