

In 1861, early in the Civil War, Union army General Winfield Scott suggested a plan to end the conflict with the seceding Southern states. The plan had two parts:

1. Blocking off all Southern seacoasts on the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf Coast. This would prevent the Confederates from exporting products such as cotton and tobacco. It would also stop them from importing supplies for the war by sea. Planners in the North hoped that this might discourage the South from pursuing the war further.
2. Gaining control of the Mississippi River. This would split the South into two parts. It would also deny them the use of the river for moving supplies.

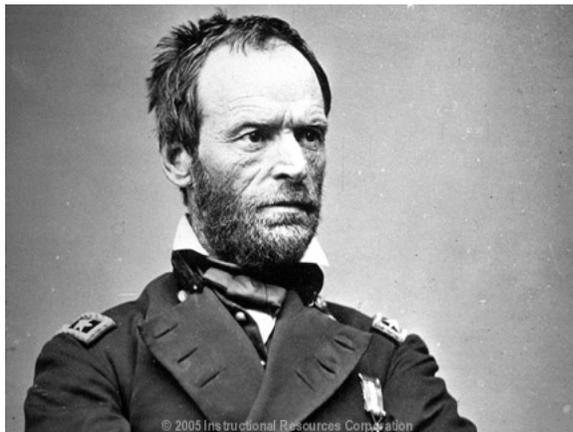
General Scott rightly feared that the North would be too impatient to support his plan. Union supporters believed the war would be over quickly and that using Scott's strategy would prolong the end. Newspaper reporters named Scott's strategy the Anaconda plan, comparing it to the snake who slowly strangles its prey. By the end of the war, the Anaconda plan had proven to be important in helping to defeat the Confederacy. Two additional strategies were used by Union forces:

1. Splitting the South in a land campaign. The Union army would march through the Tennessee Valley and Georgia and control key cities.
2. Capturing Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital.

While the Anaconda strategy deprived the Confederacy of much needed supplies, the land campaign of the Union army devastated the land and defeated the spirits of those who remained at home. One of the men behind the Confederate land campaign became famous for his brutally effective tactics.

A Long War

General William Tecumseh Sherman was named for the great Shawnee warrior chief, Tecumseh, whom Sherman's father greatly admired.



General William Tecumseh Sherman (1820–1891) was one of the most successful of the Union field commanders.

Despite his later military success, Sherman was always conflicted about war. At first, he wanted no part of a civil war. He thought that the nation's politicians had led the whole country into trouble and that it was up to them to find a solution. As a graduate of the army's West Point Academy, though, he wasn't in a position to sit out the war once it began. He still thought the politicians were in over their heads, though, and he believed the war was a bad idea. "You might as well attempt to put out the flames of a burning house with a squirt gun," he said.

President Lincoln, however, felt that violent conflict was probably unavoidable. He didn't think that political compromise with the politicians of the South over the issue of slavery was possible. The Southern economy depended on slavery, and most Southerners did not want that to change. It seemed that Lincoln was right that war was coming.

Sherman knew the war would be difficult. Although many Northerners expected a quick victory, Sherman disagreed. At one point he wrote that he expected the Civil War to last longer than anyone would expect.

The Atlanta Campaign

He was right. The war dragged on for years, with terrible losses on both sides. Finally, in 1864, Sherman received orders to move against the city of Atlanta, Georgia.

He marched out with 100,000 troops from Chattanooga, Tennessee, early in May 1864. Entering Georgia, he began his determined trek to reach his target. It was as if nothing could stand in his way. His first significant move was to take Kingston, a railroad boomtown, on May 19. It was also home to mines of saltpeter, an important component of gunpowder. Sherman destroyed these mines, considerably diminishing the Confederates' supply.

The pressures of command and the stress of war sometimes troubled Sherman. The assistant secretary for war even went so far as to call Sherman loony, or crazy. Newspapers ridiculed him, writing that he



A map of Sherman's march to the sea

was insane and depressed. He was certainly anxious, often not eating or sleeping well. He also got angry with reporters, who often tried to get and publish secret information about the war effort.

Even though some people did not like Sherman, he still won the respect of his superior, General Grant. From the beginning of his Atlanta campaign, he was determined, never losing sight of his ultimate goal. By mid-July, Sherman's army was within sight of its target city. Confederate General Johnston was fired for having allowed them to get this far. General Hood took over, but he would prove unable to save the city.

Sherman was a great military strategist. He predicted the Confederates' next moves so accurately that he was able to plan good counterattacks. On August 9, he bombarded the city with an attack that lasted for two weeks. Then, the Confederates played right into Sherman's hands by riding off to a raid in Tennessee, hoping to disrupt Union supply lines. Sherman seized his opportunity. With the Confederate cavalry away, he took the railroad south of the city, which he knew was the Confederate army's lifeline. On September 2, he and his troops took Atlanta.

Sherman took war seriously, and he knew war had harsh consequences. He wrote a letter to the leaders of Atlanta, telling them that they needed to evacuate the city. In it, he wrote, "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 today than any of you to secure peace."

Total War

Sherman's military talent was remarkable, but the way he began and conducted his next campaign would make his name stand out in history. People expected that the battles during the war would be between the soldiers of opposing armies. Civilians and their property often got in the way and suffered, but they weren't usually the primary targets. But when Sherman pushed on from Atlanta to Savannah, he pursued a strategy known as "total war." This meant that he considered all of the resources of a country at war to be fair game for attack. The idea was to not only win on the battlefield, but also to take away the enemy's ability to wage war at all. Sherman's army left Atlanta in November. In a devastating move, he gave the order to burn the city behind them, preventing its many resources from being used against Union forces.

Sherman wanted to be able to move quickly while causing the most trouble for the South. He decided to reduce his army's dependence on its lines of supply by having his soldiers search for what they needed along the way. They raided farms and towns and simply took what they wanted. Sherman gave special orders about how the civilian population was to be treated. Speaking of destroying things like grain mills and houses, he wrote:

In districts and neighborhoods where the army is unmolested, no destruction of such property should be permitted; but should guerrillas or bushwhackers molest our march, or should the inhabitants burn bridges, obstruct roads, or otherwise manifest local hostility, then army corps commanders should order and enforce a devastation more or less relentless, according to the measure of such hostility.

The army did indeed ruthlessly destroy such property. They used a scorched Earth policy, meaning they left little behind them. They often used fire to burn crops and buildings. They also killed livestock and attacked railroad lines. They even destroyed some of their own lines of communication and supplies to prevent them from being used by the Confederates. The effect of Sherman's march to the sea on the Confederate army was drastic. Soon its soldiers were dying from cold and hunger, and the morale of both the Southern army and civilian population was low.

On December 21, Sherman took Savannah practically without a fight. The capture of the seaport was of great help to the North, as well as another enormous loss for the South. Sherman telegraphed Lincoln to say, "I beg to present you as a Christmas gift the city of Savannah. . . ." On February 17, 1865, Sherman's army burned South Carolina's capital of Columbia. The war would drag on for a while longer, but the Union's strategy had taken its toll on the Confederacy. The anaconda had swallowed its prey.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1.** From which city did Sherman begin his Atlanta Campaign?
 - A.** Savannah
 - B.** Columbia
 - C.** Chattanooga
 - D.** Kingston

- 2.** What is General Sherman most famous for?
 - A.** working with General Grant
 - B.** being a great Confederate general
 - C.** suffering from anxiety and depression
 - D.** pursuing “total war” in his march to Savannah

- 3.** Why was destroying a saltpeter mine significant?
 - A.** Where there's saltpeter, there's gold.
 - B.** Saltpeter was used to make gunpowder.
 - C.** Without saltpeter, the railroads couldn't run.
 - D.** Saltpeter was an important ingredient in southern cooking.

- 4.** Some historians criticize General Sherman's policy of total war as going too far. Others argue that its effectiveness might have shortened the Civil War. Do you think that there should be limits on what an army can do while conducting war? Why or why not? Consider and discuss how your answer may be influenced by your own experience or by where you live. Support your answer with evidence from the text.