



Personal Memoirs of P.H. Sheridan

Phil Sheridan

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In the most popular narratives of the Civil War, Union Generals Ulysses S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman are celebrated as the Union's most successful generals and men who revolutionized total warfare with the use of scorched earth tactics. Sherman's March to the Sea continues to be one of the most famous campaigns of the war, and he is still widely reviled in the South because of it.

Lost in this common narrative is the fact that Sherman's March was preceded by a scorched earth campaign that made Virginia howl, led by "Little Phil" Sheridan. The 5'5 Sheridan was one of the smallest and toughest fighters in the Union Army, whose capabilities as both a general of infantry and cavalry made him one of the most valuable and versatile officers in the North. A close associate of Grant's in the West, Sheridan was so critical that Grant brought him east in 1864 and gave him command of the Union cavalry to face off against the vaunted JEB Stuart.

Despite his successes in the West and during the Overland Campaign, Sheridan's most famous campaign was in the Shenandoah Valley, which had seen much fighting and Stonewall Jackson's famous 1862 Valley Campaign. In 1864, however, Sheridan and his Army of the Shenandoah defeated Jubal Early and systematically destroyed the economic infrastructure and viability of the Valley, which had been considered the "breadbasket" of Virginia during the war's earlier years. Residents of the Valley simply referred to Sheridan's campaign as "The Burning".

After Sheridan's cavalry proved instrumental in surrounding Lee's army and forcing its surrender at Appomattox, Sheridan had cemented his legacy as one of the greatest Union generals of the Civil War. But he was far from done. During Reconstruction, he was a military governor responsible for trying to pacify Southern civilians in the wake of the Civil War, and it should come as no surprise that Sheridan and Southerners didn't see eye to eye. Sheridan himself famously stated, "If I owned Texas and Hell, I would rent Texas and live in Hell." Sheridan also ran afoul of President Andrew Johnson, who later removed him from his post.

The tough and acerbic Sheridan was also one of the highest ranked officers who fought the Indian Wars in the decades after the Civil War. Notorious for uttering "The only good Indians I ever saw were dead", which has since been misattributed into more generalized and bigoted forms, Sheridan's biographers have taken pains to try to point out that Little Phil wasn't a racist, though there can be no denying he ruthlessly waged

war on the Great Plains to subdue Native American tribes.

Enemies on the battlefield rarely got the best of Sheridan, but his hard living finally caught up with him around the end of the 1880s, when Sheridan, in his 50s, began suffering massive heartattacks. By the time he died in 1888, he had been General-in-Chief and Commanding General of the U.S. Army, the very upper echelons of the military, and he was celebrated as one of the Civil War's foremost heroes.

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