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A House Divided: 89 Total War – II

Lead: One hundred and fifty years ago the Republic was facing its greatest crisis. This continuing series examines the American Civil War. It is "A House Divided."

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Having pushed the Confederates under John Bell Hood down into Alabama in Fall 1864, General Sherman abandoned his pursuit of the rebels and returned to Atlanta. He was weary of rehearsing tactics from the Confederate playbook

and proposed a new strategy, one that would ignore Hood and go on the offensive not against standing armies or even organized resistance, but against the heart of the South. He secured permission from Grant and Lincoln for a most remarkable experiment in what would come to be called total war. On November 15th he set fire to all that had military value in the city, turned his back on Atlanta and set out for Savannah, nearly 300 miles to the east on the coast. He wrote, “...if I move through Georgia, smashing things...instead of being on the defensive I would be on the offensive...march(ing) a well-appointed army, right through [Jefferson Davis’s] territory, it is a demonstration to the world, foreign

and domestic, that we have a power which Davis cannot resist...I can...march, and make Georgia howl!”

Like Abraham Lincoln, Sherman believed in severe war, but a gentle peace. He was determined that Union forces should smash the sustainability of Southern war-making by destroying rebel farms, factories, and railroads with a view to crushing Confederate will. Honestly he implied, ‘We cannot change the hearts of Southerners, but we can make this war so terrible that, sick of it, they will not again resort to it.’ And so his army steadily slashed a 25-60 miles wide wound across Georgia and even worse, South Carolina. They moved at a dozen miles

a day, swatting away feeble Confederate attempts at interdiction, inexorably destroying everything that was nailed down and confiscating almost everything that was not. It was, in the words of one Yankee officer, “the most gigantic pleasure excursion ever planned.” It was total war. Next time: Bummers at work.

At the University of Richmond’s School of Professional and Continuing Studies, I’m Dan Roberts.

Resources

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