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THE EMERGENCE OF WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN
AS A STRATEGIC LEADER**

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BATTLE COMMAND IN THE 1864 CAMPAIGN FOR ATLANTA: THE EMERGENCE OF WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN AS A STRATEGIC LEADER

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ABSTRACT

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Commanders in the twenty-first century will face extraordinary challenges in command and control. The art of leading, motivating, and decision making is described in Army doctrine in terms of *battle command*. Ultimately, battle command describes the ability of the commander to lead his organization to accomplish missions based upon his mastery of many personal and professional disciplines. This study examines the battle command of one of the great captains of the Civil War--General William T. Sherman--from both strategic and operational perspectives. The study explores General Sherman's ability to dominate his battlespace in terms of time, space, and purpose using a model prescribed by the U.S. Army Battle Command Battle Laboratory. Finally, the paper suggests some implications for the future of battle command as an operational concept.

Commanders in the twenty-first century will face extraordinary challenges in command and control. As the United States Army prepares to digitize the battlefield, there is currently much debate on the technical aspects of the function of command. However, command is an art as well as a science, and it is also a function of experience over time. Thus, the relatively new concept of "battle command" has recently appeared in Army doctrine, addressing both the art and the science. Currently, battle command is defined as "the art of battle decision making, leading, and motivating soldiers and their organizations into action to accomplish missions."¹ It includes visualizing current states and future states, then formulating concepts of operations to get from one to the other at least cost. It also includes assigning missions, prioritizing and allocating resources, selecting the critical time and place to act, and knowing how and when to make adjustments during the fight.² Importantly, the Army recognizes battle command as an operational concept from which the doctrines of leadership and command will evolve. It serves as a "conceptual underpinning" for a field of study which will describe how leaders develop their ability to lead and their ability to decide.³

As doctrine emerges, it is important to recall the lessons of history rather than focusing exclusively on the technological aspects of battle command. Since successful warriors of the past clearly possessed superb skills in command and control regardless of the technology available to them, it follows that they probably also excelled in what we now call "battle command." The purpose of this paper is to examine the battle command of one of the Civil War's great captains of battle. It will show that as an army group commander in 1864, General William Tecumseh Sherman masterfully applied the fundamentals of battle command in the campaign for Atlanta, demonstrating his skill in the operational art

of warfare and providing great lessons in strategic vision for military leaders of the future.

First, the paper will summarize the military operations conducted by Sherman's Army Group in North Georgia between May and September, 1864. Then it will analyze the Atlanta Campaign to see if Sherman adhered to the six basic fundamentals of battle command currently espoused in a preliminary model designed by the Army's Battle Command Battle Laboratory. The six fundamentals include leading, motivating, and inspiring through moral and physical presence (personal traits); seeing the enemy; seeing the terrain; seeing yourself (friendly focus); deciding the proper course of action, and visualizing the battlefield.⁴ The paper will provide insights into Sherman's effectiveness in battle command, highlighting his weaknesses as well as his strengths. Finally, it will show how Sherman's battle command relates to future leaders in our Army, drawing conclusions from his successes and failures.

It is clear that General Sherman was severely constrained in terms of time, space, and purpose in the rugged hill country of Georgia; this paper is limited in these dimensions as well. Therefore, it will focus on the operational and strategic levels of war rather than tactics. The paper will analyze the military campaign which began in the Spring of 1864 at Dalton, Georgia and ended with the Union occupation of Atlanta on September 2, 1864. Its purpose is not to draw conclusions about how the battles could have been better fought. Instead, it seeks to examine how they *were* fought--in terms of battle command. As a means of introduction, a short operational summary of the campaign follows.

In the Spring of 1864, Sherman organized his armies just north of the Georgia state

line in Chattanooga, Tennessee. He had just assumed command of the entire Military Division of the Mississippi and was told by Grant to prepare to "...move against Johnston's army, and to get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their war resources."⁵ This meant Atlanta! Taking great care to synchronize his campaign with Grant's in Virginia, Sherman inspected his command, briefed his army commanders, and secured his logistics base at Nashville. With his eye on the distant seacoasts of Georgia and Florida, he planned to move James McPherson's Army of the Tennessee, George Henry Thomas's Army of the Cumberland, and John McAllister Schofield's Army of the Ohio in a southeasterly direction towards the "Gate City" using the Western and Atlantic railroad between Chattanooga and Atlanta as his primary means of logistical support. On May 6, 1864, Sherman led "this mighty host, almost 100,000 strong, into the North Georgia wilderness," searching for General Joseph E. Johnston's Army of Tennessee.⁶ Johnston's Army mustered only 43,887 soldiers and 144 cannons, less than half the strength of Sherman's force.⁷ The first contact came near Dalton at Rocky Face Ridge, whereby Thomas and Schofield pinned the Confederates down while McPherson's infantry rapidly executed a flanking movement, bypassing to the west. No frontal assault was ordered nor permitted, and McPherson came close to routing the forces of Confederate Generals William Joseph Hardee and John Bell Hood. However, by the time McPherson was able to pass through Snake Creek Gap, Johnston's cavalry detected the threat on his left and fell back to Resaca.⁸ Sherman deliberately began probing his opponent's flank in the attempt to turn the Rebel line, a technique which would manifest itself many times in the campaign for Atlanta. Such turning movements would keep Johnston's army off-

balance, affording Sherman every opportunity to attrit the Rebel forces who expected him to attack directly down the railroad line. Clearly, Sherman was looking for blood, but he had learned about the inherent dangers of conducting frontal assaults during the Vicksburg campaign while attacking the bluffs near Chickasaw Bayou in December of 1862.⁹ His relentless pressure upon Johnston's army caused the Confederates to abandon Resaca and then Cassville, digging in at Allatoona Pass.¹⁰

Recalling the formidable terrain near Allatoona from his travels as a young lieutenant, Sherman temporarily abandoned his railroad lifeline and moved his armies south where Generals Hood, Hardee, and the newly arrived General Leonidas Polk met him head on at New Hope Church, near Dallas. Fierce fighting broke out in thick, water-soaked woods which came to be known as "the Hell-Hole," but by June 4th, Union troops had again secured the railroad, flanking Johnston once more and causing him to fall back to a position which embraced three prominent terrain features--Pine Mountain, Lost Mountain, and Kennesaw Mountain.¹¹ Thus in the month of May, Sherman had successfully driven his opponent from Dalton to Marietta while advancing his line of communications from Chattanooga to Big Shanty, nearly one-hundred miles of "as difficult country as was ever fought over by civilized armies."¹²

Two significant events occurred in the fight for Kennesaw Mountain: Sherman ordered a frontal assault, departing from his highly successful operational technique; and he flanked Johnston again with Schofield's Army, causing Johnston to abandon the mountain after inflicting heavy casualties on the Army of the Tennessee for the first time in the campaign.¹³ Actually, two assaults were conducted, one by McPherson's forces upon

Little Kennesaw and another by two of Thomas's divisions on Confederate works about one mile distant.¹⁴ Union casualties exceeded 2500 men as compared to 800 for the defenders.¹⁵ Infuriated by his losses at Kennesaw, Sherman immediately reverted to his old tactics and launched his cavalry in the effort to maintain contact with the retreating Rebels. But, surprisingly, Johnston had not crossed the Chattahoochee River as Sherman expected. Instead, he occupied well-prepared breastworks just north of the river, presumably to bide time so he could conduct an orderly river crossing.

Through personal reconnaissance, General Sherman recognized that the Confederate forces were entrenched with the river to their backs. Knowing that Johnston was still between Union forces and the Chattahoochee, Sherman applied pressure along the Rebel fortifications without becoming decisively engaged and sent Garrard's cavalry division to Roswell, more than ten miles upstream, to secure the crossing sites critical for success. As engineers and pontoniers worked furiously, the Union army crossed the Chattahoochee relatively unopposed via bridges, trestles, and fords. Johnston had not only occupied the wrong river bank--he had allowed Sherman to enter Atlanta's "back yard" without paying the full price of admission. By the end of the next day, July 18, 1864, Thomas, Schofield, and McPherson were across the river moving toward their new positions near Peachtree Creek, on the city's northeast side.¹⁶ Though not yet fully known in Sherman's Army Group, Confederate General Joseph Johnston had been relieved of his command a day earlier. Command of Confederate forces had passed to John Bell Hood, a tenacious fighter who was eager to upset Sherman's "indirect" warfighting style.

By July 20, Sherman's forces occupied a line on Peachtree Creek which extended all

the way to Decatur, several miles east of Atlanta. Thomas occupied the western position; Schofield, the center; and McPherson, the east. Hood detected a gap between Thomas's army and Schofield's army which he intended to exploit by slamming elements of two Confederate corps--those of Hardee and Stewart--into the gap.¹⁷ However, serious problems in Confederate command and control greatly diminished the Rebels' success. Stewart attacked too early; Hardee attacked too late; and several Rebel units scarcely attacked at all, causing Confederate casualties to exceed 2500 soldiers.¹⁸ In the end, Thomas's Army of the Cumberland held its ground and the Battle of Peachtree Creek became Hood's first defeat as an Army commander.

Sherman, having no intention to attack the fortified positions of the Georgia Militia which had encircled the city proper, continued with his plan to choke Atlanta off from all means of support. While his cavalry raced to cut the railroads which entered Atlanta from the east and the west, he extended McPherson's Army of the Tennessee to the south to cover the Georgia Railroad between Atlanta and Decatur. However, on July 22, murderous fighting broke out on Bald Hill (later known as Leggett's Hill) at which Hood ordered Hardee's Corps to launch a counterattack against McPherson's flank; this action came to be called the "Battle of Atlanta."¹⁹ Sherman watched his Army of the Tennessee fight for its life as four Confederate divisions assaulted the Union XV and XVI Corps, with Leggett's Hill as the very linchpin of their attack. The Army of the Tennessee was victorious, but its commander, General James B. McPherson, was killed in the onslaught along with 3721 other Union soldiers.²⁰

Sherman then intensified his energy to isolate Atlanta. He dispatched elements of

four cavalry divisions to Lovejoy Station, twenty miles to the south, to destroy the last Confederate-held railroad which entered Atlanta from Macon. Meanwhile, he passed the Army of the Tennessee, now commanded by General O.O. Howard, counterclockwise around Atlanta in a giant flanking movement which was aimed at catching Hood off guard west of town. Sherman was obviously maneuvering his forces to cut the final railroad line. Therefore, Hood launched another counterattack near Ezra Church on July 28, which was enough to protect the railroad from immediate destruction, but at a Confederate cost of 2500 additional casualties.²¹ Clearly, O.O. Howard's Army could not accomplish Sherman's intent of strangling Atlanta without reinforcement.

Sherman decided to use all available forces to sever the Macon rail line, even if it meant disengaging from the Chattanooga railroad again. Leaving Slocum's corps as a rear guard to protect the trestle over the Chattahoochee River, Sherman massed his entire army group in front of Jonesboro. On August 31, Hardee's Corps attacked the Union forces; on September 1, he in turn was attacked, causing him to withdraw quickly to Lovejoy's Station.²² The situation was now hopeless for Hood because Sherman was between him and Atlanta, in full control of the railroad. Nevertheless, Sherman was greatly relieved to receive news from Slocum on September 3, that Atlanta had been surrendered and was now in federal hands, a message which caused him to abandon his relentless pursuit of the Confederate forces and send a message to Halleck: "Atlanta [is] ours, and fairly won."²³

Entering the city with no fanfare, Sherman established a temporary headquarters, evacuated all civilians from Atlanta, and prepared for his infamous march to the sea. Though the Union strategy to defeat the Confederacy in a giant pincer movement between

the Georgia and Virginia theaters was far from complete, Sherman had captured the Confederacy's key arsenal and rail transportation center, breaking the South's will to resist and assuring Abraham Lincoln's reelection.²⁴

It is clear that the Atlanta Campaign of 1864 was one of the most successful military operations of the Civil War because of its leader, General William T. Sherman. His ability to make decisions and to lead--the essence of battle command--was directly responsible for that success. However, according to the U.S. Army Battle Command Battle Laboratory, a military leader's grasp of battle command can be further assessed by analyzing the leader's application of six basic tenets; these are known as battle command fundamentals.²⁵ Regarding General Sherman's warfighting capability during the Atlanta Campaign, this paper will now systematically analyze each of the fundamentals, beginning with Sherman's "personal (command) traits."

The first fundamental--leading, motivating, and inspiring through moral and physical presence--is readily apparent in Sherman's command style. Respected by all for his brilliance, and feared by some for his temper, Sherman had a proven ability to force his will on his subordinates as well as the Confederate Army. His personality included the attributes of imagination, resourcefulness, versatility, boldness, and determination.²⁶ And, he constantly showed up on the battlefield at the right time and place so as to influence the most critical part of the fight.

First, Sherman led his army group from the front. For instance, it is no accident that Sherman included the death account of General Leonidas Polk in his Memoirs. While conducting personal forward reconnaissance just west of Kennesaw Mountain, he spied

several gray clad soldiers on horseback and ordered a Union artillery battery to "give them a shot." One of the horsemen was General Polk, who was mortally wounded with the firing of the third round of the salvo.²⁷ Similarly, during the Battle of Atlanta, north of Leggett's Hill, Sherman galloped from out of nowhere to observe a Rebel penetration of Logan's XV Corps. Sherman directed Woods's division to counterattack while personally leading artillery from Schofield's Army of the Ohio into a supporting position, giving Logan time to close the gap.²⁸ Clearly, Sherman's style was "up close and personal."

Second, General Sherman had the power to motivate his subordinates, from generals to privates. Conscious of the importance of leading by example, "Uncle Billy" often caused entire regiments to cheer as he rode by. He pushed himself as hard as he pushed his subordinates, and he obeyed his own orders, traveling extremely light and enjoying few personal privileges because of his rank. Just after the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, Sherman "inspired" his cavalry commander, Garrard, to pursue the retreating Rebels by publicly scolding him in the streets of Marietta. And, after his dear friend, General McPherson, was killed, he ordered General Logan to temporarily assume command of the Army of the Tennessee, exhorting the messenger to "tell...Logan to fight 'em, fight 'em, fight 'em like hell!"²⁹ Perhaps Major General Jacob Cox best described Sherman as a commander who thrived under the pressures of combat:

He had the rare faculty of being more equable under great responsibilities and scenes of great excitement. At such times his eccentricities disappeared. His mind seemed never so clear, his confidence never so strong, his spirit never so inspiring, and his temper never so amiable as in the crisis of some fierce struggle like that of the day when McPherson fell in front of Atlanta.³⁰

The second fundamental of battle command is the ability to see the enemy, a

discipline at which Sherman generally excelled, at both the operational and strategic levels. Operationally, Sherman used his cavalry in superb fashion to gain contact with his opponent and to report back accurate information on enemy troop strengths and locations. Detailed personal reconnaissance usually followed. But unlike most other Union generals, Sherman then used this valuable military intelligence to set the conditions for the overall success of the campaign by planning his maneuver to bypass the enemy's strongest field positions. By allowing one of his armies to attack a lightly fortified position, he could then free a second army as his main effort to strike the enemy's flank, causing the opponent to turn his lines or fall back to new positions which were less prepared. This "indirect approach" of maneuver warfare will be discussed later; for now it is important to recognize that Sherman was able to perform this operational art precisely because he usually knew the disposition, strengths, and weaknesses of the enemy *before* he attacked.

Sherman used all available means to exploit and distribute the information he gained about his enemy. The Union cavalry of 1864 had been a long time in the making, but now performed superbly in the rough hill country of North Georgia. Additionally, Sherman protected telegraph lines as zealously as the Chattanooga Railroad itself, and frequently telegraphed enemy intelligence to his subordinate army commanders as well as to Halleck and Grant. His staff officers quickly learned the importance of disseminating enemy (and friendly) information by letter, telegraph, map, and signal flag. T. Harry Williams, in his book, McClellan, Sherman, and Grant, noticed some of the tools which Sherman pioneered so he could paint a picture of the enemy for his subordinates:

...he introduced engineering as a major factor in modern warfare. He introduced other modern devices as well: map coordinates, the photographic

duplication of maps, trip wires, and a looser and more extended order of infantry attack.³¹

In short, Sherman and his staff used every known technique to practice "threat-based analysis" of the battlefield. The general's knowledge of the enemy's strength and disposition drove him to abandon his critical railroad link two times in the Atlanta Campaign--once near Allatoona Pass in May, 1864, and again in August while massing his forces for the decisive Battle of Jonesboro.³² Having developed a preoccupation for absolute control of the railroads which led to Atlanta, Sherman would not have disengaged from his lifeline unless the enemy situation allowed him to do so--and twice it did.

Sherman also viewed his enemy from a strategic level. By the Spring of 1864, both Sherman and Grant were engaged in the art of grand strategy, frequently reporting their successes or failures directly to President Lincoln. But Sherman clearly saw the South as his ultimate opponent rather than Joe Johnston or "Fighting John" Hood. A fervent unionist, Sherman had family ties to the White House. Further, he had gained a first-hand understanding of Southern politics while serving as a superintendent of a military school in Louisiana in 1859.³³ Both experiences led Sherman to believe that political, economic, and psychological means must all be used to defeat the Confederacy. True to one of his nicknames, "the Merchant of Terror," Sherman fought his campaign for Atlanta as a precondition for his ultimate objective--to crush the South's will to resist by inflicting pain on the entire population.³⁴ The general said in a letter to Atlanta Mayor James Calhoun, "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."³⁵ Whether or not Sherman's "curses and maledictions" became the first form of modern psychological

warfare has been debated; more importantly, the way Sherman saw his enemy was unique to the Civil War. Consider the following:

Only with the emergence of Sherman and Grant did Civil War leadership break free of Jominian shackles to anticipate modern warfare. These pre-eminent northern soldiers came to accept war against civilian populations as well as against enemy armies and recognized the importance of civilian psychology, thereby displaying an awareness of "the political nature of modern war."³⁶

The third fundamental of battle command is the ability to read the terrain. Sherman's knowledge of the rugged terrain in North Georgia was clearly a factor in the operational success he enjoyed between Chattanooga and the Chattahoochee River. As a lieutenant, Sherman had been assigned temporary duties in Georgia. Therefore, in 1844, he took the opportunity to visit several key historical sites in the area, including the Indian Mounds near Cartersville and the settlement of Allatoona.³⁷ While traveling, he noted the militarily significant terrain, including the bridges over the Etowah and Chattahoochee Rivers, the narrow railroad pass at Allatoona, the city of Marietta, and Kennesaw Mountain itself.³⁸ Remarkably, Sherman's interest in the military aspects of topography would serve him well twenty years later as an army group commander.

Knowing first hand the difficulty Union regiments would experience while maneuvering in Georgia's restricted terrain, Sherman placed great emphasis on topographical analysis and mapmaking. Limited only by the technology of his time, he insisted in the:

...appointment in each division of an officer as acting topographer, whose duty it was to accompany reconnoitring [sic] parties, to collect information as to distances and locations of hamlets and houses, and to sketch roads, streams and other features. Their information was then co-ordinated [sic] at corps and army headquarters, and the complete maps were duplicated by a

photographic process and distributed, new editions being issued periodically.³⁹

At the strategic level of warfare, Sherman's broad view of the terrain was equally remarkable. He saw the Western Theater as the linchpin for Union success, and he urged his trusted friend and confidant, General Grant, to split the Confederacy geographically by driving in a southeasterly direction to the sea. On March 10, 1864, Sherman explained his analysis of the terrain in a letter to Grant:

I exhort you to come out West. Here lies the seat of the coming empire; and from the West, when our task is done, we will make short work of Charleston and Richmond, and the impoverished coast of the Atlantic.⁴⁰

Of course Sherman would be left to drive to the ocean by himself; Grant ultimately decided that the Union would maneuver on two fronts simultaneously, one in Georgia and the other in the wilderness of Virginia. Consequently, General Sherman never lost sight of the coastline. On August 13, 1864, while planning his last grand flanking movement counterclockwise around Atlanta, he wrote Grant, "If I should ever be cut off from my [logistics] base, look for me about St. Marks, Florida or Savannah, Georgia."⁴¹ Sherman, the strategic thinker, had a grand perspective on terrain which was equalled by no other general in the Civil War.

The fourth fundamental of battle command relates to the friendly focus of the commander--how he sees himself and his subordinates in terms of time, space, and purpose. Sherman's overall knowledge of his strengths and weaknesses as well as those of his subordinates was extremely relevant to his operational success in the campaign for Atlanta.

First, Sherman understood that his greatest limitation was logistics. The dearth of trafficable roads simply forced the Union army to rely upon unrestricted access to the

Western and Atlantic Railroad. Therefore, he took painstaking efforts to seize and control all railroad traffic from Nashville southward. Colonel W.W. Wright was empowered to maintain the railroad at all costs, and civilian rail traffic was curtailed with Lincoln's backing to support Sherman's attack.⁴² In a matter of weeks, thousands of soldiers were organized to protect the railroad, construct supply bases at Chattanooga and Allatoona, erect or repair trestles over three major rivers, and drive wagon trains to supplement the daily rail traffic. At one point the "railroad guard" swelled to 68,000 soldiers strewn between Nashville and Big Shanty; staff officers calculated that 230 men were protecting each mile of the Western and Atlantic.⁴³ But to Sherman, the heavy "tooth-to-tail" ratio was necessary to guarantee the resupply of his army group with ammunition, food, uniforms, medical supplies, and personnel replacements.

Second, Sherman knew that the strength of his Army Group was centered around its experienced commanders who fought valiantly. His greatest battle task was to provide them the guidance they needed to press the attack. He depended on the Union to supply him with whatever he needed, and he frequently secured the personal backing of President Lincoln and General Grant in support of his endeavors to conquer the Gate City of the South. Operationally, Sherman kept Johnston completely off balance for the first one hundred days of the campaign, refusing to attack breastworks and other fortified positions in all battles except Kennesaw Mountain. His personal skill in predicting where clashes would take place--his ability to "read" the battlefield--routinely provided McPherson, Thomas, and Schofield the advantages of surprise and mass over their opponents. In short, Sherman knew that his battle-proven Military Division of the Mississippi would be

victorious if the army commanders were empowered to do their jobs, unencumbered by politics, and confident in full logistic support. Sherman's confidence in his commanders is apparent in his Memoirs:

In Generals Thomas, McPherson, and Schofield, I had three generals of education and experience, admirably qualified for the work before us. Each...made a history of his own...and each possessed special qualities of mind and of character which fitted them in the highest degree for the work then in contemplation.⁴⁴

At the strategic level, Sherman saw himself inextricably linked to Grant. The two had pledged to Lincoln to work in tandem, eventually striking the final blow in Carolinas with Grant's forces as the anvil and Sherman's as the hammer. But by early June, Sherman recognized that Grant's Virginia campaign was proving to be costly, in terms of casualties and time. Therefore, with the news of the Union defeat at Cold Harbor, Sherman redoubled his efforts to take Atlanta as quickly as possible, realizing that the real task of rolling up the Carolina coastline lay before him. The "united approach to strategy" which he shared only with Grant was utmost in his mind as the Union armies attacked Kennesaw Mountain.⁴⁵ Sherman was perhaps the only Union soldier in Georgia who could accurately visualize the long road ahead; his patience was tested and he responded with zeal. Nevertheless, in terms of time, Sherman was two months behind schedule. In terms of space, his armies would travel another fifty miles before Atlanta would fall. And, in terms of purpose, he was extremely anxious to convince Lincoln that he must drive to Savannah in pursuit of the agreement he had made with Grant.

The fifth fundamental of battle command is the ability to make sound decisions in the heat of combat. Historical literature confirms that Sherman had both strengths and

weaknesses in this personal dynamic.

First, one must recognize that Sherman was extremely well-disciplined to make sound operational decisions because of his experience and his personal attention to intricate detail. He told his staff that they must push hard and be ready to exploit the situation anytime the enemy "let go."⁴⁶ They responded with detailed staff estimates and accurate strength accounting procedures, compiling complete personnel summaries three times per month.⁴⁷ Knowing the strengths of his armies and having a personal feel for the battle, Sherman usually made critical decisions at the right time. For example, his decision to name O.O. Howard as the new commander of the Army of the Tennessee after McPherson was killed was an informed decision; so was his decision not to pursue Hood once Atlanta Mayor James M. Calhoun surrendered the city to General Slocum.⁴⁸ Most remarkably, while garrisoned in Atlanta, Sherman assessed correctly that the Union Army could sever all lines of rail support and forage off the land for an indefinite period of time, a decision which came only after studying agricultural production reports and the Georgia state census figures of 1860.⁴⁹ Other favorable examples abound.

However well-informed, Sherman was less than perfect in his decision-making ability, committing serious errors on two occasions in the campaign. He correctly believed that a commander's early decision had the effect of empowering his subordinates to act. But his temperament sometimes led him to make hasty decisions, some of which were disastrous. At Kennesaw, Sherman's decision to conduct a frontal assault was wrong, and it is probable that he covered up his true assessment of the failed attack when he wrote in his Memoirs that he was "satisfied of the bloody cost of attacking intrenched [sic] lines."⁵⁰

But perhaps the most costly decision of the campaign came during the Battle of Atlanta on July 22, 1864. Sherman allowed the Army of the Tennessee, which he had previously commanded, to fight to the death against murderous Confederate attacks against its left flank. Amazingly, thousands upon thousands of Union soldiers stood idly by, waiting for Sherman's order to reinforce the devastated XV Corps. Sherman explained the extraordinary failure to utilize five eights of his army by the astonishing declaration:

I purposely allowed the Army of the Tennessee to fight this battle...almost unaided...because I knew that...if any assistance were rendered by either of the other armies, the Army of the Tennessee would be jealous.⁵¹

It is clear that William T. Sherman's decision to let the Army of the Tennessee "fight it out" at the Battle of Atlanta led to several hundred unnecessary casualties in July, 1864. Impatience and favoritism were two unnecessary accoutrements of Sherman's personality which twice adversely affected his decision-making ability by clouding his insight.

The sixth fundamental of battle command is the most important--the ability to provide strategic vision. By 1864 Sherman had developed a clear, mental picture of what the United States of America would look like after the war, and it included no vestiges of seceding states. He relentlessly held to the view that the Union could be preserved only if the South surrendered--completely and totally. Grant and Lincoln obviously agreed, but neither seemed to display the passion that Sherman showed, even before he was named to command the Military Division of the West. In fact, because of his superior intellect, Sherman appears to have been the driving force behind Grant's adoption of the dual campaign strategy, the details of which Sherman shared with Grant on their famous trainride to Cincinnati in March of 1864. Together, at the Burnet House in Cincinnati,

they solidified the grand strategy of the United States by planning the longest and most destructive military raid in the history of North America, using all available means to crush the South.⁵²

Within his own operational theater, Sherman's military strategy included capturing Atlanta; controlling the Confederate arsenal and rail hub in the city; conducting operations in concert with Grant in Virginia, effectively splitting the Confederacy in half; bringing the pain of the war to the population at large; and destroying the Rebel army opposing him.⁵³ He succeeded at all but the last. Seeking Grant's approval for his march to the sea, Sherman, the visionary, wrote:

If we can move a well appointed army right through his territory it's a demonstration to the world, foreign and domestic, we have a power which Davis cannot resist. This may not be war but rather statesmanship....⁵⁴

To accomplish his campaign strategy, Sherman continued to apply the operational concept he had pioneered and tested near Meridian, Mississippi in February, 1864. Rather than attacking Confederate forces head-on, Sherman learned to attack the weakest points of the Rebel breastworks with a supporting attack, while flanking the enemy with the Union main effort. These turning movements, later heralded as ingenious by B.H. Liddell-Hart and others, became the standard maneuver in the campaign for Atlanta and were extremely effective in preventing Union casualties while keeping Joe Johnston confused. It is significant that Sherman had the vision to anticipate the type of warfare the Union Army would need to fight in the rough hill country of North Georgia and that he never abandoned it, save once. Liddell-Hart assigns great importance to the operational maneuver developed by General Sherman:

Thus by manoeuvre to draw an opponent acting on the strategic defensive into a series of costly tactical offensives, and at the same time to maintain an almost continuous progress, was a triumph of strategic artistry which of its kind is without parallel in history.⁵⁵

Finally, Sherman's "total war" approach used in the campaign for Atlanta was visionary and quite radical for its time. He attacked all elements of society--armies, cities, institutions, rules, norms, and customs--in the fervent effort to psychologically destroy the South's will to fight.⁵⁶ The artillery shelling of Atlanta, the forced evacuation of non-combatants, the destruction of railroads, the military occupation of the city at large, and the subsequent burning of the city all illustrate how fervently Sherman desired to bring the war to the people. Even though some civilians were maimed and killed in the August artillery shelling, Sherman's understanding of war as the "science of barbarity" allowed him to issue the order with no remorse.⁵⁷ In fact, Sherman did not consider himself bound by laws of war to give the citizens of Atlanta preparatory warnings before the bombardment began, since Atlanta was "a heavily fortified town with arsenals, magazines, foundries, and public stores."⁵⁸ Often credited for pioneering modern psychological warfare, Sherman, more than any other general of his time, understood that "the will of a nation to fight rests on the economic and psychological...security of its people, and that if these supporting elements are destroyed all resistance may collapse."⁵⁹ Notably, Sherman envisioned the endstate of his campaign before he set out from Chattanooga, and when he left Atlanta at seven o'clock on the morning of November 16, his prophecy had been fulfilled.⁶⁰ The capture of Atlanta had set the conditions for a highly successful march to the sea.

It is abundantly clear that General William Tecumseh Sherman was able to dominate

his battlespace in the campaign for Atlanta because, by 1864, he had mastered the fundamentals of battle command. His effectiveness can be assessed in two major ways. First, Sherman was successful as a strategist! Groomed at Shiloh, Vicksburg, Meridian, and Chattanooga, he clearly understood the national interest to be the security of the Union. When Grant selected him to command the Military Division of the Mississippi, he was thoroughly prepared to secure the ultimate objectives of national policy--split the Confederacy in half and totally defeat the South (ends). The campaigns for Atlanta, Savannah, Columbia, Fayetteville, and Goldsboro were courses of action (ways) which led to the South's defeat by employing well-supplied armies (means) to overwhelm the opponent. Since the division between grand strategy and military strategy was not well-defined during the Civil War, Sherman simply took it upon himself to leverage all instruments of national power to ensure his success. He conducted political negotiations with Southern officials, he economically stifled Atlanta by severing the rail lines, and he psychologically overwhelmed the South by bringing the war to the population at large. From the perspective of basic strategy, Sherman was effective in the Atlanta campaign because he concerned himself with ways to employ means to achieve ends.⁶¹ Second, by 1864, Sherman had mastered the two most basic battle command fundamentals--leading and deciding. Gradually overcoming a lifetime of personal and professional setbacks which ranged from severe depression to bankruptcy, the general had persevered! His ability to lead was paramount in the conduct of the campaign. Over time, he developed a unique charisma which inspired the North and traumatized the South, causing him to rise to a position of international prominence after the war. Though Sherman's decision making

was not perfect, he possessed the uncanny ability to visualize the endstate of a campaign, decide upon a course of action, and passionately lead his army group towards that objective. Once he focused on Atlanta and secured Grant's approval for the timing of the campaign, Sherman drove his subordinates relentlessly, basing his decisions to attack, flank, or delay upon the best factual information available to him. More importantly, in the absence of facts, he made many accurate decisions which were based upon his experience, his knowledge of topography, and his "gut feel" for what Joe Johnston would do next.

Finally, one must seriously consider what General Sherman's mastery of battle command has to with strategic leaders in the Army of the 21st century. Is the Atlanta Campaign relevant to the future, or is "battle command" merely another doctrinal precept which has emerged to facilitate our current fascination with future commanders who may someday win wars by mastering information flow on a high-technology battlefield?

Hopefully, the answer is clear. To dominate one's battlespace means mastering many personal and professional disciplines, most of which were demonstrated in 1864 by William T. Sherman. As an operational concept, battle command deserves the scrutiny of senior leaders, strategic theorists, and aspiring commanders. The six fundamentals discussed in this paper may or may not need modification; however, some framework is needed on which to instruct the fundamentals of battle command to commanders of the future. Such a holistic training model will produce leaders who are focused upon dominating their battlespace in terms of time, space, and purpose, rather than by enhanced technology alone.

In conclusion, General William Tecumseh Sherman's reputation as an army group commander has drawn mixed reviews. Strategists have called him everything from a harbinger of destruction to a strategic genius. The latter, more popular title implies that he possessed transcendent qualities which allowed him to foresee the operational movement of his Confederate opponents. But history has revealed that "Old Cump" spent a lifetime mastering the interpersonal and collective skills which led to the fall of Atlanta. The full array of those skills will serve as the premiere model for battle command in the twenty-first century.

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