

War Comes to the Home Front: Union Troops in Atlanta

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5th Grade Social Studies

Overview of the Lesson

During the year 1864, William Tecumseh Sherman, was waging “total war” in his infamous March to the Sea. One stop was Atlanta. The Journal of Mrs. Dolly Sumner Lunt describes life around Atlanta before, during, and after Sherman’s visit.

TEKS/TAKS

5.4D – Causes and effects of the Civil War

5.25A – Differentiate between primary and secondary sources

5.25D – Identify different points of view about an issue or a topic

Objectives: The learner will

- **Read and answer questions about a journal entry**
- **Students will work in groups to read and understand excerpts from the journal**

Time Required 1-2 45-minute class periods

Materials Needed: “War Comes to the Home Front” PowerPoint

Computer/projector

Copies of journal excerpts

Procedure

- **Introduction – Ask the students what they know about William Tecumseh Sherman’s March to the Sea. Record responses.**
- **Distribute copies of the short article, “Sherman’s March to the Sea”, which is available on the [Ohio History Central](#) website. Read over the article together. Have students brainstorm what could happen to a city located in the path of the March to the Sea.**
- **Introduce the “War Comes to the Home Front” PowerPoint. Have students examine the photos in power point slides 2 and 3 (life in Atlanta before Sherman).**
- **Read Sections 1, 2, and 3 of the journal together as a class. (Comprehension questions are listed at the end of the PowerPoint.)**

- Starting with Section 4, assign students to small groups to answer questions about the entries. Each group will need copies of the entries. Moving a section at a time, have students read to answer questions. Discuss the answers at the end of each section.
- After completing the readings, show the students the three pictures showing what Union troops did to Atlanta.
- Have the students write in their journals what they know about Sherman's visit to Atlanta. In addition, have them write about how they would have felt and what they would have done if they were Mrs. Burge. (She chose to stay, while many people left before the soldiers arrived.)
- After students have completed entries, have them discuss what they would have done if they were Mrs. Burge.

Assessment:

Informal – Journal entries about Sherman's visit to Atlanta.

Formal –

Union General William Tecumseh Sherman led his troops on the March to the Sea which resulted in destruction of homes, stores, crops, bridges and railroad tracks. This path of destruction was 60 miles wide and 300 miles long. The theory behind this destruction was:

- A. Guerilla warfare
- B. Surprise attack
- C. Total war
- D. Complete destruction

Answer: C – Total War.

Sherman's March to the Sea

Ohioan William Tecumseh Sherman, a general in the Union army during the American Civil War, is most famous for his March to the Sea. On September 1, 1864, Sherman and his army captured Atlanta, Georgia, an important transportation and economic center in the South. Despite this important Northern victory, the Confederate government and many of its citizens remained committed to the war effort. Sherman intended his March to the Sea to break the will of the Southern people who still desired to fight.

Sherman was an advocate of total war. He contended that the Northern military was "not only fighting hostile armies, but a hostile people, and must make old and young, rich and poor, feel the hard hand of war." Sherman realized that the Southern civilian population provided the bulk of supplies that Confederate forces needed to wage war against the North. To speed the defeat of the Confederate military, Northern forces, Sherman believed, needed to prevent Southern civilians from supplying their armed forces with food and other necessities of war. In essence, the Northern military needed to wage war against both the Confederate military and Southern civilians.

To break the will of the Southern populace, Sherman proposed the March to the Sea. He proposed leaving nearly sixty thousand men behind in northern Georgia and Tennessee to deal with Confederate soldiers under the command of Nathan Bedford Forrest and John Bell Hood, while Sherman took the remainder of his army, numbering approximately sixty-two thousand men, from Atlanta to Savannah, Georgia, a harbor on the Atlantic Ocean. General Ulysses S. Grant and President Abraham Lincoln first opposed this plan, but Sherman eventually convinced these men in his proposal's feasibility.

Sherman left Atlanta with his sixty-two thousand-man army on November 15, 1864. As the Northerners began their 285 southerly trek to Savannah, Hood led his Confederate army on a raid into Tennessee. As a result of Hood's action, fewer than five thousand Confederate soldiers under Joseph Wheeler stood between Sherman's army and Savannah.

Sherman left behind his supply train, determining that he would allow his men to forage from civilians along the march. His soldiers commonly requisitioned all of the provisions that they could find from the civilian populace. Whatever food that the men could not eat or cart off, they generally burned, denying it to the Southern civilians and the Confederate military. The Union soldiers even commandeered supplies from the slaves. They also destroyed numerous homes by setting the structures on fire. Sherman's men successfully occupied Savannah by mid December, 1864.

While modern-day scholars debate the level of destruction that Union soldiers exacted upon the civilian populace during the March to the Sea, the use of total war achieved Sherman's desired effect. Many Southern civilians, especially those who endured the Northerners' wrath, experienced a weakened resolve. While many of these Southerners remained committed to the struggle, other Confederates began to doubt the South's chance for victory over the Northerners. Sherman's use of total war helped the North emerge from the American Civil War victorious.

[Ohio Historical Society](#), 2005, "Sherman's March to the Sea", [Ohio History Central: An Online Encyclopedia of Ohio History](#).

Extension Activity – Mrs. Burge’s Journal entries make Sherman and the Union troops seem like the bad guys. Give the students a copy of the sheet with a picture of Sherman. Write about the Union troops’ experiences in Atlanta from Sherman’s point of view.



Document Sources

- **Primary Source Documents**

A Woman's Wartime Journal: an Account of the Passage over Georgia's Plantation of Sherman's Army on the March to the Sea, as Recorded in the Diary of Dolly Sumner Lunt (Mrs. Thomas Burge). Accessed at <http://docsouth.unc.edu/burge/menu.html> .

Photos of Atlanta before and after Sherman’s visit were accessed at <http://www.unitedstreaming.com/>. (These photos are also available through the Library of Congress. It was easier to find them through United Streaming.)

- **Secondary Source**

Ohio History Central – Sherman’s March to the Sea -- accessed at <http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/entry.php?rec=551>