

Major General W.T. Sherman Begins His 1864 Campaign

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By the beginning of February, 1864, much of the heavy fighting that had happened in the months previous had died down because of the winter weather. In the northern part of the country, where the Army of Northern Virginia, under the command of the Confederate General Lee, and the newly reorganized Federal Army under the command of Lieutenant General Grant, sat watching each other. General Sherman was in command in the west, keeping his eye on the Army of the Potomac under the command of General Meade. Although this was the case, there was some skirmishing underway – some in Virginia and North Carolina – during this week.

Noteworthy during this week was the fighting around New Berne, North Carolina. On the 2nd of February, Confederate navel men in small boats captured the U.S. gunboat *Underwriter* in the Neuse River, but were forced to set fire to her and flee.

Most of the action that happened in the early part of February was General Sherman's decision to begin his Meridian Campaign in Mississippi. Sherman's plan was to move from Vicksburg Tennessee, where he was staying after the Chattanooga Campaign in 1863, with four divisions of infantry and Colonel Winslow's cavalry brigade. While advancing westward, their plan was to destroy the Southern Mississippi Railroad. Cooperating with Sherman were some 7600 cavalry from Memphis under William Sooy Smith, who was General Grant's chief of cavalry. He was supposed to meet with Sherman at Meridian with all the cavalry in the department. However, Smith's journey was delayed.

General Leonidas Polk and a force of about 20,000 confederates were tasked with slowing down Sherman's movement towards Meridian. Much of the action happened as Sherman started to move away from Vicksburg. There was a continued skirmish that lasted 18 miles on the 5th while Sherman's forces moved into Jackson, Mississippi. This was the third time that Sherman's troops had entered and occupied the capital of Mississippi. On the next day, Sherman and his men left Jackson and went towards their goal of Meridian.

Down in Florida, while Sherman was advancing on Meridian, 10,000 men landed at Jacksonville, on the eastern coast of Florida. This expedition was for the purpose of starting to "rebuild the South." Lincoln had issued a proclamation of amnesty in December which would give a free pardon to any of the rebels that would take an oath to the Federal Constitution and Union. It was under this proclamation, that troops under Brigadier General Truman Seymour and under the overall command of Major General Q. A. Gillmore, occupied Jacksonville, Florida, on the 7th. By the end of the week, both the expedition and the campaign in Mississippi were doing well in their respective duties.

On the political scene, President Davis of the Confederacy recommended Congress to call for the suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus as a "sharp remedy" to combat spying, desertion, associating with the enemy, and disloyal gatherings and activities. Also, the Confederate Congress approved Acts which included a ban on the importation of luxuries and the circulation of U.S. paper money.