

## **Sherman Prepares for His March**

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In the two months since his armies had captured Atlanta, General William T. Sherman had rested the bulk of his command, while sending elements north of the city to deal with General John Bell Hood's Confederate Army of Tennessee, which was moving against Sherman's railroad supply lines. On October 5 a portion of Hood's army attacked the Federal position at Allatoona, but they were repulsed after Sherman sent reinforcements there. Following the engagement, Hood determined to move westward into Alabama, with the ultimate goal of advancing to the north in a desperate attempt to regain control of Tennessee.

Frustrated in his efforts to destroy the remnants of Hood's command, and unwilling to follow the Confederate army as it moved northward, Sherman instead decided upon an ambitious, daring plan to cut his army off from his supply lines and, with no contact to the outside world, march southward through Georgia towards Savannah. His goal was to "make Georgia howl" by destroying anything of military value in a wide swath through the central part of the state, and to destroy the morale of southern civilians by appropriating food, livestock, and anything else necessary for his army's sustenance. Though naturally having some concerns, both President Lincoln and General-in-Chief Ulysses Grant agreed to Sherman's plan and on November 9 the general began issuing orders in preparation for the movement.

Having sent General George Thomas northward with enough forces to deal with Hood and protect Tennessee, Sherman reorganized his remaining 60,000 troops into two wings, one commanded by General Oliver O. Howard and other under General Henry Slocum. When the advance began on November 15, Slocum would move in a southwesterly direction towards Milledgeville, while Howard's troops would first move southward towards Macon and Griswoldville, before swinging to the west. Orders were issued strictly limiting the number of

wagons and baggage to be brought on the march. The Yankees were to live off the land and the inhabitants, with instructions to “forage liberally on the country during the march.” Soldiers, later notoriously known as “Bummers” were to range out from the army and collect whatever supplies they needed from the local population. Historian E.B. Long quotes Sherman as stating that if the army met resistance from civilians, Union officers should “enforce a devastation more or less relentless.”

Before leaving Atlanta, Sherman ordered the destruction of anything of military value in the city and in nearby towns. On November 11, Federal troops destroyed factories, warehouses, bridges and railroads in Rome, Georgia, and also began the destruction of railroads as well as any structures of military value in and around Atlanta that might benefit the Confederacy, though they spared churches and most civilian dwellings. E.B. Long adds that Sherman “wanted to make sure that Atlanta’s military, manufacturing, and communications facilities could not be immediately activated by the Confederates.”

Sherman’s cavalry under Judson Kilpatrick departed several days earlier, but the main force would leave Atlanta on the morning of November 15. Sherman later recalled the scene when he left the city the next day: “Behind us lay Atlanta, smoldering and in ruins, the black smoke rising high in [the] air, and hanging like a pall over the ruined city.” Ahead of him lay the interior of Georgia, and ultimately Savannah and the sea.