



ROBERT STILES

## A Confederate Soldier Describes the Pressure of Fighting in the Trenches (1903)

The increased range and accuracy of Civil War weapons literally drove men into the ground to escape the rain of bullets and artillery shells that sprayed across a battle-field. Defending soldiers increasingly fought behind earthworks and other defensive works. Robert Stiles was educated in the North, but soon after the war began he headed south with his brothers and Georgia-born father and enlisted as a private in the Confederate Army. Stiles, who served in the Army of Northern Virginia and rose to the rank of major, described the hardship of living and fighting in the trenches at Cold Harbor, which was a foretaste of the experience of both sides during the drawn-out siege of Petersburg, Virginia, which commenced soon thereafter.

One can readily understand, now, the supreme discomfort and even suffering of "the lines." Thousands of men cramped up in a narrow trench, unable to go out, or to get up, or to stretch or to stand without danger to life and limb; unable to lie down, or to sleep, for lack of room and pressure of peril; night alarms, day attacks, hunger, thirst, and the yet more weary day; the first glance over the way, at day dawn, bringing the sharpshooter's bullet singing past your ear or smashing through your skull, a man's life often exacted as the price of a cup of water from the spring.

FROM ROBERT STILES, *Four Years under Marse Robert* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1903), p. 290.



WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN

## War Is Cruelty, and You Cannot Refine It (1864)

Following the capture of Atlanta, Sherman ordered the civilian population to evacuate the city. When the mayor and city council protested his order, Sherman wrote the following reply, discussing the nature of the war. More bluntly than any other commander, Sherman expressed the meaning of total war in the context of the Civil War. When he left the city to begin his famous march to the sea, Sherman burned Atlanta to prevent it from again being used by the Confederacy as a military base.

Headquarters Military Division of the Mississippi,  
in the Field, Atlanta, Georgia,  
September 12, 1864

*James M. Calhoun, Mayor, E. E. Rawson, and  
S. C. Wells, representing City Council of Atlanta.*

Gentlemen:

I have your letter of the 11th, in the nature of a petition to revoke my orders removing all the inhabitants from Atlanta. I have read it carefully, and give full credit to your statements of the distress that will be occasioned, and yet shall not revoke my orders, because they were not designed to meet the humanities of the case, but to prepare for the future struggles in which millions of good people outside of Atlanta have a deep interest. We must have peace, not only at Atlanta, but in all America. To secure this, we must stop the war that now desolates our once happy and favored country. To stop war, we must defeat the rebel armies which are arrayed against the laws and Constitution that all must respect and obey. . . .

You cannot qualify war in the harsher terms than I will. 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. . . . But you cannot have peace and a division of our country. If the United States submits to a division now, it will not stop, but will go on until we reap the fate of Mexico, which is eternal war. The United States does and must assert its authority, wherever it once had power; for, if it relaxes one bit to pressure, it is gone, and I believe that such is the national feeling. This feeling assumes various shapes, but always comes back to that of Union. Once admit the Union, once more acknowledge the authority of the national Government, and, instead of devoting your houses and streets and roads to the dread uses of war, I and this army become at once your protectors and supporters, shielding you from danger, let it come from what quarter it may. . . .

FROM WILLIAM T. SHERMAN, *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman*, vol. 2 (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1875), pp. 125-27.

petuated in pride.

We don't want your negroes, or your horses, or your houses, or your lands, or any thing you have, but we do want and will have a just obedience to the laws of the United States. That we will have, and, if it involves the destruction of your improvements, we cannot help it.

. . . By the original compact of Government, the United States had certain rights in Georgia, which have never been relinquished and never will be; that the South began war by seizing forts, arsenals, mints, custom-houses, etc., etc., long before Mr. Lincoln was installed, and before the South had one jot or tittle of provocation. I myself have seen in Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Mississippi, hundreds and thousands of women and children fleeing from your armies and desperate, hungry and with bleeding feet. In Memphis, Vicksburg, and Mississippi, we fed thousands upon thousands of the families of rebel soldiers left on our hands, and whom we could not see starve. Now that war comes home to you, you feel very different. You deprecate its horrors, but did not feel them when you sent car-loads of soldiers and ammunition, and moulded shells and shot, to carry war into Kentucky and Tennessee, to desolate the homes of hundreds and thousands of good people who only asked to live in peace at their old homes, and under the Government of their inheritance. But these comparisons are idle. I want peace, and believe it can only be reached through union and war, and I will ever conduct war with a view to perfect and early success. . . .

Yours in haste,

W. T. Sherman, Major-General commanding.

## William Tecumseh Sherman Proposes to March to the Sea (1864)

*When Sherman first suggested his unorthodox plan to abandon his communications and supply lines and march his army 300 miles through enemy territory, Grant balked at the idea, believing it too risky. Sherman's men could forage for food, but they would have to take all their military and medical supplies with them; there would be no way to resupply or reinforce his army until it arrived at the coast (the navy was not even certain of Sherman's ultimate destination). But Sherman persisted and Grant finally agreed. In the following dispatch, Sherman explained the political and psychological advantages of his march. When he started on his march, a British military magazine commented that "Sherman has done either one of the most brilliant or one of the most foolish things ever performed by a military leader." Events would justify Sherman's thinking.*

must be broken and his army destroyed. Now, it is a well-settled principle that if we can prevent his succeeding in his threat we defeat him and derive all the moral advantages of a victory. . . .

I have employed the last ten days in running to the rear the sick and wounded and worthless, and all the vast amount of stores accumulated by our army in the advance, aiming to organize this branch of my army into four well-commanded corps, encumbered by only one gun to 1,000 men, and provisions and ammunition which can be loaded up in our mule teams, so that we can pick up and start on the shortest notice. I reckon that by the 10th instant this end will be reached, and by that date I also will have the troops all paid, the Presidential election over and out of our way, and I hope the early storms of November, now prevailing, will also give us the chance of a long period of fine healthy weather for campaigning. Then the question presents itself, What shall be done? On the supposition always that Thomas can hold the line of the Tennessee, and very shortly be able to assume the offensive as against Beauregard, I propose to act in such a manner against the material

Hdqrs. Military Division of the Mississippi,  
In the Field, Kingston, Ga., November 6, 1864.

Lieut. Gen. U.S. Grant,  
Commander-in-Chief, City Point, Va.:

Dear General:

I have heretofore telegraphed and written you pretty fully, but I still have some thoughts in my busy brain that should be confided to you as a key to future developments. The taking of Atlanta broke upon Jeff. Davis so suddenly as to disturb the equilibrium of his usually well-balanced temper, so that at Augusta, Macon, Montgomery, and Columbia, S. C., he let out some of his thoughts which otherwise he would have kept to himself. As he is not only the President of the Southern Confederacy but also its Commander-in-Chief, we are bound to attach more importance to his words than we would to those of a mere civil chief magistrate. The whole burden of his song consisted in the statement that Sherman's communications

resources of the South as utterly to negative Davis' boasted threat and promises of protection. If we can march a well-appointed army right through his territory, it is a demonstration to the world, foreign and domestic, that we have a power which Davis cannot resist. This may not be war, but rather statesmanship, nevertheless it is overwhelming to my mind that there are thousands of people abroad and in the South who will reason thus: If the North can march an army right through the South, it is proof positive that the North can pre-

val in this contest, leaving only open the question of its willingness to use that power.  
Now, Mr. Lincoln's election, which is assured, coupled with the conclusion thus reached, makes a complete, logical whole. Even without a battle, the result operating upon the minds of sensible men would produce fruits more than compensating for the expense, trouble, and risk. . . .  
I am, with respect,  
W. T. Sherman,  
Major-General.



JAMES CONNOLLY

## An Illinois Soldier Marches with Sherman to the Sea and Beyond (1864-1865)

*In 1862 James A. Connolly, a young lawyer in Charleston, Illinois, enlisted in the 123rd Illinois Infantry. Serving in the western theater, he wrote a number of letters to his fiancée, Mary Dunn, and then kept a diary while with Sherman's army on its famous march through Georgia and South Carolina, from which these excerpts are taken. By the end of the war he had attained the rank of lieutenant colonel. He was active in Illinois politics after the war and was elected to Congress.*

Atlanta, November 15, 1864 . . . Our Commissaries have been busily engaged all day in loading rations, and our Quarter Masters in issuing clothing and shoes to the troops. Up to about 3 p.m. this issuing was carried on with something like a show of regularity, but about that time fires began to break out in various portions of the city, and it soon became evident that these fires were but the beginning of a general conflagration which would sweep over the entire city and blot it out of existence; so Quartermasters

FROM Paul M. Angle, ed., *Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1959), pp. 301, 311, 314, 318-19, 322-24, 356, 375, 384, 387.

and Commissaries ceased trying to issue clothing or load rations, they told the soldiers to go in and take what they wanted before it burned up. The soldiers found many barrels of whiskey and of course they drank of it until they were drunk; then new fires began to spring up, all sorts of discordant noises rent the air, drunken soldiers on foot and on horseback raced up and down the streets while the buildings on either side were solid sheets of flame, they gathered in crowds before the finest structures and sang "Rally around the Flag" while the flames enraptured these costly edifices, and shouted and danced and sang again while pillar and roof and dome sank into one common ruin. The night, for miles around was bright as midday; the city of Atlanta was one mass of

*Near Milledgeville, Ga., November 25, 1864 . . .*

Our foragers came into camp tonight pretty well loaded, and I can't imagine where they found so much stuff through this country. I suppose the negroes assisted them. Where can all the rebels be? Here we are riding rough shod over Georgia and nobody dares to fire a shot at us. We burn their houses, barns, cotton and everything else, yet none of the Southern braves show themselves to punish us for our vandalism. . . . Georgia is an excellent state for foraging. We are living finely, and the whole army would have no objection to marching around through the State for the next six months. Indeed, the whole trip thus far has been a holiday excursion, but a very expensive one to the rebels.

*Near Sandersville, Ga., November 26, 1864 . . .*

The rebel papers we get hold of from Augusta also call on all the citizens to turn out and fall timber across the roads—destroy their forage and provisions, and do everything possible to harass us and retard our march. Let them do it if they dare. We'll burn every house, barn, church, and everything else we come to; we'll leave their families homeless and without food; their towns will all be destroyed, and nothing but the most complete desolation will be found in our track. This army will not be trifled with by citizens. If citizens raise their hands against us to retard our march or play the guerrilla against us, neither youth nor age, nor sex will be respected. Everything must be destroyed. This is the feeling that has settled down over the army in its bivouac tonight. We have gone so far now in our triumphal march that we will not be balked. It is a question of life or death with us, and all considerations of mercy and humanity must bow before the inexorable demands of self preservation.

*Effingham County, Ga., 18 miles from Savannah, December 9, 1864 . . .* Slaves are not very plenty[ful] amongst them [the residents], but this I think arises from the fact that slave labor cannot be made profitable on this very poor soil. These people though here were not original Secessionists and are now in favor of a reconstruction of the Union on any terms.

*Savannah, January 19, 1865 . . .* I don't care

flame, and the morrow must find it a mass of ruins. . . . All the pictures and verbal descriptions of hell that I have ever seen never gave me half so vivid an idea of it, as did this flame wrapped city to-night.

*Near Sand Town, Ga., November 19, 1864 . . .*

Our men are foraging on the country with the greatest liberality. Foraging parties start out in the morning; they go where they please, seize wagons, mules, horses, and harness; make the negroes of the plantation hitch up, load the wagons with sweet potatoes, flour, meal, hogs, sheep, chickens, turkeys, barrels of molasses, and in fact everything good to eat, and sometimes considerable that's good to drink. Our men are living as well as they could at home and are in excellent health.

*Near Murder Creek, Ga., November 21, 1864 . . .*

Citizens everywhere look paralyzed and as if stricken dumb as we pass them. Columns of smoke by day, and "pillars of fire" by night, for miles and miles on our right and left indicate to us daily and nightly the route and location of the other columns of our army. Every "Gin House" we pass is burned; every stack of fodder we can't carry along is burned; every barn filled with grain is destroyed; in fact everything that can be of any use to the rebels is either carried off by our foragers or set on fire and burned.

*Milledgeville, Ga., November 23, 1864 . . .* Our

soldiers and even some officers have been plundering the State library today and carrying off law and miscellaneous works in armfuls. It is a downright shame. Public libraries should be sacredly respected by all belligers, and I am sure General Sherman will, some day, regret that he permitted this library to be destroyed and plundered. I could get a thousand dollars worth of valuable law books there if I would just go and take them, but I wouldn't touch them. I should feel ashamed of myself every time I saw one of them in my book case at home. I don't object to stealing horses, mules, niggers and all such *little things*, but I will not engage in plundering and destroying public libraries. Let them alone, to enlarge and increase for the benefit of the loyal generations that are to people this country long after we shall have fought our last battle and gone into our eternal camp.

how soon we get over into South Carolina, for I want to see the long deferred chastisement begin. If we don't purify South Carolina it will be because we can't get a light.

*Fayetteville, N.C., March 12, 1865 . . .* Our entire army is, and has been all the time, in the best possible condition. We have lived just as well as on our march through Georgia. . . . The army burned everything it came near in the State of South Carolina, not under orders, but in spite of orders. The men "had it in" for the State and they took it out in their own way. Our track through the State is a desert waste. Since entering North Carolina the wanton destruction has stopped.

*Near Newse River, N.C., March 21, 1865 . . .* Be-



## The Heavens Were Lit with Flames (1864)

DOLLY LUNT BURGE

*Dolly Lunt left Maine as a young woman and went to Covington, Georgia, to teach school. There she married Thomas Burge, a planter, and became mistress of his plantation. By the time Sherman's army swept through Georgia, she was a widow. The following account from her diary described the arrival of Union troops in November 1864 at her plantation.*

November 19, 1864. Slept in my clothes last night, as I heard that the Yankees went to neighbor Montgomery's on Thursday night at one o'clock, searched his house, drank his wine, and took his money and valuables. As we were not disturbed, I walked after breakfast, with Sada, up to Mr. Joe Perry's, my nearest neighbor, where the Yankees were yesterday. Saw Mrs. Laura [Perry] in the road surrounded by her children. . . . Before we were done talking, up came Joe and Jim Perry

FROM DOLLY LUNT BURGE, *A Woman's Wartime Journal* (New York: The Century Company, 1918), pp. 20-32.

from their hiding-place. Jim was very much excited. Happening to turn and look behind, as we stood there, I saw some blue-coats coming down the hill. . . .

. . . I . . . ran home as fast as I could, with Sada. I could hear them cry, "Halt! Halt!" and their guns went off in quick succession. Oh God, the time of trial has come!

. . . I walked to the gate. There they came filing up.

I hastened back to my frightened servants and told them that they had better hide, and then went back to the gate to claim protection and a guard. But like demons they rush in! My yards are full. To

fore we marched half way through South Carolina I was perfectly sickened by the frightful devastation our army was spreading on every hand. Oh! It was absolutely terrible! Every house except the church and the negro cabin was burned to the ground; women, children and old men turned out into the mud and rain and their houses and furniture first plundered, then burned. I knew it would be so before we entered the state, but I had no idea how frightful the reality would be. This state is filled with deserters from the rebel army; they flock to us every day; the look upon us as their friends. Hundreds of them have gathered up their families and with a little bundle of bedding stowed away in an ox car or mule cart, they toil along after our trains.

soldiers swearing that their Sunday clothes were to get such things as they had. Poor Frank's chest was broken open, his money and tobacco taken. He has always been a money-making and saving boy; not infrequently has his crop brought him five hundred dollars and more. All of his clothes and Rachel's clothes, which dear Lou gave her before her death and which she had packed away, were stolen from her. Ovens, skillets, coffee-mills, of which we had three, coffee-pots—not one have I left. Sisters all gone!

Seeing that the soldiers could not be restrained, the guard ordered me to have their [the slaves'] remaining possessions brought into my house, which I did, and they all, poor things, huddled together in my room, fearing every movement that the house would be burned.

A Captain Webber from Illinois came into my house. Of him I claimed protection from the vandals who were forcing themselves into my room. . . .

He felt for me, and I give him and several others the character of gentlemen. I don't believe they would have molested women and children had they had their own way. . . .

Sherman himself and a greater portion of his army passed my house that day. All day, as the sad moments rolled on, were they passing not only in front of my house, but from behind; they tore down my garden palings, made a road through my back-yard and lot field, driving their stock and riding through, tearing down my fences and desolating my home—wantonly doing it when there was no necessity for it.

Such a day, if I live to the age of Methuselah, may God spare me from ever seeing again!

As night drew its sable curtains around us, the heavens from every point were lit up with flames from burning buildings. Dinnerless and supperless as we were, it was nothing in comparison with the fear of being driven out homeless to the dreary woods. Nothing to eat! I could give my guard no supper, so he left us. I appealed to another, asking him if he had wife, mother, or sister, and how he should feel were they in my situation. A colonel

my smoke-house, my dairy, pantry, kitchen, and cellar, like famished wolves they come, breaking locks and whatever is in their way. The thousand pounds of meat in my smoke-house is gone in a twinkling, my flour, my meat, my lard, butter, eggs, pickles of various kinds—both in vinegar and brine—wine, jars, and jugs are all gone. My eighteen fat turkeys, my hens, chickens, and fowls, my young pigs, are shot down in my yard and hunted as if they were rebels themselves. Utterly powerless I ran out and appealed to the guard.

"I cannot help you, Madam; it is orders."

As I stood there, from my lot I saw driven, first, old Dutch, my dear old buggy horse, who has carried my beloved husband so many miles, and who would so quietly wait at the block for him to mount and dismount, and who at last drew him to his grave; then came old Mary, my brood mare, who for years had been too old and stiff for work, with her three-year-old colt, my two-year-old mule, and her last little baby colt. There they go! There go my mules, my sheep, and, worse than all, my boys [slaves]!

Alas! little did I think while trying to save my house from plunder and fire that they were forcing my boys from home at the point of the bayonet. One, Newton, jumped into bed in his cabin, and declared himself sick. Another crawled under the floor—a lame boy he was,—but they pulled him out, placed him on a horse, and drove him off. Mid, poor Mid! The last I saw of him, a man had him going around the garden, looking, as I thought, for my sheep, as he was my shepherd. Jack came crying to me, the big tears coursing down his cheeks, saying they were making him go. I said:

"Stay in my room."

But a man followed in, cursing him and threatening to shoot him if he did not go; so poor Jack had to yield. James Arnold, in trying to escape from a back window, was captured and marched off. Henry, too, was taken. . . .

My poor boys! My poor boys! What unknown trials are before you! How you have clung to your mistress and assisted her in every way you knew. . . . Their cabins are riddled of every valuable, the

from Vermont left me two men, but they were Dutch [Germans], and I could not understand one word they said.

My Heavenly Father alone saved me from the destructive fire. My carriage-house had in it eight bales of cotton, with my carriage, buggy, and harness. On top of the cotton were some carded cotton rolls, a hundred pounds or more. These were thrown out of the blanket in which they were, and a large twist of the rolls taken and set on fire, and thrown into the boat of my carriage, which was close up to the cotton bales. Thanks to my God,

the cotton only burned over, and then went out. Shall I ever forget the deliverance?

To-night, when the greater part of the army had passed, . . . my room was full, nearly, with the negroes and their bedding. They were afraid to go out. . . . I sat up all night, watching every moment for the flames to burst out from some of my buildings. . . . I could not close my eyes, but kept walking to and fro, watching the fires in the distance and dreading the approaching day, which, I feared, as they had not all passed, would be but a continuation of horrors.