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Published in the Sunday Magazine, 1907.

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Campaigning with Sherman.



(3,900 words)

Ms.

Oliver O. Howard  
Major-General U.S.A.  
(Retired)

Campaigning with Sherman.

After my arrival in Washington with my regiment the first three years organization from Maine, I encamped on Meridien Hill near Columbia College. I was a young colonel and very ambitious to have the best drilled regiment at the front. Senators, which then included Hon. John Sherman, Hon. Henry Wilson and others, representatives, especially those from Maine, and the President and Vice-President, Lincoln & Hamlin, rode out along Fourteenth Street every evening to see the troops which were gathering from the North. None of these neglected to pay me visits. I was quite proud one evening to be introduced to President Lincoln himself, who had been watching my inspection and parade. He very heartily expressed his gratification at the progress we had made in fitting our men for real service. But those who then took special notice of my doings, were army officers. General Irvin McDowell, at that time next to General Winfield Scott, was the most prominent. One evening I received a note from him, asking me to select three other regiments besides my own to constitute a brigade. This I did the next day and reported that my brigade would consist of the Third, Fourth and Fifth Maine, and the Second Vermont. This brigade was hardly organized, when McDowell instructed me to move over to Alexandria, Va., and report to General Heintzelman whose headquarters were in that badly paved little city. Heintzelman was to be my division commander.



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William Tecumseh Sherman was passing through a similar series of experiences. He had come straight from Alexandria, La. to Washington, and naturally went to the Senator, his brother, for advice. He was the exact opposite to this brother in most of his characteristics. His brother was quiet in manner and always reticent, while he, usually called Tecumseh, was outspoken and exceedingly impulsive. John was a decided Western Republican, abreast of Lincoln, but not ardent in any anti-slavery expressions; while Tecumseh spoke strongly, in burning words, for the Union; but was very conservative touching State rights and the institution of slavery. His attachment to the old Constitution he expressed in various ways and was never going to leave it while a fragment of it remained. He was astonished that the politicians in Washington when he arrived there were so apathetic, still believing as most of them did, that the storm then upon us would soon be over. John Sherman felt sure of it, that the administration by a little carefulness, by a few judicious measures, would be able to weather the heavy clouds and come out bright and strong in the end. Tecumseh pooh,poohed all this. "Secession," he cried in his loud, ~~clear~~ <sup>clear</sup> voice, "is already an accomplished fact; your arsenals are taken; your forts are in the hands of the Secessionists and nothing but active war of the most vigorous kind will put down the opposition." He was especially indignant that Mr. Lincoln should call out 75,000 men for only three months. It was in this mood that he exclaimed to his brother John and his near friends: "Do you expect to put down this rebellion with a squirt-gun"? John and Tecumseh together went to see the President, to whom Tecumseh expressed himself without reserve. He knew the Southern leaders. He



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knew what they were planning and he knew how intensely earnest and resolved they were. He blurted <sup>out</sup> his opinions ~~out~~ roughly without picking his words.

While Mr. Lincoln carefully listened to these young men he found Tecumseh too fiery for his use at that time. He told him so, and so turning away, Sherman left the White House vexed and angry

At once the young man went away to St. Louis and plunged into other business not connected with the army, bitter enough in his feelings and in his talk. He was offered the chief clerkship of the War Department. This he abruptly declined. "Give me something consonant with my age, my experience and my rank in the army". His West Point mate George H. Thomas was already a colonel in the second cavalry, and he did not think it right to accept <sup>a</sup> position of less prominence than his.

The Secession movement, like a great flood kept gaining in volume and in force. New regiments were raised by us and new levees were soon called. Sherman was at last offered and accepted the Colonelcy of one of these new regiments in the regular army, namely, The 13th Infantry. He threw up his business, hastened to Washington, received his coveted commission and was sure that he would be sent back to Missouri to fill up the ranks of his new organization; but "No", said General Scott, "I want you here! At present I will make you an inspector on my staff and send you out to look after different portions of my scattered forces". Not a little chagrined and quite disappointed, William Tecumseh Sherman took up with some reluctance the roll of an inspector, and became active aide-de-campe to Gen. Winfield Scott, the man he venerated more than any other in the army. This was the 10th of June, very near the time I was marching my brigade into Virginia. His brother John



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On Lincoln's assembling Congress, ~~the~~ two brothers returned together to Washington, John went to the Senate, while Tecumseh was directed, as I was, to choose his ~~regiments~~ to form a brigade in Tyler's division. He began this work the 20th of June and was soon on the Virginia side of the Potomac with his regiments encamped in order not far from mine. These regiments were fresh enough but they found their master and leader in this outspoken, impulsive, headstrong



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When my brigade passed through Alexandria the veteran soldier and old army commander, General Heintzelman, stood at a street corner within plain sight of the ancient church where Washington was said to have worshipped, a little past the now famous Marshall House where Col. Elsworth had been assassinated. Heintzelman and his staff stood there as I marched along; I saluted him with my sword, but I left my marching regiments at a right-shouldered shift. The General called me back and in his sharp, nasal voice reprimanded me severely for not going past him at a shouldered arms. He said, "And you, a West Point man, in this manner neglect to pay proper respect to your division commander?" I tried to apologize, but he would not accept apology or explanation. My fault a little later would not have been a fault at all, for customs of service changed. The old idea was that a stinging rebuke was wholesome. One thing is sure, such a rebuke makes a deep impression and cannot easily be forgotten. It does not, however, win the heart! Sherman in marching over his brigade was not so reviewed by Heintzelman or Tyler in Alexandria. *Sherman would have resented it.* His men went more directly from the long bridge to the vicinity of Fort Cochran, constructed on the right hand, north of the Theological Seminary. I know that Sherman and I were equally diligent after we had gotten into place in preparing our commands as well as we could for the coming conflict.

There were three brigades in Heintzelman's division, those of Wm. B. Franklin, Orlando B. Wilcox and mine. Mine was in the rear on the march to the front. The evening of the 20th of July,



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1861, found us within about two miles of the hamlet of Centreville, Va. It had been a weary day for men unused to the harness; the weather was hot; the roads were fairly good; but in that part of Virginia there were many small streams of water running across the roads over which we were advancing. Each stream had small bridges consisting of one or two logs, hewn smooth on the upper face, the bridges being always on one side or the other of the roadway. Every enlisted man wanted to walk over the little bridge. If permitted, this operation would elongate the column several miles. By great diligence on the part of my staff and line officers, I managed to have the <sup>men</sup> tramp through the small streams and to keep ~~the men~~ <sup>them</sup> pretty well closed up. Still I was two hours later than I ought to have been in coming into <sup>camp</sup> camp. At last the ground was chosen, and the men were comfortably bivouaced for the night. Great excitement had been running all along down the different columns. It was marvelous how the news was propelled from brigade to brigade; from regiment to regiment; in fact from man to man; we heard firing for the first time when Fairfax Court House was ahead. We heard the noise of skirmishing and some cannon shots as we approached the heights east of Centreville. Rumors came to us of what Tyler had <sup>and Sherman</sup> done when ~~he~~ <sup>the column</sup> turned off to the left and approached Bull Run. <sup>was the</sup> The <sup>most</sup> work of Richardson's brigade; ~~it~~ it ran into the enemy with great boldness and then ran back.

Here Sherman, now in his element, hurrying forward, gave strong support with his leading regiment, and had a few mwn killed. It was only a skirmish, but it produced a profound effect upon the whle of Tyler's division. Tyler was only to "feel the enemy"-, to make a reconnaissance--not to bring on a battle. How could Tyler



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do all that, with the fighting Richardson ahead and the rash and headstrong Sherman so near?

After my bivouac was arranged and my brigade had become a little rested there was still time for the evening parade. That Saturday night (July 20th, 1861,) I formed four parallel lines on a steep slope, one regiment behind another. As soon as the Chaplain's prayer was over, as Colonel commanding, I addressed the soldiers. Even up to this day old soldiers of that brigade recall to me the talk of that evening. I told them during the slowly fading twilight that we were very soon going into battle together, and I pointed out as well as I could what our General and the country expected of us. The parade was hardly over when I received a note from McDowell to hasten to his camp at Centreville and meet our division leaders and their brigade commanders. Hunter had two; Heintzelman three, and Tyler three. It was at this famous interview that I first saw to recognize him, *concerning whom I had heard so much* W. T. Sherman. McDowell took us for instruction in three installments. He spread his charts on the ground and lighted up the face of them as well as he could with short candles, greasy enough and flickering in the wind. He pointed out with a short stick the position of the enemy, and of the routes of march of the three divisions I have named. Dixon Miles, who had the reserves, and his commanders were at that time kept back as far as Fairfax Court-House, so I did not see them. I took a good look at each one of the others. Schenck, Burnside and Franklin impressed me more than any of the rest. For some reason Sherman was very sombre and said but few words that night. Our acquaintance, however, had begun; I had already taken in some of the rougher points



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of the man, but had not yet learned to value him as the ablest one of all those who carefully scrutinized McDowell's charts and plans of operation for the ~~next~~ day's conflict. It was dark, and McDowell's camp lights were dim. Still I observed that Sherman, dressed in a soldier's overcoat with shortish skirts, was tall and straight and of rather slender build, and that he moved about quickly. None of us remained long that night at Centerville. We returned to our bivouacs to prepare as well as we could for the eventful tomorrow. There wasn't much sleep for we began to march at 2.30 A. M.

That famous battle of Bull Run, which ended in our shameful discomfiture, had one good effect. It taught especially the division and brigade commanders some very wholesome lessons, and one was to be careful <sup>before battle</sup> to let their men have sufficient rest and sleep. My four regiments were held back at the blacksmith's shop till the afternoon, and were then hurried over the long march by the way of Sudly's Ford, where Heintzleman's Division had followed Hunter's early in the morning. More than half of my men had fallen by the way from sheer exhaustion. It was after three before I gained the hill, where a small remainder of Rickitt's battery was found - the battery that I was to support. It was there where Sherman's men had fought the hardest. We saw only the signs of the struggle - carriages broken, horses killed or wounded, and men dead or disabled. The Confederates held the edge of a wood in front and Kirby Smith with his Confederate flankers was closing upon our right, when, after forming in line, firing rapidly, and making a bold effort to advance, I was compelled to retire my brigade to a sheltered spot in order to re-form. But, in going back through a grove, the officers lost all control of their men, and we soon mingled, whether we



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would or not, in the retreating panic-stricken throng. Sherman's story of how his brigade participated gives some side-lights bearing upon himself which I like to notice. Sherman was listening and watching by that Bull Run "Stonebridge" (previously destroyed) on the pike. He got a glimpse about ten o'clock <sup>of</sup> Confederates rapidly moving off to the right. Just to their rear were more - quite a force of them. He made Ayer's Battery open fire upon them, but the smoothbore guns could not reach that far. Waiting like a restless horse at last he was permitted to go over Bull Run. He was ready. He had long since caught sight of a Confederate horseman crossing the deep, ugly Run. He quickly took his brigade to that point and his men waded that stream without disaster. He led them on and up the right bank until he stuck Hunter's advance. There were no regiments on the field that fought more bravely or more persistently than his four. They first defended Rickitt's battery, already in a bad way when they arrived. Again and again you behold the brave and active Sherman here. He communicates with McDowell; he places his regiments one after another in the best chosen places. He rallies them when they give way and remains with them while the bullets of concealed foes from the thickets in his front are cutting them to pieces and the air is hot with bursting shells. Hunter's and Heintzleman's Divisions had gradually faded away, not so much from the force of the opposition as for the want of coherence in themselves. Sherman's was the last, excepting my own brigade, to break up. Mine, as we have seen, had come on the field a little later. Could Sherman's brigade and my own have been united just there where Rickitt's battery perished, the results would have been different. Many and many were the battles we lost in the war from the want of



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simultaneous action on the part of our different organizations. I will not attempt to detail fully the retreat, mostly a disorderly rout. Sherman appeared the next day at noon with the majority of his men at the old camp at Fort Goehman; he had lost several officers, among them two regimental commanders and many men in the battle. These most panic-stricken never halted until they arrived at the camp from which they had marched out so bright and happy a few days before. Sherman found not only his men, but hosts of others, crossing the bridges into Washington. He placed strong guards at the long bridge and at the aqueduct in Georgetown to prevent such desertions, and very soon had his command under better discipline and drill than any other officer. So much so was this the case that the President heard of Col. W. T. Sherman's tremendous energy and success. One regiment claimed the right to be mustered out because it had served the three months from the date of its first coming into a camp. The government decided, however, that the regiment's time was not out until three months from its formal muster into the service of the United States. One of the officers in anger disputed this decision, and meeting Colonel Sherman, declared his intention of going straight home. He told Sherman that his business was suffering and that it was his right and his duty to return to New York. Sherman repeated the government's decision in the premises. The officer defied him. Sherman then told him that if he persisted he would have him shot as he would a dog. Sherman's fury when angry I saw once or twice. The officer in terror yielded to this relentless injunction and went back to camp. It was a little later that Mr. Lincoln and several friends came over to the Virginia side in a carriage and went from regiment



to regiment of Sherman's brigade. The Colonel was riding with him from camp to camp. President Lincoln was asked to say a few words to each regiment as he passed. He did so, making four different efforts. He spoke kindly and congratulated the men upon their fine appearance and on their good conduct in the late campaign and battle. They were about to cheer him; Lincoln cautioned them not to do so. Col. Sherman says: "Cheering is not military". Lincoln intimated that if any of them had any grievances that he would be very glad to hear them and would act as far as he could for their relief. Upon this that same mutinous officer called after his carriage just as it was starting back from the camp. The officer cried: "Mr. Lincoln, Colonel Sherman said that if I do not do so and so he will have me shot like a dog." Mr. Lincoln, leaning from the side of the carriage, when the officer had come near, said (in a sort of stage whisper) "I know Colonel Sherman well, and I think he would do it." General Sherman in his Memoirs gives this story himself, a little more in detail. That was the time when Mr. Lincoln humorously settled the question of the term of service and sustained Sherman's discipline.

Sherman and Robert Anderson of Sumter fame, were among the first to become Brigadier Generals of Volunteers. Sherman's commission was dated August 10th 1861.

There was on the part of Mr. Lincoln some hesitation in promoting Colonel George H. Thomas. Anderson, to command what eventually became the Army of the Cumberland, earnestly requested for his division commanders, Sherman and Thomas. Anderson and Sherman went together to the White House and interviewed the President about Thomas. Rumors came to Mr. Lincoln's ears that Thomas had at one time sought a Southern Military School and had sympathized with



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with Jeff Davis, when he was given a Major's commission in the Second Cavalry along with Joseph E. Johnston and Robert E. Lee. Mr. Lincoln frankly told this to Anderson and Sherman. Robert Anderson himself a southern man cried out with vehemence: "Why Mr. Lincoln, Thomas is loyal; I will vouch for his loyalty with my life!" Sherman was equally sympathetic. "Old Tom disloyal to the Government, absurd! absurd! He never drew a disloyal breath since he was born."

Anderson's petition was granted so that he had Thomas and Sherman to sustain him in his onerous work gathering volunteers from all over the west and shaping them into an army to watch along the Ohio River and be ready to meet the Secession forces when they came, or to prevent the swarming of our foes of Kentucky from Covington to Paducah--from Louisville to Nashville. It was a great and difficult task that General Anderson undertook and it was not long before he was broken down and too ill to bear the burden of such anxious and unremitting labor. He then (Oct. 8th, 1861) transferred the command of that important department to Sherman.

Sherman, like every man who is a genius, had corresponding to the most prominent features of his mind abeyances where his abilities were not noticeable. One of these was a singular dislike to newspaper correspondents. Grant would simply shut his lips and be silent; but Sherman would get impatient and often deal out to them vehement invectives. Sometimes his flashes of anger would reach out to bother his innocent staff or other friends.

He had not been long in command at Louisville, Ky. in the fall of 1861, trying while looking southward to cover his wide front with not to exceed 20,000 men, when he was visited by the Hon. Simon Cameron, who was accompanied by members of his War



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office ( for he was still Mr. Lincoln's Secretary of War) and followed by a reasonable number of newspaper correspondents; some of the latter afterwards became editors and historians. Mr. Cameron visited the General at his Louisville office; where he endeavored to explain to the Honorable Secretary the situation, - the uncertain condition of Kentucky as to loyalty, - the sure approach of a Confederate army larger than his own, - the want of drill and discipline of his whole present force, and the terrible consequences soon to come if that part of our strategic field was longer neglected.

The last interview between the Secretary and Sherman occurred at the famous Galt-house in one of the larger rooms of that hospitable hotel. Mr. Cameron had with him that morning about the ablest newspaper man in the country. Several army officers were also there. At first all were seated near a table, with large topographical charts upon them. Mr. Cameron asked very properly, innocent of any intended offense: "General Sherman, as you complain of having too few men to meet and defeat the enemy, how many men do you estimate as necessary ?" Sherman rose and began to walk the floor, with his head bent forward as was his custom when thinking deeply.

"Why, man alive, how can you ask me such a question ? We must have 50,000 now. And we'll need 200,000 men to clear this part of the general field of operations and break through the enemy's line of defense."

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of the venerable statesman . "Look here! Two southern armies will be upon us in a few days. Albert Sidney Johnston's from Nashville and Zollicoffer's from Cumberland Gap. With our present force it would be sheer madness to attempt to cross Green River; and yet hesitation would be as fatal!

Cameron did not see things as Sherman did. Some men never can see things at a distance, but do get some glimpses of coming events; Sherman's mind, now as ever, moved in lightning flashes. He saw what was near and what was far.

"War," he said, "is upon you and you have scarcely 20,000 men to meet at least 60,000. The country will go to the dogs. Better put some other man in my place."

Then it was that all the people around him began to say "Sherman, poor fellow, is crazy."

The military correspondent wrote a full account of all this to the Cincinnati Commercial. An editorial proclaimed Sherman's insanity. It is such a settler of things that I quote a few words.

"The painful intelligence reaches us in such form that we are not at liberty to discredit it, that General W. T. Sherman late Commander of the Department of the Cumberland is insane."-- He has, of course, been relieved altogether from command. The harsh criticisms which have been lavished upon this gentleman, provoked by his strange conduct, will now give way to feelings of the deepest sympathy for him in his great calamity." And yet General Sherman at that time was more thoroughly sane than the Secretary of War, his critics, whether politicians or army officers.

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