

Renewed Vigor:  
How the Confederate retaliatory burning of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania  
Sanctioned the Unleashing of Sherman's Destructive  
March through the South

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*War is a game at which the two contending parties can play and any retaliatory or cruel policy inaugurated by the one is invariably followed by a similar policy by the other. It need not seem strange then, that the first opportunity the Confederates had of retaliating upon their enemies, they improved<sup>1</sup>*

*Jacob Hoke, resident of Chambersburg*

The burning of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania on July 30, 1864 by Confederate forces was a unique incident of the American Civil War. It was the first time the South had applied the torch in retaliation for similar offenses delegated by the Federal army. Four months later, Union General William T. Sherman captured Savannah, Georgia and promptly notified Washington of his accomplishment of reaching the coast.<sup>2</sup> He just completed his infamous March to the sea and paused in the Georgia city to compile the records of the venture. Statistical analysis reported that his army of 62,000 had seized five thousand horses, thirteen thousand head of cattle, destroyed cotton gins and mills without number, and done a total of one hundred million dollars damage to the state's economy.<sup>3</sup> Sherman's march through Georgia and the Carolinas was indeed ruthless and destructive. His raiders brought terror. The advancing columns took chickens, cattle, corn, foraged the country side, and burned almost every essential building that contributed to the replenishment of southern troops. Horror struck a Confederate widow: "It seemed the whole world was coming...men with axes on their shoulders, men with spades, men with guns."<sup>4</sup>

Sherman is credited with the original idea of bringing "total war" to the Southern population. His plundering in Georgia and later campaign in the Carolinas was not solely his

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Hoke, *The Great Invasion of 1863; or, General Lee in Pennsylvania*. (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, reprint 1959), . Further note: Hoke was a merchant in Chambersburg throughout the Civil War.

<sup>2</sup> Lincoln responded to Sherman's telegram of his capture by saying, "Many, many thanks for your Christmas gift-the capture of Savannah." Letter to Sherman, December 26, 1864 in *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and writings 1859-1865*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1989), 665.

<sup>3</sup> Lee Kennett. *Marching through Georgia: The Story of Soldiers and Civilians During Sherman's Campaign* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 309.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 155.

unique idea during the American Civil war. The Confederate government also conceived ideas to contribute to an all out destructive war on northern soil. Even more importantly, the Confederate burning of Chambersburg Pennsylvania in July 1864 contributed to Sherman's decision to march through Georgia and the Carolinas later in the year.

General Sherman's March to the Sea is canonized as a ruthless campaign against helpless and defenseless civilians rather than against the Confederate Army.<sup>5</sup> Yet, widespread destruction of personal property and livestock was common with both Northern and Southern armies throughout war. James McPherson in his article, "From limited war to Total War in America" wrote that several Union commanders (notably Sherman and Philip H. Sheridan) systematized this destruction into a policy. Also, they did not deliberately kill civilians.<sup>6</sup> Destructive policies evolved and grew over the course of the war. However, the spread of Civil War violence and destruction beyond the battlefield is unclear. Mark Coburn in *Terrible Innocence* comments that each side of the conflict proved that the other instigated an all out war and did more of it.<sup>7</sup> Regardless, both sides initially took up arms with expectations of subduing each other.

The first major engagement of the Civil War took place fifty miles south of Washington in mid-summer of 1861. Politicians and citizens of the north believed that the war would conclude in a matter of weeks. Impatience and anxiety intensified with the Northern public in the mood to return to a regular life. The populace generally conceded that Southerners would run at the first trace of gunpowder. On the twenty-first of July, civilian and government officials paraded themselves down to Manassas Junction, Virginia. In a picnic like atmosphere, many expected to witness the confrontation between northern military

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<sup>5</sup> Victor Hansen, "Sherman's War," *American Heritage*, 50, no. 5 (2000): 65.

<sup>6</sup> James McPherson, "From limited war to Total War in America" *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871* (New York: University of Cambridge Press, 1997), 297.

superiority and the Southern hostile rebellion.<sup>8</sup> Later to be termed the First Battle of Bull Run or Battle of Manassas to Southerners, the event shocked many. Undisciplined Union troops were routed, new realities of warfare surfaced, and few slowly began to consider the possible longevity of this conflict.<sup>9</sup> It dawned on Northern and Southern populations that the conflict would last longer than a couple of weeks with the Union struggle to subdue Southern self-determination.

Independence was the primary goal of the Confederate States of America and it arrived without virtually any external opposition. Within the remarkably short period of sixty days, seven states of the deep South seceded, adopted a constitution, elected a provisional congress and president, established an army and navy, and produced a national flag. In their own eyes, Confederates initiated their country two months before the firing on Fort Sumter. Hence, when the war came, they could claim their aim was to defend themselves and to maintain their independence. “We seek no conquest, no aggrandizement, no concession of any kind,” claimed Jefferson Davis. “All we ask is to be let alone.”<sup>10</sup> The desire to be left alone proved futile, for the Southern armies could not idly sit on their territory and repel the invasions from the north. Union intentions were to bring the lost sheep back to the fold and end this insurrection to bring all under the government of a unified United States.

In 1863 and 1864, as Northern armies combined greater success with greater destruction, Southerners demanded reprisal. On June 23, 1863 *The Savannah Republican* said, “Let Yankee cities burn and their fields be laid waste” and noted with satisfaction three days later that a large majority of Southern newspapers shared the *Republican’s* eagerness for

<sup>7</sup> Mark Coborn, *Terrible innocence* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1993), 125.

<sup>8</sup>J. Matthew Gallman, ed., *The Civil War Chronicle* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2000), 90.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>10</sup> Jefferson Davis’ first address to the Provisional Confederate Congress in Montgomery, Alabama, April 29, 1861 quoted in Joseph L. Harsh, *Confederate Tide Rising: Robert E. Lee and the making of Southern Strategy, 1861-62* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent University Press, 1998), 5.

retaliation.<sup>11</sup> In 1862 newly appointed commander of the Confederate Army Robert E. Lee noted the short terms of the initial volunteers in the Union army. He was also aware of the concern of the business community over the enormous expenses being acquired daily, the rabid impatience of many editors and politicians for a hasty advance of their armies, and the Lincoln administration's need for good news to supply its people to counter act waning enthusiasms. The unpredictability of the length of the war led to both sides lashing at each other with threats of ultimate destruction. Both sides of the conflict issued special orders and laws designed to convince the governments that more stringent measures were necessary to subdue the enemy.<sup>12</sup> These increased policies led to a developing mode of warfare that involved all aspects of society. Twentieth-century historians would designate this type of fighting total war.

American Civil war strategies at the onset of the fighting originated from the era of the French Revolution and Napoleon. Primarily responsible for this transformation was Antoine Henri Jomini who served as a staff officer in Napoleon's armies during the Empire. The revolutionary tradition witnessed by Jomini was that of the direct strategic approach, with the ultimate concentration of troops participating in a frontal assault. Many of Jomini's principles were taught to West Point cadets who fought on both sides of the conflict.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, keeping warfare away from non-combatants was the West Point ideal of a regular army.<sup>14</sup> The arrival of the rifled musket with its devastating range gave an entrenched

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<sup>11</sup> *Savannah Republican*, June 23, 1863, quoted in Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York: Random House, 1991), 37.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Congress passed the Seizure Act in July 1862, which provided for the seizure or condemnation of personal property belonging to persons engaged in rebellion. In response, the Confederate government issued General Orders Number 54 on August 1 adopting similar measures.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Hagerman. *The American Civil War and the Origins of modern warfare: Ideas, Organization, and Field Command* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1988), 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> Royster, 95.

position the enormous ability to pick off advancing troops before they had a chance to close in to fire on the defensive position. Both armies in the war made assaults on positions that resulted in extreme casualties due to their belief that advancing in close ordered lines in mass towards the enemy would break the lines.

An excellent example of 'old' principles being applied with new military weaponry is General Robert E. Lee's decision to override a division commander's advice and assault defensive positions on Malvern Hill, just outside Richmond in July 1862. All approaches were protected by Union artillery and guarded by swarms of infantry securely sheltered by fences, ditches, and ravines. Union General Fitz John Porter later recalled that, "regiment after regiment, and brigade after brigade [of Confederates] rushed at our batteries, but the artillery...mowed them down with shrapnel, grape, and canister; while our infantry...scattered the remnants of their columns."<sup>15</sup> Porter sensed the uselessness of this institutionalized approach of fighting. Fourteen Confederate brigades tried unsuccessfully to penetrate the Union lines before the carnage ended. Confederate General Daniel Hill, who participated in the assault said afterward, "it was not war-it was murder."<sup>16</sup> At this early phase of the war, the traditional methods of assaulting fortified positions would continue to result in drastic casualties throughout the entire war. By attrition, both sides would find other retaliatory methods of destruction to achieve their war goals.

Total war was not a concept known to Civil War participants though the term was coined only in 1921 by Italian Giulio Douhet following World War I. As an advocate of air power, Douhet envisioned how much better it would be to hurdle over stalemated trenches and

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<sup>15</sup> John Fitz Porter, "The Battle of Malvern Hill," in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, ed. Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel (New York: The Century Co., 1888), II, 417.

<sup>16</sup>Daniel H. Hill, "McClellan's Change of Base and Malvern Hill," *ibid.*, 392.

attack the enemy's industries and centers of population inaccessible from their armies.<sup>17</sup> Not until 1948 was the term first applied to the Civil War by John B. Walters' article, "General William Tecumseh Sherman and Total War," published in the *Journal of Southern History*.<sup>18</sup> However, during this time period, applying the total war concept to the Civil War, in particular Sherman's case, is exaggerated. "The gift of sounding like a twentieth-century man was peculiarly Sherman's," writes Mark Neely in rebuttal.<sup>19</sup> The first application of the idea of total war to the Civil War came not as a Northern idea. The idea lies in the following document, written at the outbreak of war:

They [the United States] have repudiated the foolish conceit that the inhabitants of this confederacy are still citizens of the United States, for they are waging an indiscriminate war upon them all, with a savage ferocity unknown to modern civilization. In this war, rapine is the rule: private residences, in peaceful rural retreats, are bombarded and burnt: Grain corps in the field are consumed by the torch: and when the torch is not convenient, careful labor is bestowed to render complete the destruction of every article of use or ornament remaining in private dwellings, after their inhabitants have fled from the outrages of a brutal soldiery.

Mankind will shudder to hear of the tales of outrages committed on defenseless females by soldiers of the United States now invading our homes: yet these outrages are prompted by inflamed passions and madness of intoxication.<sup>20</sup>

The source of this initiative came from the pen of Confederate president Jefferson Davis. It was a speech he presented to the Confederate Congress on July 20, 1861, a day early before the First Battle of Bull Run unfolded. The narrative sounds as if he were describing Sherman's March through Georgia or Union actions in the Shenandoah. Before leaving the United States senate, he

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<sup>17</sup>Mark E. Neely, Jr., "Was the Civil War a Total War?" in *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 33-34.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>20</sup> Jefferson Davis, speech to Provisional Congress, July 20, 1861, quoted in James D. Richardson, ed., *The Messages and papers of Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy 1861-1865* (New York: Chelsea House, 1966), 120.

and fellow senator Louis T. Wigfall warned that Northern wealth might be destroyed by the burning of Northern cities, while Southern prosperity lay safe in crops produced by “incombustible” land.<sup>21</sup> Davis was not alone in his sentiments. Supporters of harming the Yankees in their homes began to make their case even before Northern armies had moved into the South. Long before Federal soldiers had grown purposeful and efficient in destructive work, Southerners urged the Confederate government to strike decisively at Northerners, who, they argued, had set a precedent for a war of invasion against civilians.<sup>22</sup> The *Memphis Avalanche* suggested in August 1861 that, “the bombardment of a few Northern cities would bring our enemies to their senses.”<sup>23</sup> Even though few Confederate movements into the North would fail, they rested on the original argument that their best hope for independence lay in taking the war to the North.

Eventual Confederate movement into the Border States<sup>24</sup> was intended for liberation not conquest, thus remaining loyal to the Southern policy to defend their homeland. Southern leaders believed rebel presence in northern soil could influence their politics. Most southerners welcomed this policy in 1862. The possibility of having these contested states join the Confederacy may provoke the North to back down. The Confederate House of Representatives passed a resolution 63-15 permitting Lee’s invasion into the North.<sup>25</sup> By

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<sup>21</sup> United States Senate, January 10, 1861, *Congressional Globe*, 36<sup>th</sup> Congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, 310, quoted in Royster, 34.

<sup>22</sup> Royster, 35.

<sup>23</sup> *Memphis Avalanche* reprinted in Frank Moore, ed., *The Rebellion Record: A Diary of American Events* (New York: 1861-1868), Volume II, 75.

<sup>24</sup> The Lincoln administration regarded Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri as Border States. They were critical because of their geographical positions and uncertain loyalty due to their strong ties to both South and North. Slavery existed in all four states, though its importance had diminished in Delaware and Maryland as their prewar economies became increasingly interwoven with the North.

<sup>25</sup> Royster, 37.

virtue of its location, Chambersburg was destined to attract the attention of Confederate forces operating north of the Potomac.

Chambersburg before the civil war was a picturesque town of 6,000 inhabitants located in southern central Pennsylvania. The town was a stop on the Underground Railroad where slaves eventually fled north to their freedom. John Brown even used the location as a base of operations for his raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859.<sup>26</sup> Cavalry general J.E.B. Stuart was ordered to reconnoiter the area in autumn of 1862 and took up residence at Chambersburg on October 10. His primary goal was to destroy a railroad bridge at the rear of Chambersburg and inflict damage upon the enemy and his means of transportation.<sup>27</sup> The town surrendered without resistance, while troops plundered a quartermaster depot. As the earliest Southern incursion into Pennsylvania, it received substantial publicity throughout the Confederacy. It was extensively celebrated as “Stuart’s Chambersburg Raid,” even though Chambersburg was in no sense its objective.<sup>28</sup>

When Lee’s army reached Pennsylvania in 1863, he issued an order forbidding plunder. Lee believed in sparing civilians unnecessary suffering and promised to carry on the war in Pennsylvania forbidding injury to private property and set orders for requisitioning and purchasing supplies. General Order Number 73 was issued while in Chambersburg in 1863:

The commanding general considers that no greater disgrace could befall the army, and through it our whole people, than the perpetration of the barbarous outrages upon the unarmed and defenseless and the wanton destruction of private property, that have marked the course of the enemy in our own country...

It must be remembered that we make war only upon armed men, and that we cannot take vengeance for the wrongs our people have suffered without lowering ourselves in the

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<sup>26</sup> “Civil War in Mercersburg,” <[www.mercersburg.org/warmerc.htm](http://www.mercersburg.org/warmerc.htm)> (9 September 2003).

<sup>27</sup> Robert E. Lee to J.E.B. Stuart, October 9, 1862, “The Rebel Official Reports of the Raid of Stuart’s Cavalry General Lee to the Rebel War Department,” reprinted in *The Valley Spirit*, November 5, 1862, <<http://cti.itc.virginia.edu/~ela/frhome/invaspenn.html>> (19 September 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Everard Smith, “Chambersburg: Anatomy of a Confederate Reprisal.” *American History Review* 96, no. 2 (1991): 440.

eyes of all whose abhorrence has been excited by the atrocities of our enemies, and offending against Him to whom vengeance belongeth.<sup>29</sup>

Although not all his followers agreed with his standards, most Confederate soldiers attempted to live up to their commander's high expectations and their own. James E Green of the 53<sup>rd</sup> North Carolina Infantry Regiment expressed his pleasure of the Pennsylvania countryside: "[T]his is a fine country the fields all covered with the finest Wheat I ever saw."<sup>30</sup> Yet, many of the soldiers were not sorry to see Yankees suffer. Lee's original plan, cut short by the unexpected battle of Gettysburg, entailed the stripping through the eastern Pennsylvania countryside.

During the Gettysburg campaign in July 1863, foraging parties visited Chambersburg, while 700 wounded Confederate soldiers, captured by union cavalry, were brought to the town turning many buildings into makeshift hospitals. During this three-week period, Chambersburg played unwilling host to more than 60,000 Southern soldiers. Prior to the battle of Gettysburg Rachel Cormany kept a diary of Confederate activities within Chambersburg. She notes on several dates that the "Rebs" plundered various merchants to the point where they were almost entirely ruined.<sup>31</sup> Cormany was quite frank in her distaste of the Southern invaders. She was awakened one morning to the yelling and wailing of soldiers while they continued to do, "all the mischief they can," which basically entailed burning warehouses, machine shops and tearing up railroad tracks.<sup>32</sup> Included in the objectives of the

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<sup>29</sup> General Order Number 73, *War of the Rebellion, Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 130 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1880-1901), ser. I, vol. 27, part 3, 943; hereinafter cited as *OR*.

<sup>30</sup> James E. Green, Diary entry June 25, 1863, *James E. Green Papers*, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, as quoted in Smith, 445.

<sup>31</sup> Rachel Cormany, diary entry on June 24, 1863, *The Cormany Diaries: A Northern Family in the Civil War*, James C. Mohr, ed., (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1982), 333.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, diary entry on June 30 & July 2, 1863, 337,338. Note: It is important to note that both sides of the conflict up to this point would burn warehouses, industrial shops, and destroy transportation lines.

invasion were the cities of Harrisburg and Philadelphia.<sup>33</sup> However, severe losses at Gettysburg brought Southern forces back into Virginia. The residents of Chambersburg would have to wait another year before Southern forces returned to Northern soil.

By 1864 Lee believed that the best strategy for the South would be to hold the territory that the North sought to conquer. He chose this strategy to influence the 1864 elections up north. If they could hold on to their territory, the northern voters could realize that the Union could not win.<sup>34</sup> It is not clear whether Lee advocated a destructive retaliatory agenda into northern soil, considering his orders to respect private property. He would never return with his army into the North, but found himself preoccupied with his counterpart, Ulysses S. Grant in Virginia.

In the summer of 1864, Grant's Army of the Potomac was before Petersburg, Virginia and Lee's smaller Confederate Army of Northern Virginia. The political pressure on the Lincoln Administration was growing as the casualty lists lengthened and there was no end to the fighting in sight. Lincoln, less than enthusiastic about the progress of the war, looked to Grant to defeat the Army of Northern Virginia. The general's strategic plan was to work all the Union armies simultaneously to crush the South from all sides. Subsequently, by grinding down the enemy, the Union would win. Grant had tried to overwhelm the opposition and had failed. As long as Lee's army remained in the field, Grant felt he could not bring the war to a close. In addition to his grand strategy, he introduced a new element into the war. Grant now "...ordered his generals to burn and destroy all sources of Confederate supplies in their path of operations...the South's stomach."<sup>35</sup> The soldiers and animals were to eat Confederate food. Sources of production for food and manufactured products were now military targets.

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<sup>33</sup> Maurice Matloff, ed., *American Military History* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1969), 249.

<sup>34</sup> Archer Jones, *Civil War Command and Strategy* (Free Press: New York, 1992), 153-54.

Furthermore, homes, schools and personal property were *not* considered military targets.<sup>36</sup>

The stalemate between the armies led to Union activity into the Southern breadbasket of the Shenandoah Valley region of Virginia.

Grant acted to remove the Valley as a source of subsistence for the Confederates in mid 1864. He ordered unoccupied generals to leave West Virginia and advance into Virginia damaging railroads and communications towards Staunton, Virginia. According to Grant, these movements into the Valley could possibly draw aid away from Lee. It would also prevent Lee from being reinforced by troops, cover the North against another invasion, and help isolate Richmond.<sup>37</sup> Meanwhile, Lee sparingly sent infantry under the command of Lieutenant General Jubal A. Early and launched it into the Shenandoah Valley to distract Grant and take pressure off the Petersburg front. Staunton was second only to Richmond in importance to the Eastern confederacy as a hub for communications and supply for Virginia and its western connections.<sup>38</sup> Grant's orders orchestrated events in the Shenandoah that would lead both sides of the war into a total war mind and eventual burning of Chambersburg.

Guerrilla fighting often accompanied confederate operations in the Shenandoah Valley, a form of resistance many Federals regarded as, "little better than terrorism."<sup>39</sup> Along with carrying out Grant's order to plunder the countryside, Union General Hunter attempted to solve this problem by holding private citizens responsible for partisan acts that occurred in their vicinity. His troops carried out his hard-line policies with profound results. Hunter justified most of the property destruction as punishment for specific attacks on his men. The

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<sup>35</sup> Gary Walker, *Yankee Soldiers in Virginia's Valley: Hunters Raid* (Roanoke, VA, A&W Enterprise, 1989), 6.

<sup>36</sup> Fritz Haselberger, *Confederate Retaliation: McCausland's 1864 Raid* (Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: Beidel Printing House, Inc., 2000), 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, 435.

general soon circulated a letter throughout his section of the Shenandoah Valley accusing guerrillas and “bushwhackers” that they would be treated as regular Confederate soldiers, not as civilians. He asserted that, “These practices are not recognized by the laws of war of any civilized nation,” and promised retaliation on “houses and other property of every secession sympathizer residing within a circuit of five miles from the place of the outrage.” He assured that they would be the blame if guerrilla activity continued.<sup>40</sup> Robert T. Barton, a lawyer of Winchester, Virginia recalled Hunter remaining true to his promise by burning several houses in the small town of Newton in revenge for the death of some of their cavalrymen.<sup>41</sup> General Early’s army soon gathered numerous reports pertaining to Hunter’s policies throughout the Shenandoah region.

Jubal Early recalled the events that led to his decision to burn Chambersburg. After holding back Union forces in the Valley, Early moved on to threaten Washington. During Early’s venture into the Shenandoah, his forces witnessed and heard local civilians complain about Hunter’s activities. In 1884, he reminisced that on his expedition against Washington, he saw evidence of wanton destruction committed by Hunter’s troops under his orders. Wholesale destruction of private property and burning of a number of private houses appeared “without provocation.”<sup>42</sup> “I came to the conclusion it was time to open the eyes of the people of the North to this enormity, and by example in the way of retaliation.”<sup>43</sup> For the first time in the war, Early proposed to deploy a confederate force with specific orders to destroy private

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<sup>40</sup> General David Hunter, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1864, quoted in Jacob Hoke, 598.

<sup>41</sup> Robert T. Barton as quoted in Margareta Barton Colt, ed., *Defend the Valley: A Shenandoah Family in the Civil War* (New York: Random House 1994), 318.

<sup>42</sup> Jubal Early in letter to Jacob Hoke, September 4, 1884, quoted in Hoke, 590.

<sup>43</sup> Jubal Early, *Lieutenant General Jubal Anderson Early, C.S.A.: Narrative of the War Between the States* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., reprint 1989), 401. Note: Early wrote that he did not want to retaliate in Maryland, a border state, because he believed that Maryland would eventually become a member of the Confederacy. See Jubal Early, “Why Chambersburg was burned,” *Valley Spirit*, 31 August 1864, col. 7.

property in the north. Hunter's detrimental policies in the Shenandoah inaugurated a similar retaliatory approach in Early's conscience. Consequently, the stakes were mounting as to who could out do the other in terms of retribution. Early gave orders to Brigadier General John McCausland to carry the taste of Hunter's brand of warfare against civilians to the Cumberland Valley of southern Pennsylvania. This was the infamous Chambersburg Raid, and it reflected the increasing war-weariness and eagerness to embrace noncombatants by both sides.<sup>44</sup> V.V. Slingluff, Esq. a member of the First Maryland Confederate Cavalry and eyewitness in the valley campaign felt justified in the idea of burning a northern town. Along with other Southern soldiers and civilians, they came to the conclusion that, "it was time for us to burn something in the enemy's country."<sup>45</sup>

With Hunter running rampant throughout the Shenandoah, Early had prepared a detailed set of instructions. On July 25, 1864 Early asked for General McCausland to carry out his prescribed objectives. McCausland recalled that when he received his orders he nearly fell out of his saddle. Early ordered him, "to make a retaliatory raid and give the Yankees a taste of their own medicine. The job wasn't pleasant to contemplate."<sup>46</sup> At Chambersburg, he was to levy a ransom of \$100,000 in gold or \$500,000 in green backs (paper money) to pay for the homes and property that Hunter devastated.<sup>47</sup> If the ransom was not paid, McCausland was to burn the town. In Early's words, "to lay the town in ashes."<sup>48</sup> In addition, Early desired that

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<sup>44</sup> B.F. Cooling, *Jubal Early's Raid on Washington 1864* (Baltimore: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company 1989), 215.

<sup>45</sup> V.C. Slingluff, "The Burning of Chambersburg," *Southern Historical Society* (Richmond: Published by the Society, 1903) 37: 160.

<sup>46</sup> McCausland as quoted in Haselberger, 75.

<sup>47</sup> Hunter burned the House of ex-Virginia governor John Letcher; the Virginia Military Institute; a dwelling place of Robert E. Lee's relatives; plundered Washington College (later renamed Washington & Lee College) as well as other private dwellings. Several northern newspapers condemned Hunter's actions.

<sup>48</sup> Jubal Early, *Lieutenant General Jubal Anderson Early, C.S.A.: Narrative of the War Between the States*, 401.

the payment would provide the desired effect, urging the government in the North to adopt a different policy.<sup>49</sup> This contradicts Lee's policy of maintaining Southern territory by not conquering new territory in order to influence voters in the north. Confederate General John Gordon later wrote in his post-war years that the burning of Chambersburg was in direct contravention of General Lee's orders, which were abhorrent to the ideas and maxims with which he instilled his army.<sup>50</sup> Immediately following Chambersburg, McCausland's orders demanded that he lead his forces to ask Cumberland, Maryland for the same amount.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Early made additional ransom requests from Hagerstown, Frederick, Boonsboro, and Middletown. Frederick, which was a smaller town than Chambersburg, responded promptly to Early's proposal. Even some of the inhabitants expressed the regret that he had not made it \$500,000, probably due to Southern sentiment.<sup>52</sup> Fortunately, these towns paid the ransom demands and the collections went to the Confederate Treasury. Chambersburg, who already played host to confederate troopers in the recent past, did not take the threat seriously.

McCausland's troopers reached their destination at dawn, Saturday, July 30, 1864.<sup>53</sup> Eyewitness reports estimated the size of the force at about 2,890 men. Of this number, just under 1,000 would position themselves within the city limits, while the remainder arranged their lines west of town.<sup>54</sup> Local bankers abandoned Chambersburg with their cash assets after

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<sup>49</sup> Jubal Early, *A Memoir of the Last Year of the War for Independence in the Confederate States of America* (Columbia, South Carolina: South Carolina Press, reprint2001), 72.

<sup>50</sup> John B. Gordon, *Reminiscences of the civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), 305.

<sup>51</sup> Haselberger, 77.

<sup>52</sup> Smith, 438.

<sup>53</sup> McCausland insisted upon burning the town in the night, but was objected by another leader. A citizen of Chambersburg overheard the conversation. Which leads to the question of what might have transpired had McCausland not been overruled.

<sup>54</sup> S.J. Niccolls. "About the Rebel Raid," *The Franklin Repository*, Pennsylvania, 31 August 1864, column 4, 2, <[http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vshadow2/newspaper\\_images/fr1864/](http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/vshadow2/newspaper_images/fr1864/)> (13 September 2003).

being forewarned of the approaching raiders. While some citizens urged the cavalrymen to abate their demands, others reacted defiantly unable to believe the Confederates would actually carry out their threat. The town council refused even to meet with the invaders. Following an immediate refusal, McCausland showed the citizens the written orders and a few citizens were willing to pay the ransom, while others were not.<sup>55</sup> After waiting an interval estimated between three to six hours, time ran out and the general put the town to the torch.<sup>56</sup> Benjamin Schneck, An eyewitness to the affair reported that in less than twenty minutes Chambersburg caught fire at a dozen locations.<sup>57</sup> A few soldiers resisted their orders outright or found ways to avoid putting them into effect. Colonel William E. Peters refused to obey and was placed temporarily under arrest. Some troops even helped people carry out items from citizen's houses.<sup>58</sup> Colonel John S Mosby, whose guerrilla bands paraded throughout the Shenandoah against Union forces, wrote later that Peters believed it was bad policy to provoke retaliation and "is entitled to a monument to his memory."<sup>59</sup> In spite of Peters' chivalrous deed, individual episodes of compassion were hastily submerged in the tidal wave of violence that flooded the town. McCausland's men fanned out though the streets, breaking into homes and ordering out the terrified families on ten minutes' notice. Ample time to vacate their

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<sup>55</sup> John McCausland, "The Burning of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania: Ordered by General Early in Retaliation of the Wanton Destruction of the Private Property of Citizens of Virginia," in R.A. Brock, ed., *Southern Historical Society Papers* (Richmond: Published by the society, 1903), vol. 31: 269.

<sup>56</sup> Haselberger, 35.

<sup>57</sup> Benjamin Schneck, *The Burning of Chambersburg* (Philadelphia: Lindsay & Blakiston, 1884), 15.

<sup>58</sup> Benjamin Schneck to Margaretta S. Keller and her husband, August 3, 1864, *Civil War Letters*, n.d., <<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/civwarlett-browse?id=F6084>> (6 October 2003).

<sup>59</sup> John S. Mosby, *Memoirs of Colonel John S. Mosby* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1917), 24.

dwelling places was non-existent.<sup>60</sup> Few victims managed to save much more than the clothing on their backs.

The destruction was carried out in the most efficient and ruthless manner imaginable. The soldiers broke open the doors with axes, rifle butts, and boards. Upon entering, they smashed up furniture and gathered it in the center of the room. They poured a combustible fluid over the heap and ignited it with matches. They also scattered combustibles in the closets and along the stairways before applying the torch. Some citizens paid ransoms to save their homes and businesses. In several instances, the soldiers took money and set fire to those places anyway.<sup>61</sup>

Many of the Confederate units lost all sense of military discipline as the fire spread. Drunken Confederates pillaged freely and robbed citizens of sums large and small. "I never witnessed such a site in all my life," wrote one Southerner to his wife. "Nancy, the poor wimmen and children and also gray beard men was running in every direction with a little bundle of cloths under their arms crying and skreaming."<sup>62</sup> Rebel officers begged resident D.R. Knight to get the women out of town as quickly as possible, as many of the Confederate soldiers were intoxicated.<sup>63</sup> Numerous reports testify to the breakdown of military discipline and to the atmosphere of pandemonium that attended the event. "After the order was given to burn the town of Chambersburg," wrote Brigadier General Bradley T. Johnson, who commanded with McCausland during the raid, "and before drunken soldiers paraded the streets in every possible disguise and paraphernalia...I tried, and was seconded by almost every officer of my command, but in vain, to preserve the discipline of this brigade, but it was impossible; not only the license afforded was too great, but actual example gave them excuse

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<sup>60</sup> Schneck, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Haselberger, 37.

<sup>62</sup> As quoted in Smith, 437.

and justification.”<sup>64</sup> A confederate surgeon by the last name of Richardson, by birth, a Northerner, publicly condemned the work of McCausland. When asked by a citizen who his commanding officer was, he said, “Madam, I am ashamed to say that General McCausland is my commander!”<sup>65</sup> Early, however, claimed full responsibility for executing orders: “For this act, I, alone am responsible...I am perfectly satisfied with my conduct on this occasion, and see no reason to regret it.”<sup>66</sup>

McCausland’s burning of Chambersburg received immediate reprisals from the Union command. During this same time period Early’s main force extended itself closer to Washington forcing Grant to defend the capital city. Grant knew that the Confederates would defend the Shenandoah Valley. It was the principal storehouse that they had and Lee would make a desperate struggle to maintain it. On hearing of Early’s exploits into Maryland and Pennsylvania, Grant commented in his *Memoirs* that, “I determined to put a stop to this.”<sup>67</sup> Grant immediately appointed Cavalry General Phil Sheridan on August 6 to hunt down Early’s army in the Shenandoah Valley region. Specific orders were given that nothing should be left to invite the enemy to return and to take all provisions and forage to use for his forces.<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, Grant wanted to prevent additional incursions in the north and believed Sheridan would be best for the job. Grant instructing him to pursue the enemy to the death.<sup>69</sup> Grant in turn was stepping up the pressure against the rebel forces by gradually allowing his

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<sup>63</sup> Schneck, 25-26.

<sup>64</sup> Report of Brigadier General Bradley T. Johnson to Lieutenant Colonel A.S. Pendleton August 10, 1864, *OR*, Series I, vol. 63, part I, 7-8.

<sup>65</sup> Schneck, 27-28.

<sup>66</sup> Jubal Early, *A Memoir of the Last Year of the War for Independence in the Confederate States of America*, 74.

<sup>67</sup> Ulysses Grant, *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* (New York: The Century Co. 1909) vol. II, 205.

<sup>68</sup> Ulysses Grant to Phil Sheridan August 5, 1864, *OR* Series I volume 53, Part 1, 90.

<sup>69</sup> Horace Porter, *Campaigning with Grant* (New York: The Century Company, 1897), 270.

subordinates to respond in a similar military fashion as was demonstrated at Chambersburg. With Sheridan at the reigns in the Shenandoah and Sherman keenly aware of the events up North from Atlanta, the burning of Chambersburg unleashed the Union war machine to devastate portions of the South. Combatants in the early stages of the war could not foresee these types of retaliatory measures taking place. In a letter written to General Grant, Sherman wrote that he was “glad you have given General Sheridan the command,” and that Sheridan, “will worry Early to death.”<sup>70</sup> Sherman witnessed the evolution of Sheridan as a co-progenitor to total war. Merton Coulter, in his book, *The Confederate States of America 1861-1865*, wrote that the burning of Chambersburg frightened and embittered Grant, which led to his decision to appoint Sheridan to the Shenandoah Valley. Subsequently, he wrecked the region as thoroughly as Sherman was later to do in Georgia.<sup>71</sup> Coulter gives the impression that Sherman’s destructive swath through Georgia was an indirect result of the destruction of Chambersburg.

In wake of the burning of Chambersburg, Joseph Waddell, an Augusta County, Virginia resident wrote in his diary on September 5, 1864 that the, “result of the matter [is] that the North is encouraged to present the war with renewed vigor, and in all probability many months are added to the terrible conflict.”<sup>72</sup> Waddell was ardently aware that the Union forces were in the process of raising the ante against the Southern home front. Ultimately, a new battle cry would reverberate in the South from the mouths of Federal troops.

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<sup>70</sup> Sherman in letter to Grant, August 7, 1864. Brooks D. Simpson and Jean V. Berlin, ed., *Sherman’s Civil War: Selected Correspondence of William T. Sherman, 1860-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 684.

<sup>71</sup> Merlon Coulter, *The Confederate States of America, 1861-1865*. (Louisiana State University Press, 1950), 362.

<sup>72</sup> Joseph Addison Waddell, diary entry, September 5, 1864 *Diary of Joseph Addison Waddell*, Virginia Center for Digital History, University of Virginia, <<http://Jefferson.village.Virginia.edu/vshadow2/>> (2 September 2003).

Sherman denied that he had ever favored wanton destruction of human life in any instance; rather, he had acted throughout his military career to reprimand those who did not obey the law. In the course of most of his major campaigns, Sherman said he preferred to conserve life and generally offered the enemy the opportunity to surrender before he set about his tasks of destruction.<sup>73</sup> Personal retaliation and retribution were not his motivation:

“Sherman was an extremely ethical man,” says Charles Vetter, author of *Sherman: Merchant of Terror, Advocate of Peace*, “one who despised war. Yet, he was a realist and knew there would be times in the history of human affairs that war must be resorted to. War, however, was a means to an end, the end being peace.”<sup>74</sup>

The smoldering effects of Chambersburg soon carried its way to Sherman’s troops in Georgia. J. Scott Moore of the Confederate 14<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, who contributed to the burning of Chambersburg, found his unit caught by surprise by vengeful Union cavalry troops screaming “Remember Chambersburg!” shortly after the town’s destruction.<sup>75</sup> The phrase probably spread as a justifiable means to plunder and devastate Southern regions without necessary provocation. While in Atlanta, one soldier, a sergeant in the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Engineers and Mechanics, entrusted with the duty of destroying anything of use to the Confederates, radiated the passion with which the troops torched the city, although he personally could not bring himself to fire a residence before the eyes of its youthful resident:

Most of the people left their houses without saying a word for they heard the cry of *Chambersburg* and they knew it would be useless to contend with the soldiers. but as I was about to fire one place a little girl about ten years old cam to me and said, Mr soldier you would not burn our house would you. If you do where are we going to live and she looked

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<sup>73</sup> John W. Brinsfield, “Military Ethics of General William T. Sherman: A Reassessment,” *Parameters, Journal of the U.S. Army War College* 12 (1983): 37.

<sup>74</sup> Charles Vetter, *Sherman: Merchant of Terror, Advocate of Peace* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing company, 1992), 20.

<sup>75</sup> J. Scott Moore, “A Southern Account of the Burning of Chambersburg,” *Southern Historical Society Papers* 26 (1903): 321.

into my face with such a pleading look that I could not have the heart to fire the place So I dropped the torch and walked away. but *Chambersburg* is dearly paid for.<sup>76</sup>

What helped prevent a complete tragedy in the burning of Atlanta was General Sherman's previous eviction of nearly all the residents. Regardless, the Confederate actions at Chambersburg helped invigorate Union rationalization and Sherman's order to torch and burn Atlanta.

In an effort to justify his actions the Georgia and the Carolinas, Sherman explained his motivation for his military decisions in a letter to Captian J.H. Lee in 1881:

...the rebels were notoriously more cruel than our men. We could never work up our men to the terrible earnestness of the Southern forces. Their murdering of Union fugitives, burning of Lawrence [Kansas], Chambersburg...were all right in their eyes, and if we burned an old cotton gin or shed it was barbarism. I am tired of such perversion, and will resent it always.<sup>77</sup>

Sherman explained his cause for devastating Georgia. He widened the total war concept to the forefront for all to see. General Henry Hitchcock, one of Sherman's generals agreed with Sherman that it was terrible to consume and destroy the sustenance of thousands of people. More importantly, Hitchcock makes the case that it is distressing to hear the terror and grief of the women and children throughout Georgia: "Personally, they are protected and their dwellings are not destroyed, while their husbands and fathers are, "*bringing like terror and grief into more innocent homes* in our Border States." Hitchcock continues by adding that by driving them into despair might be the only way to mercy in the end.<sup>78</sup> Chambersburg location next to a border state prompted Hitchcock's support of Sherman's exploits through Georgia.

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<sup>76</sup> Allen Campbell (1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Engineers & Mechanics Regiment) to his father, December 21, 1864, *Campbell Family Papers* (Michigan State University), quoted in Joseph T. Glatthaar, *The March to the Sea and Beyond: Sherman's Troops in Savannah and Carolinas Campaigns* (New York: New York University Press, 1985), 139.

<sup>77</sup> Sherman to Captain J.H. Lee of Spotswood, N.J., June 14 1881, in *The Papers of William T. Sherman*, Letterbook 95, USMA Archives Microform Collection, quoted in Brinsfield, *Parameters*, 36.

<sup>78</sup> Henry Hitchcock, *Marching with Sherman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927), 125. Note: Italics are Hitchcock's.

Even prior to his March to the Sea, Sherman submitted to Governor Brown of Georgia an offer to “spare the State, and in our passage across it confine the troops to the main roads and... moreover, pay for all the corn and food we needed.”<sup>79</sup> The Georgia Legislature discarded Sherman’s proposal, called for a levy en masse of all white males aged 16 to 45, released the prisoners from the state penitentiary, and even forced all ministers not actively serving a church or synagogue into the Confederate forces.<sup>80</sup> In light of this response, Sherman told Colonel Joshua Hill, one of his representatives to Governor Brown, “There is nothing left for me to do but to proceed.”<sup>81</sup> Unlike the Chambersburg raid, Sherman had asked permission from the governor prior to his raid. Upon completing his campaign through Georgia, Sherman’s army continued through the Carolina’s.

Columbia, South Carolina was torched to the ground when Sherman’s troops passed through. Wade Hampton, a Confederate cavalry officer opted for terms of surrender. He conversed with his Union counterpart, Judson Kilpatrick and was disdainfully ignoring him. Angry with the Federals, Hampton said, “ I never could bring myself to live again with a people that have waged war as you have done.” Accordingly, Kilpatrick responded by referring to the “allusion to the burning of Chambersburg,” and insisted that the activities of Sherman’s army were a response to such Confederate depredations. Hampton reportedly ignored that comment, threatening retaliation for Federal harshness.<sup>82</sup> Lieutenant Colonel T.M. Rice also witnessed the burning of Columbia and said that Sherman did what he could to

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<sup>79</sup> William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of William T. Sherman* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1984), vol. 2, 138.

<sup>80</sup> Brinsfield, 44.

<sup>81</sup> Lloyd Lewis, *Sherman: Fighting Prophet* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932), 423, quoted in Brinsfield, 44.

<sup>82</sup> George W. Pepper, *Personal recollection of Sherman’s Campaigns in Georgia and the Carolinas* (Zanesville, Ohio: Hugh Dunne, 1866), 409-410.

alleviate the sufferings of the citizens.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, he expressed his distaste for the hypocritical writings of Confederate writers against Sherman's strategies that none of them have ever expressed the slightest disapprobation of the destruction of Chambersburg.<sup>84</sup>

The Confederate burning of Chambersburg set in motion the Union's determination to raise the destructive progress of the American Civil War to new unparalleled heights. Union and Confederate armies gradually learned that they embarked into a new phase of warfare, later to be coined total war by twentieth century historians. Both sides, desperate with the progress of the war gradually took liberties to wreck havoc on each other's country, by demolishing railroads, factories, and the eventual crossing over to involve non-combatants. These retaliatory processes led to greater destructive works. Early's endorsement to destroy Chambersburg in the North proved fatal, for the Union army adapted newer policies. Sherman's men as well as others fighting the Federal cause became alive with new vigor to crush the South. After the war a Confederate officer remarked of Sherman's embarkation through Georgia: "The Federal army generally behaved very well in this State. I don't think there was ever an army in the world that would have behaved better, on a similar expedition, in an enemy country. Our army certainly wouldn't."<sup>85</sup> The war may have lasted longer had Chambersburg not burnt to the ground disabling a Union spark to strike forward. William W. Pritchard, a Union cavalryman who advanced with Sherman in Georgia and into the Carolinas, initially believed that Southerners started the destructive process by their burning of Chambersburg. Pritchard came to the realization that the cycle of reprisals would continue in a dangerous spiral. In the Carolinas, he wrote that, "I am more and more impressed with the

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<sup>83</sup> Lieutenant Colonel T.M. Rice, quoted in Benjamin Dean, *Recollections of the 26<sup>th</sup> Missouri in the War for the Union* (Lamar, Missouri: Southwest Missourian office, 1892), 68, <<http://www.angelfire.com/mo2/26thmo/history/historypageii.htm>> (20 September 2003).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>85</sup> Former Confederate Soldier as quoted in Victor Hansen, *The Soul of Battle* (New York: The Free Press, 1999), 239.

burning business and the cruelty of it. I do not believe in it, and the more I see of it, the more I hate the principle. It is barbarous, cruel and rough and ... [if we lose the war] I shall assign as the reason the wanton destruction of private property and the savageness in which this campaign is conducted.”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> William W. Pritchard, journal entry for February 8, 1865, *William W. Pritchard Journal*, United States Army Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, quoted in Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union military policy toward Southern civilians, 1861-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 201-202.

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