

## General Sherman on the “March to the Sea,” 1865

### Introduction

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In the fall of 1864, Gen. James H. Wilson took command of Gen. William T. Sherman’s cavalry. Sherman and Wilson met and discussed various operations in Sherman’s “March to the Sea” from Atlanta to Savannah, Georgia. Wilson’s instructions were to prevent Confederate Gen. John B. Hood from operating in Tennessee, to sweep through Alabama and Georgia, and to rejoin Sherman in either the Carolinas or Virginia.

Shortly after that meeting, Wilson and his 17,000 cavalry soldiers joined Gen. George H. Thomas’s troops in destroying Hood’s army. This letter, written on January 21, a month after the fall of Savannah on December 21, 1864, shows both Sherman and Wilson ready to begin the second phase of their plan: Sherman would march through the Carolinas and Wilson would take Alabama. The colorful General Sherman uses typically brash language to describe how he “knocked daylight through Georgia.”

### Questions for Discussion

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Read the introduction, view the image and then read the transcript of General Sherman’s letter. Then apply your knowledge of American history to answer the following questions.

Note: Access to a detailed physical / political map of the Southeast region will be helpful in answering Question 2.

1. Supporters of the Union applauded Sherman’s “March to the Sea,” while Southerners were especially horrified by the actions of armies under his command. Identify and explain portions of this letter that would support the Northern and Confederate points of view.
2. On a map, locate the objectives and strategies of the Union forces suggested in Sherman’s letter.
3. Describe the problems Sherman suggested lie ahead for Union forces.

## General Sherman on the "March to the Sea," 1865

## Image

HEADQUARTERS, MILITARY DIVISION OF THE MISSISSIPPI,  
*In the Field: Savannah, Ga 1865*  
 January 21.

Dear Wilson,

I got yours of January 5, and am glad to reciprocate your kind expressions. I remember well our talk at the Camp fire at Gaylesville and think in your case of personal congratulation that in here worked out the culmination of that time. I knocked daylight through Georgia, and in retreating to the sea like a Persian man I gathered up some plunder and washed into this beautiful city, which you & Sherman gave Hood & Forrest a taste of what they have to expect by trying to meddle with our Congress & territory.

William T. Sherman to James H. Wilson, January 21, 1865. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02947), p1.



## General Sherman on the "March to the Sea," 1865

Kiputish did not say well and by Civil's  
 words pretty freely he conspired to  
 brooked Whelan and so he had  
 thought that he had no idea what  
 was going on. It is time for me to  
 be off again for Columbia, but it has  
 been raining hard and the country is all  
 under water, but I will soon be  
 off. Kiputish will have to keep close to  
 our Infantry as Whelan has a superior force  
 but Kiputish did whip him fairly at  
 Myrtle and thinks he can do it  
 again. I want Thomas to make  
 the trip to Columbia ~~to see~~ ~~to see~~ ~~to see~~  
 give him general instructions.

I know that there is plenty of  
 Force in Alabama after you get  
 60 miles south of the Tennessee River  
 all along down the Penobscot and

William T. Sherman to James H. Wilson, January 21, 1865. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02947), p2.

General Sherman on the "March to the Sea," 1865

Black woman her long hair of Corn  
 last fall. also below Calladega on  
 the coast. The proper Route is from  
 Bristol & Esopus to Columbia. then  
 Pincalouse. Idem. and up the  
 coast a Calladega & Reser.

My route north is well inland

signed  
 W. Sherman  
 W. S.

William T. Sherman to James H. Wilson, January 21, 1865. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02947), p3.



## General Sherman on the "March to the Sea," 1865

### Transcript

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William T. Sherman to James H. Wilson, January 21, 1865. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC02947)

Headquarters, Military Division of the Mississippi,

In the Field, Savannah, Ga 1865

January 21,

Dear Wilson,

I got yours of January 5, and am glad to reciprocate your Kind expressions. I remember well our talks at the Camp fire at Gaylesville and think we have Cause of personal Congratulation that we have worked out the calculation of that time. I Knocked daylight through Georgia, and in retreating to s[outh] like a sensible man I gathered up some plunder and walked into this beautiful City, whilst you & Thomas gave Hood & Forest, a taste of what they have to Expect by trying to meddle with in Conquered Territory [2] Kirkpatrick did very well and by Circling round pretty freely he Completely bamboozled Wheeler and so befuddled Hardee that he had no idea what was going on. – It is time for me to be off again for Columbia, but it has been raining hard and the Country is all under water, but I will soon be off. Kirkpatrick will have to keep close to our Infantry as Wheeler has a superior force but Kirkpatrick did whip him fairly at Waynesboro and thinks he can do it [ag]ain. I want Thomas to make the trip to Selma but can only give him general instructions.

I know that there is plenty of Forage in Alabama after you get 60 miles south of the Tennessee River all along down the Tombigbee and [3] Black [Rivers] to arrive in large fields of Corn last fall, Also below Talladega on the Coosa. The proper Route is from Decatur & Eastport to Columbia, then Tuscaloosa, Selma, and up the Coosa or Tallapoosa to [text loss]

[written in another hand]

My route north is well inland

Signed

W. T. Sherman

Maj

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Notes: 1/3<sup>rd</sup> center section of page 3 including signature has been removed, and is noted as text loss in the transcript.