

The Ohio Factor in the Civil War

The Toy Soldier Museum's James H. Hillestad focuses on three generals with Ohio ties and their roles in leading Union forces to victory to end the War Between the States

TEXT AND PHOTOS: JAMES H. HILLESTAD

For four long years, the Civil War was fought all across the South and in parts of the North, with more than 1 million casualties. The conflict holds the dubious distinction of being America's bloodiest war.

Early edges in leadership, fighting spirit and home turf advantages for the Confederacy ebbed away as the war dragged on.

The Union, with its industrial might and larger population, overcame the South's early advantages. Federal forces went on to defeat the South and bring the Civil War to an end.

Contributing to that final outcome in large measure were three illustrious Union generals, all hailing from Ohio. These are their stories.

ULYSSES S. GRANT

It has been said that the life of Ulysses S. Grant is like a Horatio Alger story.

He was born in Point Pleasant, Ohio, in 1822, and baptized Hiram Ulysses Grant. However, he was always referred to as Ulysses by his father, Jesse Grant.

Ulysses grew up on the family farm, where his father tanned hides. As a boy, he hated the stench and gore of the tan-



U.S. map highlighting Ohio's location.

nery so much that in later life his meat had to be blackened.

His father won Ulysses a nomination to the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. For reasons that are not quite clear, when Ohio Democratic Rep. Thomas L. Hamer filled out the successful 16-year-old candidate's nominating paperwork, he mistakenly wrote down "Ulysses Simpson Grant" (Simpson was his mother Hannah's maiden name).

It became his adopted name because officially West Point could not change an appointee's name. Grant soon learned to enjoy having the initials "U.S.," which led to his classmates calling him Uncle Sam.

As a West Point cadet, Grant was held in high regard as a superb horseman. He

was graduated ranking in the middle of his class in 1843.

During the Battle of Monterrey in the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), Grant put his brilliant horsemanship to use by volunteering to run a sniper's gauntlet to deliver an urgent request for ammunition for his hard-pressed brigade. He later wrote:

"I adjusted myself on the side of my horse furthest from the enemy, and with only one foot holding on to the cantle of the saddle and an arm over the neck of the horse exposed,

I started at full run. It was only at street crossings that my horse was under fire, but these I crossed at such a flying rate that generally I was past and under cover of the next block before the enemy fired."

After the war, Grant's heroic action gave way to boredom, with long Army postings in remote locations. He took to drinking and resigned his commission in July 1854, shortly after being promoted to captain.

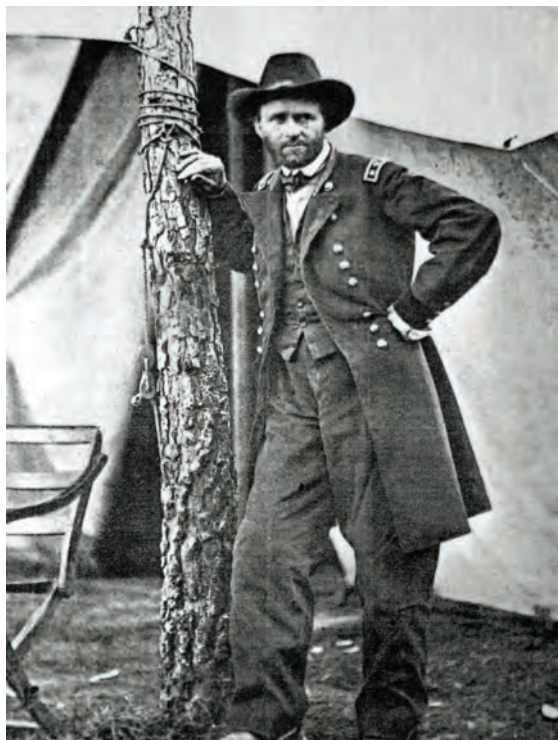
Grant returned to farming. Unable to make a go of it, he gave up agriculture and tried other occupations without success.

After Southern states seceded from the United States and fighting erupted in April 1861, Grant welcomed a "second



OHIO GENERALS ON POSTAGE STAMP

Grant, Sheridan and Sherman appeared together on a 3-cent U.S. postage stamp which caused quite a ruckus when it was issued as part of a 1936-1937 Army series. Sherman was admired in the North for his role in ACW, but was reviled by many in the South for his campaigns of destruction. Curiously, however, when the stamps went on sale, they sold well in South Carolina and Georgia. After all, it provided one way that a Southerner could lick Sherman!



Grant at Cold Harbor, Va., in 1864.



W. Britain figures portray Lincoln and Grant at City Point, Va., in March 1865, during the Battle of Petersburg.

SLAVEHOLDER, ABOLITIONIST

Grant was both a slaveholder and abolitionist. He freed the only slave he owned, William Jones, in 1859. Grant never budged from his own belief that enslaving people was wrong.

calling” — a return to the colors. He was made a colonel of volunteers and was sent to subdue rebels in Missouri.

As a brigadier general, he went on to capture Fort Donelson in Kentucky overlooking the Cumberland River Feb. 16, 1862. This exploit earned him the sobriquet of “Unconditional Surrender” Grant.

At the Battle of Shiloh in April 1862, Union casualties totaled more than 13,000. Grant’s enemies — which included his commanding officer Gen. Henry Halleck — sought to have him removed from command.

Learning this, President Abraham Lincoln adamantly responded, “I can’t spare this man. He fights.”

It was Grant’s refusal to acknowledge the possibility of defeat that kept him going. It was said of him that he was one of those rare and strange men who are fortified by disaster, instead of succumbing to despair.

Aware that the Union could replace

men and equipment while the Confederacy could not, Grant often traded man-for-man in combat knowing that losses would hurt the enemy more than they hurt him. For this, Grant was condemned as a “butcher.”

That he spent many lives is true, but so did the Union generals who had preceded him. The difference was that with the blood he spilled, Grant purchased victory while his predecessors had gained nothing.

Physically, Grant was not an imposing

“I CAN’T SPARE THIS MAN. HE FIGHTS.”

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN

figure. At West Point, he stood 5 feet 8 inches tall and weighed 135 pounds. In fact, he took care not to seem imposing by disdaining bluster, pomp and strong language. Without raising his voice, however, he commanded attention.

Grant went on to orchestrate the capture of Vicksburg, Miss., in July 1863.

Four months later, he broke the Confederate siege of Chattanooga, Tenn.

On March 12, 1864, Lincoln named Grant general-in-chief of the Union armies, replacing Halleck, and promoted him to lieutenant general. No man since George Washington had held that U.S. military rank.

Half a million men were under Grant’s command. He also had two extremely able men to assist him: Gens. William Tecumseh Sherman and Philip Sheridan.

Grant ushered in the final great offensive movement of the war — a war that would last another year.

As Grant continued to hold and batter the Army of Northern Virginia at Petersburg, Va., and as Sherman harrowed the Confederate heartland, Sheridan would lay waste to the lush Shenandoah Valley, the “breadbasket of the Confederacy.”

Sheridan promised Grant that by the time he was through, “If a crow wants to fly down the Shenandoah, he must carry his own provisions with him.”

Grant forced Lee to abandon Peters-

BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

Volumes 1 and 2 of the “Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant” were published by Mark Twain. More than 300,000 sets were sold. Next to the Bible and “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” they became the most visible books in 19th-century American homes.



Union artillery direct their fire on the Confederate entrenchments at Petersburg, Va.

burg, and with it, the Confederate capital of Richmond about 21 miles to the north.

The drama of the war climaxed at Appomattox Court House, Va., April 9, 1865, when Grant, in his mud-spattered uniform, accepted the surrender of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, the immaculately dressed aristocrat from Virginia.

Grant went on to serve two terms as the 18th U.S. president. He left the White House in 1877.

Never an adroit businessman, Grant lived his last years in poverty. Bankrupt, he sat down to write his memoirs, hoping to provide for his family. He finished the manuscript July 16, 1885, just seven days before he died.

The two-volume “Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant” became an American classic — and the author’s final victory.

WILLIAM TECUMSEH SHERMAN

William Tecumseh Sherman was born Feb. 8, 1820, in Lancaster, Ohio. He was orphaned at a young age.

His foster father, U.S. Sen. Thomas Ewing Sr., a prominent member of the

Whig Party from Ohio, secured an appointment to West Point for Sherman. He was graduated in 1840 and was commissioned as a second lieutenant. He served in the Mexican-American War.

As was true of Grant, Sherman became discouraged after the war by the lack of excitement. He resigned his com-

**“WAR IS CRUELTY.
THERE IS NO USE
TRYING TO REFORM
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—W.T. SHERMAN

mission and pursued a career in banking. Then he practiced law and dabbled in real estate. Though not perhaps the most “exciting” of careers, none of these pursuits satisfied him.

On May 14, 1861, Sherman accepted an appointment as colonel of the 13th Infantry. His performance at the Battle of Shiloh, where he was wounded but



Grant's Tomb, located in Riverside Park in New York City, is the final resting place of the 18th president and his wife, Julia.

LAND FOR EX-SLAVES

In 1865, Sherman decreed that 400,000 acres of land in the South would be divided into 40-acre lots and given to former slaves.

refused to leave the field, earned him a promotion to major general of volunteers.

Sherman developed a strong and lasting friendship with Grant. He in turn remained a staunch Sherman supporter despite rumors of his instability.

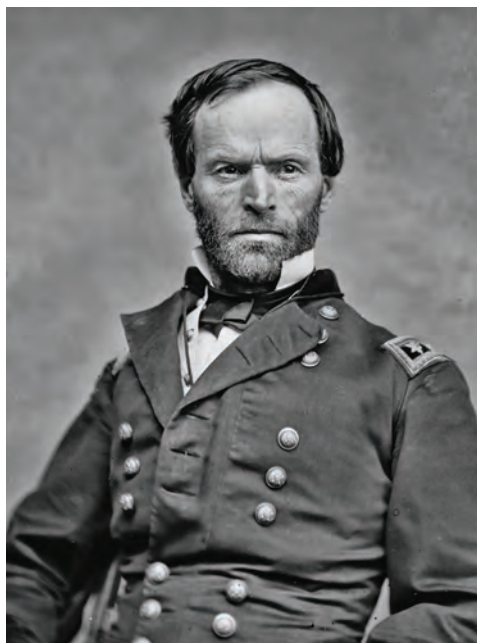
Sherman wrote of their friendship, “Grant stood by me when I was crazy and I stood by him when he was drunk; and now we stand by each other always.”

Their friendship is all the more remarkable in that it transcended strong differences of opinion on abolition. Grant was an abolitionist. Sherman abominated abolition, believing that national integrity (union) and slavery should be kept distinct.

In an age of overfed, corpulent military officers, Sherman stood out as a

DID YOU KNOW?

After the Battle of Gettysburg in 1863, the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia began retreating through Maryland, retracing their steps to the Potomac River. When they crossed it on July 14, they were in what had been, one month earlier, part of the state of Virginia. It was now West Virginia, which had been admitted to the Union June 20. It was the only U.S. state to secede from a Confederate state!



Union Maj. Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman.

gaunt scarecrow of a figure, with unruly flaming red hair, unshaven yet without a full beard, and wild eyes. His manner alternated between restless energy and periods of moody, staring contemplation.

With that image in mind, it is hard to picture Sherman as a man who actually loved dancing and parties, and was

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popular with the ladies. Such was the personal enigma of William Tecumseh Sherman.

Sherman assisted Grant in the Vicksburg campaign and Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans at Chattanooga. Sherman became commander of the war’s Western Theater with the assignment of



Sherman’s “March to the Sea” decimated the South’s railroads as Union troops tore up rails, then heated them over fires to bend them and render them useless.



Sherman vanquishes Atlanta, July 1864. Figure from Thor Johnson of AeroArt.

pursuing and defeating the Confederate Army of Tennessee, led by Gen. Joseph E. Johnston. The Union ultimate objective: to seize Atlanta.

With about 100,000 men, Sherman descended through Georgia, decimating Confederate supply lines and property along the way. Southern troops evacuated Atlanta Sept. 1, 1864.

Sherman evacuated the civilian population and commenced destroying Atlanta’s military resources. He then cut a flaming swath of destruction all the way to Savannah, which surrendered Dec. 21, 1864.

In a telegraph message to President

Lincoln, Sherman said, “I beg to present you as a Christmas gift: the city of Savannah.”

Sherman’s men had left much of Atlanta in smoldering ruins. Shortly before his army left Savannah, fire broke out in that city as well.

Leaving those flames behind, Sherman’s juggernaut rolled into Columbia, capital of South Carolina, where fires razed half that town Feb. 17, 1865. He had promised Grant that he would “make Georgia howl,” and he now punished South Carolina “as she deserves.”

Unlike Grant, who believed wars were won by defeating the enemy army, Sherman embraced the doctrine of waging total war not only against the enemy army, but also against civilians who supported the troops.

After the war, Sherman was put in charge of all army activities west of the Mississippi River — the Indian Wars. When Grant became president in 1869, Sherman was named commanding general of the Army.

In the presidential election of 1884, Sherman rejected the notion of running with the memorable phrase, “I will not accept if nominated and will not serve if elected.”

Sherman died in New York City Feb. 14, 1891.

PHILIP SHERIDAN

In physique, Philip Sheridan was unprepossessing: just 5 feet 5 inches tall and

FATHER’S TRIBUTE TO TECUMSEH

The ACW Union general’s father, Charles R. Sherman, was a successful lawyer who sat on the Ohio Supreme Court. William Tecumseh Sherman claimed that his middle name was chosen because his father had taken a fancy to the famous Shawnee Indian chief.



Mounted on his horse Rienzi, Sheridan leads an attack at the Battle of Five Forks, Va., in April 1865.



Sheridan's cavalry were unrelenting in their pursuit of the retreating Confederates in the last weeks of the war.

weighing barely 115 pounds. He could have been the model for the Fighting Irish leprechaun mascot of the University of Notre Dame.

Lincoln, who would have towered over him, described Sheridan as “a brown, chunky little chap with a long body, short legs, not enough neck to hang him, and such long arms that if his ankles itch, he can scratch them without stooping.”

Sheridan was born March 6, 1831, in Albany, N.Y., and grew up in Somerset, Ohio. He was graduated from West Point in 1853.

At the 1862 Battle of Murfreesboro, Tenn., he saved Rosecrans' army and made the Union victory possible. Sheridan was elevated to major general at age of 32.

Sheridan was exactly the sort of man that Grant wanted. Maj. Gen. George Meade passed along to Grant how Sheridan boasted that he could “thrash hell out of Jeb Stuart any day.”

Grant responded, “Did Sheridan say that? Well, he generally knows what he's talking about.”

Sheridan put words into action when he chased down Stuart May 11, 1864.

FOSTERED EDUCATION, CONSERVATION

Sheridan was credited with creating a postgraduate college for military officers at Fort Leavenworth, Kan. He was also largely responsible for the establishment of what became Yellowstone National Park.



Union cavalry commander Philip Sheridan.

“SHERIDAN HAD ‘NO SUPERIOR AS A GENERAL, EITHER LIVING OR DEAD,’ ACCORDING TO GRANT.”

In 1864, Grant made Sheridan chief of cavalry in command of a separate “Cavalry Corps” of the Army of the Potomac. Until this point in the war, the Union Army had made far less effective use of cavalry than the Confederate Army. Grant wanted to change that. No longer would the cavalry's primary mission be reconnaissance and guarding rear areas, as espoused by Meade, to whom Sheridan had reported. The cavalry would now assume an offensive role — to seek out and destroy the enemy.

On April 1, 1865, Sheridan led the Union charge that won the Battle of Five Forks, Va. Showing courage and dash,

Sheridan leapt over the Confederate defenses on his horse Rienzi and secured the surrender of the battered men in butternut and gray.

Sheridan had “no superior as a general, either living or dead,” according to Grant.

After the ACW, Sheridan was appointed military governor of Texas and Louisiana. He ended his career “pacifying the Plains,” which in essence meant herding Indians into reservations.

Sheridan died of a heart attack in 1888.

CONCLUSION

That, in brief, is the story of three talented and unusual men from Ohio. They ended the war as three musketeers who had done more than any other generals to win the war for the Union.

Note: Figures illustrating this article were produced by W. Britain and The AeroArt St. Petersburg Collection. The dioramas were created by the writer. ■

TEXAS FOR RENT

In 1867, Gen. Philip Sheridan commented, “If I owned hell and Texas, I would rent out Texas and live in hell.”

ABOUT THE WRITER

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