

## **Sherman Marches North**

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Following his capture of Savannah, Georgia, in late December 1864, General William T. Sherman had rested and resupplied his army while preparing for its next movement. While some in the administration supported the idea of transporting Sherman's command to Virginia by sea, the general himself was committed to the idea of extending his March to the Sea into a March Through the Carolinas. After discussions with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, who had journeyed to Savannah, Sherman received permission for an overland movement northward.

By mid-January, the Federal armies were nearly ready to begin their march, but they were delayed for a number of days due to bad weather. In preparation for the campaign, Sherman transferred command of Savannah to the Department of the South. On January 19 he issued orders for the first elements of his command to begin their march northward from Savannah, though his entire 60,000-man force would not begin their movement until February 1. Historian Joseph McCarthy has clearly described Sherman's plan: "His proximate goal was to devastate Confederate resources in his path and punish South Carolina for its leadership in secession; his ultimate goal was to advance through North Carolina into Virginia and direct his forces at the rear of Lee's army, serving as an anvil to Grant's hammer." Sherman hoped to reach Goldsborough, North Carolina by March 15, and then move into Virginia to assist in the destruction of Lee's army. As the Federals advanced into South Carolina they were in a savage mood, hoping to extract vengeance on the state that they believed was responsible for the war.

South Carolinians would pay the price for the eagerness of their political leaders to leave the Union four years earlier.

In other news, on January 23, Confederate President Jefferson Davis signed an act that authorized the appointment of a General-in-Chief of the Confederate Armies. Davis had previously opposed such a measure, believing that it was an attempt by Congress to usurp his authority as commander-in-chief. The obvious candidate for the position was General Robert E. Lee, but Lee appeared less than enthusiastic about the idea. Davis had previously contacted the general about the position, with Lee replying that he would “undertake any service to which you think proper to assign me,” but noting that “with the immediate command of this army I do not think I could accomplish any good.” Nevertheless, following Davis’s signing of the General-in-Chief Act into law, Lee accepted the new position, which became official on February 6. He remained in command of his Army of Northern Virginia defending Richmond and Petersburg and the appointment had virtually no impact on the subsequent course of the war.

Some positive news occurred during the week concerning the thousands of captives, North and South, who languished in prisoner-of-war camps. In the early months of the conflict, a prisoner exchange system known as the Dix-Hill Cartel had been established, which allowed for the exchange of prisoners between the two sides. This system operated until 1864 when it broke down over the issue of the exchange of captured black soldiers, as well as General Ulysses Grant’s belief that the exchange system benefitted the Confederacy more by providing them with badly needed manpower. With the increased number of prisoners held by both sides, conditions

rapidly deteriorated, most notably in camps such as Andersonville. On January 24 the Confederate Congress offered to resume prisoner exchanges and Grant agreed.