

# “Rebels to the Core”: Memphians under William T. Sherman

By John Bordelon

*Tis idle to talk about Union men here. Many want Peace, and fear War & its results but all prefer a Southern Independent Government, and are fighting or working for it.*

Major General William T. Sherman<sup>1</sup>  
Memphis, Tennessee, August 11, 1862

Citizens representing various segments of Memphis society, from a southern judge to daring “lady smugglers,” engaged in unconventional warfare against the occupying Union presence under Major General William Tecumseh Sherman. White Memphians resisted Federal occupation and aided the Confederacy by smuggling goods, harboring spies, manipulating trade, burning cotton, attacking steamers, and expressing ideological opposition through the judicial system. In occupied Memphis, Sherman never confronted a conventional army. Instead, he faced relentless opposition from civilians sympathetic to the Confederacy. Previous scholarship on Memphis during the Civil War treats examines the city’s experience from numerous angles.<sup>2</sup> However, the extent of civilian devotion to the Confederacy and willingness to actively pursue their cause deserves further exploration. Focusing on the actions of pro-Confederate Memphians during one officer’s tenure in the occupied city allows for a more intimate understanding of the character of the city during wartime. Because of a shortage of extant writings of Memphians during the war, the correspondence of W. T. Sherman provides valuable insight into the experience of the city in 1862.

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<sup>1</sup> W. T. Sherman to Salmon P. Chase, August 11, 1862, as published in Brooks D. Simpson and Jean V. Berlin, eds., *Sherman’s Civil War: Selected Correspondence of William T. Sherman, 1860-1865* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 270.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Joseph H. Parks, “Memphis under Military Rule, 1862 to 1865,” *The East Tennessee Historical Society’s Publications*, 14 (1942): 31-58; Parks, “A Confederate Trade Center under Federal Occupation: Memphis, 1862 to 1865,” *Journal of Southern History*, 7 (1941): 289-314; Ernest Walter Hooper, “Memphis, Tennessee: Federal Occupation and Reconstruction, 1862-1870,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina, 1957).

## Early Occupation

In early June, 1862, Memphis found itself virtually defenseless against northern invasion. Upon news of the Confederate evacuation of Corinth, Mississippi, the city's upriver defenses at Island No. 10, New Madrid, Fort Pillow, and Randolph were evacuated in quick succession.<sup>3</sup> On the eve of the Battle of Memphis, the seventy-two companies of Confederate troops raised in Memphis were engaged in battle elsewhere. Nearly all the Confederate infantry within Memphis fled in early June, burning cotton and destroying anything of worth to the Federals on their way out. Only eight Confederate gunboats and a small infantry force remained in the city to face the approaching Union fleet.<sup>4</sup>

On the morning of June 6, several thousand Memphians gathered on the bluffs confidently anticipating a swift Confederate victory. Instead they witnessed the destruction of the city's last line of defense. The Union fleet, descending from the North, possessed a mobility superior to the stationary Confederate boats defending Memphis. Downriver momentum heightened the benefit afforded by innovative Union steel rams. The tiny infantry force on the bluffs never fired a shot as seven of the eight Confederate gunboats were captured, sunk, or burned in just over an hour.<sup>5</sup> Memphis thus surrendered with little resistance to the U. S. naval forces under Colonel G. N. Fitch, who upon taking command of the city, "exhorted to return" the many citizens who had fled and urged merchants to reopen their places of business.<sup>6</sup>

As the Union fleet docked at Memphis, the city's population underwent a dramatic transformation. With river defenses evacuated and no standing Confederate Army present, some Memphians left town even before the battle. Yet far greater numbers left thereafter, as the Federal victory on the river sparked "quite

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<sup>3</sup> J. M. Keating, *History of the City of Memphis and Shelby County, Tennessee* (New York: D. Mason & Co., Publishers, 1888), I: 511.

<sup>4</sup> Parks, "Military Rule," 31-32.

<sup>5</sup> Keating, *History of Memphis*, 511-513.

<sup>6</sup> G. N. Fitch, June 7, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1892), Ser. I, Vol. X, 912 (hereafter cited as *O. R.*); Parks, "Military Rule," 31-32.

a stampede from Memphis.” The regular June 7 train for Grenada, Mississippi, was followed by three additional ones, taking as many as one thousand citizens south. On the heels of the retreating Rebel army fled some of the most ardent supporters of the Confederacy, including a great many of the “best and most useful citizens of Memphis.” Former Memphis politicians were now either soldiers or refugees, and the banking institutions, telegraph operators, postmasters, and many of the city’s best doctors had all evacuated.<sup>7</sup>

Who remained in Memphis? “Its civilians,” stressed the *Memphis Avalanche*, “the men with whom the duties and inclinations of domesticity have rendered business, home, and pursuits of literature or art, paramount to the more boisterous attraction of military distinction—men, *civilian* in taste as in occupation, form now the population of Memphis.”<sup>8</sup> In classifying the population as “civilian,” the *Avalanche* passed no judgment on the sympathies of the remaining residents, stating simply that they avoided military service. Regardless of their motivations for opting out of the army, the civilians’ potential to aid and support the Confederacy remained.<sup>9</sup> To those civilians in the city whose Southern sympathies may have been stronger than good sense, the *Avalanche* offered the following advice: “your head is in the lion’s mouth; get it out gently.”<sup>10</sup>

As Union soldiers settled in to occupy the city, merchants from St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Louisville joined them. For the most part, these seemed to be shrewd speculators anxious to take advantage of the vulnerable economic situation of a city whose principal commercial asset, cotton, went up in flames with the evacuation of

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<sup>7</sup> *Memphis Avalanche*, June 9, 1862.

<sup>8</sup> *Memphis Avalanche*, June 8, 1862.

<sup>9</sup> The *Avalanche* had been an advocate of secession and the Confederacy since December 1861. In writing the June 8 article, “Who Lives in Memphis?” the editor would not have implied that Memphis civilians, or those who did not enlist, were indifferent or hostile to the Southern cause. The editor was himself a civilian and proved to be firmly dedicated to the Confederacy. In late June, the paper was suppressed and its editor fled south to enlist in the Confederate military. Thomas W. Knox, *Camp-fire and Cotton-field: Southern Adventure In Time of War, Life with the Union Armies and Residence on a Louisiana Plantation* (New York: Blelock and Company, 1865), 182-183.

<sup>10</sup> *Memphis Avalanche*, June 9, 1862.

a large portion of its leaders.<sup>11</sup> Over two hundred merchants with goods enough to supply “the world and the rest of mankind for many months” arrived on two boats, the *Glendale* from Cincinnati and the *Commercial* from Louisville. Newspapers and official correspondence from the period indicate a common perception that an “overwhelming number of the shippers” were of Jewish descent.<sup>12</sup> According to the *Chicago Times*, “the Israelites have come down upon the city like locusts. Every boat brings a load of the hook-nosed fraternity, with mysterious boxes under their arms, and honied words on their tongues.”<sup>13</sup> By the end of 1862, conditions in Memphis were so dramatically altered “that she had little resemblance to the city of two years previous.”<sup>14</sup>

Occupying Union commanders elected to expel active Confederate sympathizers from the city. Through these orders and the reactions to them emerged both further demographic changes to the city and testaments to its pro-Southern character. When General Ulysses Simpson Grant<sup>15</sup> arrived in Memphis on June 23, he witnessed “great disloyalty manifested by the citizens of this place” with “secessionists” running the city as they pleased.<sup>16</sup> One in a series of many temporary Union officers who would take command of Memphis in its early stages of occupation, General Grant was in town not more than a week before he acknowledged his struggle with the citizens. Responding to “the constant communication between the so-called Confederate army and their friends and sympathizers in the City of Memphis,” Grant ordered the families of all men connected with the Confederate government or military, as well as those who had fled to the South, to leave the city within five days. The

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<sup>11</sup> *Memphis Avalanche*, June 24, 1862.

<sup>12</sup> *Memphis Daily Appeal*, June 18, 1862; Knox, *Camp-fire*, 193.

<sup>13</sup> *Memphis Daily Appeal*, July 9, 1862.

<sup>14</sup> Judge J. P. Young, *Standard History of Memphis, Tennessee* (Knoxville, Tenn.: H. W. Crew and Co., 1912), 132.

<sup>15</sup> General Grant was in Memphis only a short time. When the Director of the Department of the Mississippi in late July, Major General Henry W. Halleck took over the Department of War in Washington in July, W. T. Sherman was assigned to Memphis and U. S. Grant commanded the Army of the Tennessee from Corinth, Mississippi.

<sup>16</sup> U. S. Grant to H. W. Halleck, June 27, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 41-42; Grant to Halleck, June 24, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 29-30.

general softened this extreme measure the next day by giving citizens the opportunity to sign a parole pledging they would not support the Confederacy.<sup>17</sup> As Brigadier General M. Jeff Thompson of the Confederate Army pleaded to Union authorities, there existed “scarcely a respectable family in that city [Memphis] who have not a father, husband, or brother in our army, or are the widows and orphans of those who have fallen bravely fighting for our cause.”<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the *Bulletin* noted a large number of families leaving town under Grant’s orders.<sup>19</sup>

Brigadier General Alvin P. Hovey succeeded Grant and issued a similar order in an attempt to rid the city of those disloyal to the United States. Hovey held that Grant’s orders were mild rather than brutal and that the great error of Federal commanders had been “overkindness to a vindictive and insulting foe.”<sup>20</sup> His infamous General Order No. 1 declared that all male residents of Memphis between the ages of eighteen to forty-five would be required to take an oath of allegiance to the United States, or leave city limits within six days. Use of seditious language against the United States warranted banishment to Arkansas.<sup>21</sup> The *Union Appeal*<sup>22</sup> reported that 1,350 persons, among them many of the principal property holders of the city, had taken the oath of allegiance, and perhaps 360 had passed through the lines to Dixie.<sup>23</sup> But contemporary and Memphis historian J. M. Keating disagreed, arguing that Hovey’s

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<sup>17</sup> *Memphis Union Appeal*, July 15, 1862.

<sup>18</sup> Alvin P. Hovey to Grant, July 15, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 98-99.

<sup>19</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, July 20, 1862; Knox, *Camp-fire*, 189. After the *Avalanche* was suppressed by Union authorities, it was replaced by the *Bulletin*, a Unionist organ under new editorial management. Evidently, the only Memphian forced from her home was Mrs. Matthew Campbell Gallaway, wife of the founder and editor of the *Memphis Avalanche* and an ardent secessionist who fled south upon occupation. Mrs. Gallaway was exiled on the grounds that she participated in treasonable correspondence with the enemy, *The Memphis Daily Appeal*, July 9, 1862.

<sup>20</sup> Alvin P. Hovey to U. S. Grant, July 15, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 98-99.

<sup>21</sup> *Memphis Union Appeal*, July 18, 1862.

<sup>22</sup> After the *Daily Appeal* fled to Grenada, Mississippi as Memphis surrendered, a new paper, the *Union Appeal*, seized its offices and remaining printing press, even borrowing its name.

<sup>23</sup> *Memphis Union Appeal*, July 24, 1862. The *Union Appeal* reported that the “most fashionable phrase in Memphis,” much to the dismay of the Unionist editors of the paper, was “I hate to take that oath.” Furthermore, the July 22, *Daily Appeal*, noted that few oath takers were prominent citizens; most were strangers or from the “scum of the city.”

order “forced about 1,300 men into the Confederate army and intensified the hate that grew out of the previous military and civil orders for the oppression of the people who remained loyal to the Confederate Government.”<sup>24</sup>

Upon relieving General Hovey of command of the District of Memphis on July 21, 1862, Major General William T. Sherman announced that all orders issued by his predecessors would be enforced, including Order No. 1.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, a group of Memphis physicians petitioned General Sherman to relieve the city of Hovey’s order. Sherman replied that he did not have the authority to modify his predecessor’s orders and declared that “all who have not availed themselves of General Hovey’s authority and who remain in Memphis are supposed to be loyal and true men.” Furthermore, the new commander outlined his determination “to make Memphis a safe place of operations for an army, and all people who are unfriendly should forthwith prepare to depart.”<sup>26</sup>

With their hometown population transformed by an infusion of Northerners and an exodus of Confederates, no friendly military force for miles, and their heads “in the lion’s mouth,” Memphians devoted to the Confederacy were forced to resort to alternative measures to aid the Southern cause. The *Bulletin* nicely summed up the situation General Sherman faced: “Not content with the fact that the Secession fleet has been destroyed, the Secession army defeated and scattered, the control of the Mississippi obtained, and nearly all the important military posts occupied by the National troops, certain men still continue their active and secret efforts against the Government.”<sup>27</sup> The words of 32<sup>nd</sup> Wisconsin Infantryman Frank M. Guernsey paint a more vivid picture of the citizenry. “The inhabitants are Rebels to the core and are only kept down by the military force ... they are bound to be annihilated before they will give up.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Keating, *History of Memphis*, 517-518.

<sup>25</sup> Order No. 56, July 21, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 110-11; Order No. 57, July 21, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 111.

<sup>26</sup> Sherman to Dr. E. S. Plummer and others, July 23, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 114.

<sup>27</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, July 24, 1862.

<sup>28</sup> Frank M. Guernsey to Frances Eugenia Doty, November 4 & 9, 1862, Frank M. Guernsey Civil War Letters, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis Library, Memphis, Tenn.

## Slavery and a Southern Judge

In establishing the Constitution of the United States as the sole vehicle authorized to protect the property rights of Memphians, Union authorities found a compelling avenue through which to encourage loyalty to the Union. In compliance with orders sent down by U. S. Grant, Sherman ordered that the quartermaster take possession of all vacant storehouses, warehouses, and buildings, as well as those which had been “leased out by disloyal owners.” These buildings were to be leased “to reliable and loyal tenants at fair moderate rates.” The collected rent money would be held in trust for the owners, who would be reimbursed only upon proof of loyalty to the United States.<sup>29</sup> In this way, Sherman used the property of citizens as a tool to foster allegiance, holding that “every opportunity should be given to the wavering and disloyal to return to their allegiance, to the Constitution of their birth or adoption.”<sup>30</sup> When Rebel citizens of Raleigh drove out some Unionist families of that town, Sherman responded by compelling some of the richest rebels of that vicinity to buy all the property of the expelled loyal citizens. According to the General, “this they don’t like at all.”<sup>31</sup>

From the beginning of Union occupation, fugitive slaves from neighboring plantations flocked to the city seeking the protection of the Union military. Fugitives lingering in the city were put to work on the construction of Fort Pickering and on other tasks, and legal questions quickly arose over the recovery of these slaves by their masters. After one Memphian appealed to Union authorities, only to be informed he could do nothing to reclaim his runaways, Sherman schooled the slave owner on the repercussions of secession. “The law provided a remedy for you slaveholders in cases like this; but you were dissatisfied and smashed the machine. If you don’t like your work, you had better set it to running again.”<sup>32</sup> Still, the General preferred to leave all

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<sup>29</sup> Order No. 58, July 22, 1862, *O R*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 112-113; Sherman to Fitch, August 7, 1862, *O R*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 156-157.

<sup>30</sup> Sherman to Fitch, August 7, 1862, *O R*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 156-157; Young, *Standard History*, 130.

<sup>31</sup> Sherman to Grant, August 17, 1862, *O R*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 178-179.

<sup>32</sup> Albert Deane Richardson, *The Secret Service, the Field, the Dungeon, and the Escape* (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Company, 1865), 270. The author, Richardson, was a Union army correspondent for *The Tribune*. The “machine” was the Constitution of the United States, while the law was the Fugitive Slave Clause and corresponding laws such as the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which protected the slave property of southerners.

such questions up to the courts, because “it was neither his duty nor pleasure to disturb the relation of master and slave.” Once courts were re-established in the city, they would be able to hear the cases and pass fair judgment, but it was “understood that all masters who are in open hostility to the Constitution of their country will lose their slaves, the title to which only exists by force of that very Constitution they seek to destroy.”<sup>33</sup>

By mid-August, General Sherman’s tactics regarding property seemed to create the desired effect. He found the people of Memphis “much more resigned and less presumptuous than at first. Your [Grant’s] orders about property and mine about niggers make them feel that they can be hurt, and they are about as sensitive about their property as Yankees.”<sup>34</sup> Sherman assumed military control of law enforcement on October 25. According to Sherman, all Memphis slaves were potentially subject to confiscation and emancipation under the Federal Confiscation Act,<sup>35</sup> so he ordered the police forces to treat all slaves as if they were free until the judicial system decided on the matter. His policy allowed slavery only by consent of the laborer and without force of the master. In effect, Sherman suspended Tennessee’s slave code in the city.<sup>36</sup>

Judge John T. Swayne took his stand against Federal policy on slave property when the Criminal Court opened for business in November. Born in Washington, D. C., Swayne, nephew of Justice Noah H. Swayne of the United States Supreme Court, moved with his family to Henry County, Tennessee, as a child. After studying law in Henry, Swayne proceeded to Memphis where he established himself as an honest and successful lawyer. He was elected Judge of the Shelby County Criminal Court a few years prior to the Civil War.<sup>37</sup> From Odd Fellows’ Hall, Judge Swayne delivered a defiant charge to the grand jury, acquainting the body with Tennessee laws relating to and regulating slaves and free persons of color, as well as the conduct

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<sup>33</sup> General Order No. 67, August 8, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 158-159.

<sup>34</sup> Sherman to U. S. Grant, August 17, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 178-179.

<sup>35</sup> The Confiscation Act of 1861, passed on July 17, allowed enemy noncombatants sixty days to retract their Southern allegiance, after which the Union military could confiscate runaway or captured slaves and grant their freedom, Lloyd Lewis, *Sherman: Fighting Prophet* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958), 244-245.

<sup>36</sup> John Vincent Cimprich Jr, *Slavery’s End in Tennessee, 1861-1865* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 41.

of citizens in reference to them.<sup>38</sup> However, no slave case had yet come before the Court. Swayne's preemptive charge sought to secure the rights of slave owners from the outset of judicial proceedings. "The subject is one purely of State policy," noted Judge Swayne. "Slaves, by the common law, were property before the adoption of the Constitution and the formation of the union of States." Espousing the theory of slavery as a positive-good, Swayne asserted that the courts of Tennessee had reaffirmed the relationship of slave to master, placing "a social and domestic as well as a property value" on slaves. Although it possessed the power to confiscate slaves, Swayne argued the Union Army could not destroy slave property through emancipation.<sup>39</sup>

Judge Swayne emphatically espoused traditional states rights arguments central to secession and the Confederacy. He insisted slavery was "a matter of State control and legislation alone, no other government or authority but that of the State, to have power over it." Drawing from the compact theory (and a strict interpretation) of the Constitution, Swayne argued that "the States, in delegating limited powers to the General Government, did not, and did not intend to, clothe its officers or any department with any other than those limited powers." Valid as any other statute and never before questioned by any legal authority in the entire country, the laws of Tennessee regarding slaves had to be diligently enforced. Swayne declared there existed "no power anywhere delegated to change or destroy slave property or to disturb their regulation under the laws of the State, made in pursuance of the State constitution, which, as stated, emanated from the people and was guaranteed and was sanctioned by the Constitution and the Congress, and through the organic forms of the United States."<sup>40</sup>

Realizing the potential implications of a defiant Rebel in the judicial system, Sherman immediately rebuked Swayne's insubordination. He asserted that Judge Swayne had "charged a grand jury under the old law of Tennessee as though there was no war and utterly ignored the laws made by the Congress of the United States

<sup>38</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, October 14, 1862. The court met during the previous month, but because Union soldiers in the building destroyed all semblance of order, Swayne adjourned for the second Monday in November.

<sup>39</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, November 12, 1862; Cimprich, *Slavery's End*, 42.

<sup>40</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, November 12, 1862.

[i.e. the Confiscation Act].” Sherman warned the insubordinate judge that he was not only “bringing a direct conflict between the State and National authority” but “unintentionally drifting your country and people to ruin, misery, and death.” Sherman noted, however, that he personally entertained no hostility to slavery or the laws of Tennessee and wished they never had been disturbed.<sup>41</sup> Judge Swayne’s open and blatant defiance of federal law weakened Sherman’s confidence that the two sides could come to some understanding. Sherman had hoped that both federal and state authority would be mutually respected by the parties to the conflict, “but this event almost convinces me that they are utterly irreconcilable.” Recognizing the direct contradiction between the laws of Tennessee and the United States, General Sherman insisted that the United States Supreme Court was the proper tribunal to handle such “momentous issues.”<sup>42</sup> Any law in conflict with federal law was invalid, “and if any lawyer or judge thinks different, the quicker he gets out of the United States the safer his neck will be.”<sup>43</sup>

Memphis Unionists felt threatened by Judge Swayne’s rebellious charge. They objected on grounds that it introduced an exciting political question to usually dispassionate proceedings, was not prompted by any specific case but as precaution, criticized the President of the United States as Commander-in-Chief during a time of war, and laid down positions that rendered the property of citizens in a state of revolt sacred from federal measures of retaliation or caution.<sup>44</sup> The court’s proceedings

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<sup>41</sup> Sherman wrote to his wife in July, “As to freeing the negroes I don’t think the time is come yet – when Negroes are liberated either they or their masters must perish. They cannot exist together except in their present relation, and to expect negroes to change from Slaves to masters without one of those horrible convulsions which at times Startle the world is absurd.” W. T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing Sherman, July 31, 1862, Sherman Family Papers, University of Notre Dame Archives, University of Notre Dame, <<http://www.archives.nd.edu/findaids/ead/html/SHR.htm>> (Aug. 10, 2005)

<sup>42</sup> Sherman to Hon. Judge Swayne, November 12, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 863-865.

<sup>43</sup> Sherman to B. W. Sharp, November 14, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 865-866.

<sup>44</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, November 13, 1862. Sherman officially responded to Swayne’s charge on November 11 with a statement from the Provost Marshal’s Office. “Any attempt to execute state laws at variance with the orders of the President and the Military Commanders ... will be severely punished.” “The status of the negro is involved in the war now existing, and will, in its progress, be clearly determined. In the mean time the runaway slave must be treated as ‘free,’ and the people are encouraged to give them employment as such.

prompted the president of the Washington Union Club in Memphis to appeal to Sherman for the safety of Unionists in the city. Although Swayne had indeed “let off some secession and states rights nonsense,” the general assured the club’s president that no insult to the United States Government would be tolerated. The criminal tribunals possessed absolutely no political power and had the authority only to punish the crime so rampant in Memphis. If the Court would attempt to rule against a Union man for his opinion or punish him for hiring a fugitive slave, “Judge Swayne and that grand jury would learn a lesson in politics that would last them to their dying day.”<sup>45</sup>

Judge Swayne articulated, from an official government position, the sentiment of those Memphians dedicated to the Confederate cause, but Sherman’s coercion forced the judge to retreat. In his next charge to the grand jury, Swayne asserted that although the slave code remained fully valid, the Court must accept its inability to rule on those laws in conflict with the will of the Federal forces.<sup>46</sup> Although there would be no more attacks on federal supremacy from the courtroom in Memphis, Swayne’s rebellious message had long before taken root among the citizens of the city. While a Memphian of such prominence publicly and officially denounced Federal policy, that same Southern sentiment ran rampant from city streets to wooded creek bottoms.

### **Smugglers and Spies**

The formidable Federal presence in Memphis presented an opportunity for citizens to relay Union military movements and tactics to Confederate armies in North Mississippi. Spy activity quickly became a means for pro-Confederate citizens to contribute to the Southern cause. In July, the Memphis *Union Appeal* entertained not the least doubt that “Memphis is today infested with a gang of prowling and sneaking spies. A class of her population, sympathizing with the rebellion, remains here for no other purpose than to carry on in a sly and stealthy manner, a treasonable

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<sup>45</sup> Sherman to Joseph Tagg, November 17, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 869-870.

<sup>46</sup> Cimprich, *Slavery’s End*, 42.

correspondence with the Confederate authorities.” Not only did Memphians themselves gather intelligence, but they also harbored rebel spies sent in from the South. The Unionist newspaper urged authorities to search everyone entering the city as well as homes of the disloyal, of which many would doubtless prove to be “dens of treason.”<sup>47</sup> General Grant was convinced that “undoubtedly spies and numbers of the Southern Army are constantly finding their way in and out of the city in spite of all vigilance.”<sup>48</sup>

As long as disloyal Memphians remained in the city, correspondence with the Confederacy would continue, including information regarding Federal military movements. Nevertheless, Sherman understood that “if all who are not our friends are expelled from Memphis, but few will be left.”<sup>49</sup> The July 30 *Bulletin* confirmed fears of spy activity, announcing that the Provost Guard had arrested one Lewis Truthop, charged as a Rebel spy. Truthop, a former resident of the city, left early in the war to join a Tennessee regiment in which he was a Lieutenant. Having returned to Memphis a few days prior to the arrest, Truthop was apprehended by military authorities while hiding in his own house with papers and other articles in his possession.<sup>50</sup>

From the earliest days of occupation, smuggling goods to the Confederacy emerged as a formidable problem for Union officers. Federal control of the Mississippi river at Memphis and New Orleans deprived the Confederate armies of necessities from both foreign and Northern ports; hence, “absolute want stalked abroad” in the South.<sup>51</sup> With the large influx of Northern merchants, the Federal authorities issued trade permits to applicants who signed an oath of allegiance to the United States and urged residents of Memphis and the vicinity to come to market and purchase much needed supplies.<sup>52</sup> These liberal trade policies were designed in part to create loyal

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<sup>47</sup> *Memphis Union Appeal*, July 10, 1862.

<sup>48</sup> Grant to Halleck, June 27, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 41-42.

<sup>49</sup> Sherman to Rawlins, July 25, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 121-122.

<sup>50</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, July 30, 1862.

<sup>51</sup> John Hallum, *The Diary of an Old Lawyer or Scenes Behind the Curtain* (Nashville: Southwestern Publishing House, 1895), 306.

<sup>52</sup> *Memphis Avalanche*, June 24, 1862.

sentiment, but the Federals failed to predict the degree to which Memphians would take advantage of their leniency. Residents purchased freely from newly arrived goods and supplies at city markets and headed straight for the out roads to smuggle them to friends and relatives in the Confederate army.<sup>53</sup> Only eleven days after the surrender of Memphis, frustrated military leaders had already “ascertained that there is a scheme on foot to smuggle salt, supplies, clothing, &c., through to the rebel army” but could do nothing to stop it.<sup>54</sup>

Memphis Rebels traveled by land and water and showed no lack of creativity in attempting to supply the Confederacy. Boots, shoes, cloth, clothing, percussion caps, and other similar military essentials passed through Federal lines by stealth to the Rebel army.<sup>55</sup> Twenty barrels of whisky posing as eggs escaped to southward by way of the steamers *Commercial* and *Woodford*.<sup>56</sup> Dead animals within the city needing to be moved to the countryside provided ample opportunity for inventive smugglers. These citizens would cut open these carcasses, stuff them with goods or specie, and sew them shut. Since decaying animals in city streets posed sanitation problems, authorities gladly allowed Memphians to drag them to dumping areas, upon which the treasure would be extracted and conveyed to nearby Rebels.<sup>57</sup>

In an effort to control rebel spy movements and smuggling, General Sherman issued orders regulating movement into and out of the city. Early Federal commanders in Memphis had required citizens to obtain passes to leave the city by taking the oath of allegiance. Sherman abolished these passes on land travel and regulated passage, limiting all travel into or out of the city to only five roads. Hence passage between Memphis and its hinterland was opened regardless of loyalty. Travel could only take place during daylight hours, and a small guard would have the freedom to search individuals suspected of smuggling and wagons “leaving town with an undue proportion of any one article or commodity.” Anyone found engaging in illegal trade

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<sup>53</sup> Parks, “Trade Center,” 292-293.

<sup>54</sup> Lew Wallace to Hotchkiss, June 18, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Knox, *Camp-fire*, 193.

<sup>56</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, July 20, 1862.

<sup>57</sup> Hallum, *Diary*, 307.

supporting Rebel armies as well as those attempting to leave the city by way of any road save the five designated would be arrested on the spot.<sup>58</sup>

Federal measures to regulate smuggling resulted in the occasional confiscation of southbound articles. But judging from the constant flood of newspaper accounts of seizures, the efforts did little to discourage creative attempts. One August day, Federals found “secesh” uniforms, a fine sword, muskets, pistols, two lots of quinine, cotton cords, and more.<sup>59</sup> On another occasion, military authorities realized too late that two boxes containing musket cartridges and bayonets had been smuggled from Memphis.<sup>60</sup> In late August, a picket guard arrested one Memphian with ten thousand dollars worth of dry goods en route to Dixie.<sup>61</sup>

Quick to identify and address problems, Sherman acknowledged the success of these active Confederate sympathizers within the city. “Of course in spite of all efforts smuggling is carried on. We occasionally make hauls of clothing, gold lace, buttons, &c., but I am satisfied that salt and arms are got to the interior somehow.”<sup>62</sup> Sherman proceeded to add new restrictions on imports and sales through a Board of Trade for the city.<sup>63</sup> In addition to the further regulation of trade, Sherman actively pursued smugglers. A party of marines went upriver on October 10 in search of a gang of smugglers and horse thieves who were reported to have a rendezvous at Island No. 40. But this tactic proved futile as the mission came up with nothing.<sup>64</sup>

Noted for their fierce commitment to the Confederacy, the women of Memphis frequently made smuggling their chief means of contributing to the cause. According to a prominent Memphis lawyer, smuggling contraband goods through the lines “was one of the industries in which many of the ladies were

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<sup>58</sup> Order No. 61, July 24, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 117-118.

<sup>59</sup> *Memphis Union Appeal*, August 6, 1862.

<sup>60</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, August 8, 1862.

<sup>61</sup> *Memphis Union Appeal*, August 27, 1862.

<sup>62</sup> Sherman to U. S. Grant, August 26, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 187-188.

<sup>63</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, August 28, 1862. The new trade regulations prohibited the sale of arms and ammunition; salt and salt meat could be imported on permit only; and drugs and medicines could be sold in strictly limited quantities.

<sup>64</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, October 11, 1862.

engaged, because they were necessarily the chief purchasers, but only in small quantities and for special purposes.” For many months the Union pickets never caught “those articles that could be readily concealed in a woman’s dress.”<sup>65</sup> Union infantrymen in the city rarely came in contact with their southern enemies, “excepting the rebels that live here and they are mostly women, and as such are out of reach of punishment.”<sup>66</sup> “All the women are secesh,” observed Sherman, and “they look the Devil to every one of our cloth.”<sup>67</sup> An October letter to the *Daily Appeal*<sup>68</sup> from “A Secesh Girl” articulated the sentiment of many Memphis women. The Yankees who attempted to prevent communications between Memphis and the South “soon learned what a ‘secesh’ female will ‘dare to do’ to cheer and encourage those who have so nobly periled their fortunes and lives in their defense; finding it impossible to conquer ladies, whose hearts are with the cause, the present commander, General Sherman, allows ladies to pass through the lines, when and where they choose.”<sup>69</sup>

If “Secesh Girl” accurately estimated the leniency shown toward women, it certainly would help to explain the boldness of the “lady smugglers.” Mrs. Drake, who resided near the corner of Madison and DeSoto, was arrested by the Provost Marshal and charged with smuggling a navy six-shooter, an officer’s hat and plumes, gold lace, other uniform adornments and more across the lines beneath her crinoline. Mrs. Allen and Mrs. James of Germantown were also arrested and charged with smuggling.<sup>70</sup> The ladies of Memphis took “extensive advantage of the extensive domains of crinoline to do an extensive smuggling business.” One woman very hesitantly obeyed when asked to descend from her carriage for examination at the

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<sup>65</sup> Hallum, *Diary*, 333.

<sup>66</sup> Frank M. Guernsey to Frances Eugenia Doty, November 9, 1862, Frank M. Guernsey Civil War Letters.

<sup>67</sup> Sherman to Ellen Ewing Sherman, August 20, 1862, Sherman Family Papers.

<sup>68</sup> The *Daily Appeal* fled to Grenada, Mississippi with its press in tact upon the surrender of the city. Because of its fugitive location, for information on Memphis it relied solely on letters from her citizens that managed to sneak through the lines as well as newspaper accounts from the controlled press, the *Bulletin* and *Union Appeal*.

<sup>69</sup> *Memphis Daily Appeal*, November 3, 1862.

<sup>70</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, October 19, 1862.

Federal picket. Since the soldiers on duty were suspicious of her, they ordered a female “contraband” to inspect her. Under the attention of the contraband “she was safely relieved of a girdle passing around her waist, from which depended, by strings, no less than twelve pairs of boots, each boot contained bottles of whiskey, or military lace, and other articles much wanted in Dixie.” A little later, an African-American woman who appeared to be suffering from “excessive dropsical” was ordered to alight from her vehicle. Authorities found “a five gallon demijohn, suspended by strings ingeniously fastened to a girdle at the waist,” not even entirely covered by her dress. Soldiers ascertained upon further examination that the five gallons contained brandy “of a very superior quality.”<sup>71</sup>

Although accounts of spy activity never received the extensive attention given to smuggling by the newspapers, General Sherman himself conceded the effectiveness of both tactics. In his *Memoirs*, Sherman wrote that Confederate General Van Dorn,<sup>72</sup> headquartered in Holly Springs, Mississippi, “had no difficulty whatever in getting spies into the town for information.” Van Dorn resorted to every possible measure to extract much needed supplies from Memphis, “but he had trouble getting bulky supplies out through the guards.” Nevertheless, determined Memphians devised ways to get medicines and other bulk cargoes through the lines. After leaving his Memphis assignment in November, Sherman moved south to Mississippi to begin preparations for a march to Vicksburg. While approaching Oxford and in need of wagons, a member of Sherman’s company solicited a farmer for the use of his vehicles. One of the vehicles, which belonged to a friend from Memphis, carried “a handsome city hearse, with pall and plumes.” Carried out of the city in a large funeral procession, the coffin was found to contain an impressive assortment of medicines for Van Dorn’s army. “Thus under the pretense of a first-class funeral,” Sherman noted, “they had carried through our guards the very things we had tried to prevent.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, October 20, 1862.

<sup>72</sup> Major General Earl Van Dorn, CSA, served as commander of the Army of the West.

<sup>73</sup> William Tecumseh Sherman, *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman* (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1990), 307.

## The Cotton Trade

Cotton, the southern commodity in greatest demand in the North, immediately became the coveted prize of Yankee commerce. Cotton was crucial to the Northern war effort. The Union army needed it for the production of tents, uniforms, and other necessities. Because Europe shared New England's desire for cotton, the Atlantic cotton trade could produce substantial revenue for the United States while conciliating foreign powers. Supplying southern plantations with agricultural tools and supplies both fueled cotton production and produced further revenue for Northerners. Federals struggled to get cotton out of occupied Southern cities without allowing the cotton trade to benefit the Confederacy.<sup>74</sup>

Memphians understood the importance of "King Cotton" to the Yankee cause, and the most ardent Confederates elected to burn their precious crop to keep it out of Federal hands. Memphis area planters had little to lose since wartime trade restrictions had devalued cotton to the point that it no longer commanded a profit in the city's markets. During the first year of war, the Confederate Congress banned the exportation of products such as cotton, sugar, molasses, and tobacco except through Southern ports in an effort to deprive the Union of such goods. In August 1861, President Lincoln prohibited trade with the Confederacy without individual permits issued by the Treasury Department, a policy in place when the Union fleet took Memphis. Embargo on upriver traffic in cotton and the presence of Federal boats on the lower Mississippi River brought the Memphis cotton trade to a standstill and rendered the thousands of bales on the river practically worthless.<sup>75</sup>

Just prior to the Battle of Memphis, rebels in the city embarked on a sweeping campaign to destroy all available cotton. The *Daily Appeal* urged citizens to "Burn the cotton! Because every bale destroyed is as good as putting a man in the field. Because our implacable enemies want it. Because, if they get it, they thereby get the 'sinews of war.'" <sup>76</sup> The next day, fifty-one bales of cotton hidden on the third floor of a building, for eventual sale to approaching northerners, were found and immediately

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<sup>74</sup> Hooper, "Occupation and Reconstruction," 92, 96.

<sup>75</sup> Parks, "Trade Center," 290.

<sup>76</sup> *Memphis Daily Appeal*, June 3, 1862.

burned.<sup>77</sup> Before occupation, rebels in the city hauled an estimated three hundred thousand bales to the countryside for destruction.<sup>78</sup> Bales of cotton stored on the levee during the occupation were constantly threatened by rebel burners.<sup>79</sup>

The people of Memphis not only prevented cotton from getting to northern markets but utilized the revived cotton trade to further the Confederate cause. With the arrival of Northern merchants, city markets that had been quiet for months quickly became centers of bustling activity. The Federal requirement that all merchants take the oath of allegiance did little to stop old Memphis businessmen, who quickly learned they could purchase the oath from corrupt Treasury officials. Many Memphians, either by signature or fraud, acquired the oath with the singular intention of violating it by serving as a medium, or “go-between,” through which much needed supplies could reach rebel forces.<sup>80</sup>

Residents of Memphis and her hinterland who sympathized with the rebellion and had cotton for sale refused to accept United States Treasury notes as payment. “Speculators whose love of gain is greater than their love of country” obliged these Memphians by paying gold and silver for their cotton. These go-betweens indirectly provided “aid and comfort” to the South by supplying specie that was subsequently passed on to Confederates, who used it to purchase war supplies in both Northern and foreign markets. General Grant responded with an order, effective August 1, 1862, declaring that gold and silver would not be paid by speculators for products from the Confederate States. Notes of the United States Treasury would be legal tender and those refusing to accept them in exchange for goods would be arrested. Furthermore, any speculator paying in gold or silver would be arrested and sent north.<sup>81</sup>

Distressed by the effectiveness of Confederate sympathizers in Memphis, Sherman banned the use of gold and silver without waiting for Grant’s order to take effect, a

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<sup>77</sup> *Memphis Daily Appeal*, June 4, 1862.

<sup>78</sup> Hallum, *Diary*, 186.

<sup>79</sup> Lew Wallace to Hotchkiss, June 18, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 15.

<sup>80</sup> Parks, “Trade Center,” 293; Hallum, *Diary*, 281-284; Keating, *History of Memphis*, 517.

<sup>81</sup> Parks, “Trade Center,” 295; General Order No. 64, July 25, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 123.

violation of the policies of the Treasury and War departments. General Sherman had found so many Northern speculators, concerned not about loyalty but profit, trading in cotton, and “secessionists had become so open in refusing anything but gold,” that he felt obligated to stop it. “This gold has but one use – the purchase of arms and ammunition, which can always be had for gold, at Nassau, New Providence, or Cincinnati; all the guards we may establish cannot stop it.” Furthermore, large quantities of salt necessary for the curing of meat products were making their way south. “If we permit money and salt to go into the interior it will not take long for Bragg and Van Dorn to supply their armies with all they need to move.” Without money or salt, the Confederate army would find itself at a greater disadvantage. “We cannot carry on war and trade with a people at the same time.”<sup>82</sup>

When officials in Washington ordered that payment in gold could not be prohibited, Sherman refused to let the matter die. Federal authorities in occupied New Orleans were advising the payment of gold in order to induce planters to bring cotton and sugar to market. The Department of War insisted that “all possible facilities are afforded” to get cotton out of southern fields and into northern markets since cotton was badly needed for Union army tents.<sup>83</sup> According to the War Department, “money is of no more value to the rebels than cotton, for they can purchase military munitions with the latter as well as the former.”<sup>84</sup> But Sherman probably understood what Washington failed to acknowledge: gold could easily slip through blockades to foreign markets, whereas cotton could not.<sup>85</sup>

Sherman immediately petitioned the Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase, reiterating the danger of gold circulation. Tennessee and other southern bank notes were good in Memphis but inconvertible elsewhere; hence, they could not be used to supply the Confederacy. Sherman encouraged payment of these notes, rather than gold, for cotton. Since salt was worth one hundred dollars a barrel in Grenada, if trade were again opened, Memphis would be “better to our enemy than it was before

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<sup>82</sup> Sherman to Rawlins, July 30, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 140-141.

<sup>83</sup> H. W. Halleck to U. S. Grant, August 2, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 150.

<sup>84</sup> H. W. Halleck to W. T. Sherman, August 25, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 186.

<sup>85</sup> Parks, “Trade Center,” 297.

it was taken.”<sup>86</sup> The district would “swarm with dishonest Jews who will smuggle powder, pistols, percussion-caps, &c., in spite of all the guards and precautions we can give.”<sup>87</sup> After much protest, Sherman finally agreed to respect his superiors’ orders, insisting to the last that “money is as much contraband of war as powder.”<sup>88</sup>

While Sherman battled his own administration, the people of the Memphis region continually sent cotton up in smoke. Cotton burners sought to target Yankee merchants and Unionist citizens who planned to sell their cotton to northern merchants in the city. In July, Mr. Gager of Memphis left the city with about twenty-five drays to collect his cotton from Concorda, about thirty-five miles out, and bring it back to the city to market. But planters along the road to Concorda informed Gager’s party that if the cotton was brought to the city, they would burn it in transit. After collecting the cotton and starting back on the road to Memphis, the cavalcade was arrested by about twenty-five armed citizens who ordered the cotton removed from the drays and proceeded to burn roughly sixty bales.<sup>89</sup> Northeast of Memphis, pro-Confederate guerilla fighters, burned some twenty-five drays loaded with sixty-four bales of cotton en route to the city. According to the *Daily Appeal*, “The Yankees find ‘Jordan a hard road to travel’ in the vicinity of Memphis. They lose their yellow boys and cotton both.”<sup>90</sup> The constant newspaper accounts of cotton burning testify to a determination to keep cotton out of Yankee hands.

Neither Sherman’s precautions nor the passage of time did much to thwart the efforts of Memphians. Nearly two years after Sherman left Memphis, cotton remained an invaluable commercial asset to the Confederacy. In May 1864, the Federal commanding officer at Memphis, Major General Cadwallader C. Washburn, closed every road out of the city, allowing only those with a special permit from Union headquarters to exit. While transporting Rebel cotton to foreign ports remained hazardous, Washburn said, “to take [cotton] to Memphis and convert it into supplies

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<sup>86</sup> Sherman to S. P. Chase, August 11, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. III, Vol. II, 349.

<sup>87</sup> Sherman to Adjutant-General of the Army, August 11, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. III, Vol. II, 350.

<sup>88</sup> Sherman to U. S. Grant, August 11, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. III, Vol. II, 350.

<sup>89</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, July 18, 1862.

<sup>90</sup> *Memphis Daily Appeal*, July 22, 1862.

and greenbacks and return to the lines of the enemy [was] safe and easy.” Large amounts of cotton converted into southern assets had not only strengthened the Confederacy, but rendered the expensive Union blockade of southern ports practically useless. Union attempts to put an end to the problem in the city had indeed been ineffective from the beginning. According to General Washburn, “Memphis has been of more value to the Southern Confederacy since it fell into Federal hands than Nassau.”<sup>91</sup>

## **Guerilla Warfare**

Memphis area guerillas were irregular fighters, or citizens in arms, resorting to unconventional military tactics in the face of an overwhelming enemy presence. Guerilla warfare may be understood in contrast to battle in which two opposing forces confront one another in the field. General Sherman explained that the country surrounding Memphis was full of guerillas—farmers and citizens who would assemble to attack Union movements, then disperse to their farms. “In that way, *all* the men of the South are in arms.”<sup>92</sup> According to the *Memphis Bulletin*, the Confederate authorities had encouraged or sanctioned “partisan rangers” as independent commands.<sup>93</sup> But men composing guerilla bands were not necessarily enlisted in Confederate military service and often remained at or near home. Thus the South could draw in a class that, because of the obvious constraints of enemy occupation, otherwise could not be employed in war. Because these guerillas were not usually in uniform, they could, if pursued, disperse and blend in with the people of the town, thereby eluding pursuit. But this placed innocent civilians in an awkward fix. The ambiguous nature of the guerilla, resembling both civilian and soldier, and their close associations with surrounding towns, if not citizens themselves, they involved whole localities in the punishment due few.<sup>94</sup> Through guerilla warfare, more so than

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<sup>91</sup> General Order, No. 3, May 10, 1864, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XXXIX, Pt. II, 22.

<sup>92</sup> Sherman to Ellen Ewing Sherman, September 12, 1862, Sherman Family Papers.

<sup>93</sup> The Confederate Congress passed the Partisan Ranger Act on April 16, 1862, sanctioning commands operating behind enemy lines, *O.R.*, Ser. IV, Vol. I, 1094-1097.

<sup>94</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, August 22, 1862.

through any other means of resistance, the people of Memphis provoked Sherman into an increasingly severe policy toward southerners and confirmed his belief that the Federals were engaged in a struggle against the *people*.

General Sherman's struggle against Memphis area guerillas began even before he officially took command of the city. In June and early July, 1862, he established a railroad depot at Corinth, Mississippi, and repaired the Memphis and Charleston Railroad west toward Memphis, salvaging several partially destroyed locomotives and platform cars.<sup>95</sup> On July 13, while en route to Memphis, Sherman survived his first guerilla attack near the Wolf River when a party of horsemen whose dress was not clearly recognized fired upon a Federal forage train. According to Sherman, "they were citizens, hastily called together to fire on the train as it was returning loaded." This episode foreshadowed Sherman's later policy in dealing with rebel guerillas. He sent a party to the Wolf River vicinity to gather twenty-five prominent citizens, each of whom was sent away to Columbus. "I am satisfied we have no other remedy for this ambush firing than to hold the neighborhood fully responsible, though the punishment may fall on the wrong parties."<sup>96</sup>

Although the Union presence within city limits prevented guerilla activity in the streets of Memphis, just beyond the Federal pickets laid a vast, wooded hinterland from which to safely further the Southern cause. Southerners wishing to take up arms against local Federal occupying forces looked to known guerilla leaders for organization. One Memphian, Reverend Edward E. Porter, provided his fellow citizens such leadership. A graduate of Hanover College in Indiana and Union Theological Seminary in Hampden-Sydney, Virginia, Porter became the first pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church in Memphis. He left the pulpit upon commencement of hostilities in 1861 to join the Confederate Army, eventually attaining the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Shortly after the beginning of the war, Porter received a commission from President Jefferson Davis to raise an independent company of

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<sup>95</sup> Sherman to George E. Flynt, June 10, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. X, Pt. I, 745-746; Halleck to Sherman, June 4, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. X, Pt. II, 255.

<sup>96</sup> Sherman to H. W. Halleck, July 14, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. I, 23.

men, later known as “Porter’s Partisans.”<sup>97</sup> By the time Memphis was captured, his company had burned 30,000 bales of cotton in Shelby and its contiguous counties in Tennessee and Mississippi and “met with but little opposition” from planters.<sup>98</sup>

After the evacuation of Memphis, Porter continued to operate regularly in the Memphis area. In late August, the *Bulletin* reported on the organization of a guerilla party composed of Porter’s Partisans, raised almost entirely in Memphis, as well as a new cavalry corps recently raised near Raleigh and a company from Kentucky. Various estimates from 500 to 3,000 men, the guerillas organized just north of Federal picket lines, searching the countryside for bridges and cotton to burn. To forestall pursuit from Federal cavalry as well as to prevent cotton from going to market, they burned bridges over the Hatchie and Wolf Rivers. These guerilla parties held a distinct advantage because they wore no uniforms, “and if hotly pursued, they become citizens, and can appear to be about their usual peaceful pursuits as soon as they can dismount, and put away their shotguns and pistols.”<sup>99</sup> When Federal forces embarked on countryside raids, guerillas, by operating on their own turf, held an undeniable advantage. As a member of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Wisconsin Infantry explained in a letter to his fiancée, “the rebels frequently come up to within a mile or two of us but they are small strolling bands which we cannot catch as they know the country so much better than we do that it would be impossible to follow them.”<sup>100</sup>

Widespread guerilla activity elicited a letter from Sherman to Salmon P. Chase, the Secretary of the Treasury, articulating the position in which the general found himself. “When one nation is at war with another, all *the People* of the one are enemies of the other.” A northern perception that ordinary southern civilians were

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<sup>97</sup> J. Harvey Mathes, *The Old Guard in Gray: Researches in the Annals of the Confederate Historical Association* (Memphis, Tenn: Press of S.C. Toof & Co., 1897), 278-279; *Biographical Notes*, Porter-Rice Family Papers, 1826-1927, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tenn.

<sup>98</sup> Ed E. Porter to G. T. Beauregard, June 6, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XXIV, Pt. III, 591-592.

<sup>99</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, August 21, 1862.

<sup>100</sup> Frank M. Guernsey to Frances Eugenia Doty, November 4, 1862, Frank M. Guernsey Civil War Letters.

not truly their enemies deeply distressed Sherman. “The Government of the United States may now safely proceed on the proper Rule that all in the South are Enemies of all in the North.” Not only were southerners unfriendly, “but all who can procure arms now bear them as organized Regiments or as Guerillas.” Despite all efforts to suppress fighters in the countryside, the Rebels were getting the better of Federal cavalry, for there was “not a Garrison in Tennessee where a man can go beyond the sight of his flagstaff without being shot or captured.”<sup>101</sup>

However, Sherman’s problems with guerillas to that point had been mild in comparison to looming guerilla attacks on the Mississippi. In late September, guerillas near Randolph fired upon the steamer *Eugene*, carrying cargo and passengers from the North. The next day Sherman sent orders to Colonel Charles C. Walcutt of the Forty-sixth Ohio Volunteers to burn the “bitterly disloyal” town of Randolph.<sup>102</sup> “Acts of this kind must be promptly punished, and it is almost impossible to reach the actors, for they come from the interior and depart as soon as the mischief is done.” Asserting that the guilty party was a small force of guerillas from the Hatchie River vicinity that had since gone home, Sherman estimated that Walcutt would find no one in Randolph but ordered him still to “destroy the place, leaving one house to mark the place.” Randolph must be made to “feel that all such acts of cowardly firing upon boats filled with women and children and merchandise must be severely punished.”<sup>103</sup> Sherman justified his brutal retaliation by pointing out that the boat contained supplies for the benefit of families, some of whose members were in arms against the Union. Furthermore, it was “an outrage of the greatest magnitude” that the people of Randolph, if not directly participating, were aware of the firing upon an unarmed vessel.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Sherman to S. P. Chase, August 11, 1862, published in *Sherman’s Civil War*, 269. Sherman sent out several infantry parties, only to convince him that “there is nothing but guerillas between this and Senatobia and Tallahatchie. All the people are now guerillas, and they have a perfect understanding.” Sherman to U. S. Grant, August 17, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 178-179.

<sup>102</sup> Sherman to C. C. Walcutt, September 24, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 235-236; Knox, *Camp-fire*, 173.

<sup>103</sup> Sherman to C. C. Walcutt, September 24, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 235-236.

<sup>104</sup> Sherman to Rawlins, September 26, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. I, 144-145.

Sherman's retaliation did not conclude with the destruction of Randolph. His Order No. 254 expressed his realization that the Federals were now at war with a whole people. Given that many families of known rebels and Confederates in arms against the Union had been allowed to reside in "peace and comfort" in Memphis, and that the Confederate authorities "either sanction or permit the firing on unarmed boats" carrying passengers and goods for the benefit of the residents of the city, Sherman ordered that "for every boat so fired on ten families must be expelled from Memphis." A list was prepared with at least thirty names. Every time a boat was fired on, ten names were drawn, whereby the selected parties were given three days to remove to a distance of twenty-five miles from Memphis.<sup>105</sup> In the wake of the *Eugene* incident, Sherman expressed his philosophy of war and attitude toward the southern people in a letter to Grant. "We cannot change the hearts of those people of the South, but we can make war so terrible that they will realize the fact that, however brave and gallant and devoted to their country, still they are mortal and should exhaust all peaceful remedies before they fly to war."<sup>106</sup>

Although Federal retaliatory measures and hunts for guerillas prevented attacks on steamers for nearly a month, the rebels were not discouraged. In early October, Colonel Landon, of the 70<sup>th</sup> Ohio, took a detachment of about three hundred men upriver to Randolph, the reputed headquarters of guerilla leader Faulkner, then east to Covington in search of guerillas but came up with nothing.<sup>107</sup> Sherman dispatched another four hundred cavalry after guerillas on the Wolf River near Germantown, Tennessee, in a successful operation, killing five, wounding fifteen, and capturing six prisoners.<sup>108</sup>

Attacks on the river resumed in mid-October, when the steamer *Continental*, loaded with passengers and freight from the North, fell under guerilla attack. A blank was fired at the boat near Island No. 21 on the Arkansas shore signaling to bring her to shore. When Captain O'Neal ignored the signal, a twelve-pound shot was

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<sup>105</sup> Special Order No. 254, September 27, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. I, 240.

<sup>106</sup> Sherman to U. S. Grant, October 4, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 259-262.

<sup>107</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, October 4, 1862.

<sup>108</sup> Sherman to U. S. Grant, October 9, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 272-274.

fired and struck the hold about a foot from the water, lodging in a bale of hay. The steamer could not get out of the line of fire before she was hit a second time near her stern, but fortunately for the *Continental*, damage was minimal and she reached Memphis with no further hindrance.<sup>109</sup> The guerillas chose the Arkansas location because opposite their position was a sandbar or island in the river, which caused vessels to hug the Arkansas bank. The steamer *John H. Dickey*, loaded with women and cargo but also with Federal soldiers, was fired upon from a similar spot. After an ignored blank signal, the *Dickey* was hit twice by cannon and barraged by rifle fire, sustaining significant damage while the boiler and pilot house were narrowly missed. She proceeded to Memphis with only one man wounded. The *Bulletin* explained that the Southern sympathizers had been encouraged by the inactivity of the Federal gunboats, believing they could “close the river commerce of Memphis and starve it into submission to the Confederacy.”<sup>110</sup>

The October onslaught against northern steamers continued with no end in sight. The *Gladiator* was fired upon below the city, killing two and wounding many, but the ship was not lost. According to General Sherman, “the conduct of the guerillas was fiendish in the extreme.”<sup>111</sup> Just over three miles downriver from Memphis below a bend in the river, between President’s Island and the Arkansas bank, guerillas assaulted the *Cataboula* from the Arkansas side. Men in uniform poured volleys of buck shot and Minie balls upon the boat from only fifty yards away, aiming in the vicinity of the pilot house. Besides the usual passengers and cargo, two women and two children were on board. Only one person was wounded and none were killed, although the boat did sustain damage, especially to the pilot house.<sup>112</sup> Colonel Walcutt rode to the place from which the *Cataboula* was fired upon, found much complicity with the guerillas, and burned the town. Sherman refused to feed and clothe the families of men engaged in firing upon boats carrying on peaceful

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<sup>109</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, October 16, 1862.

<sup>110</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, October 18, 1862.

<sup>111</sup> Sherman to Rawlins, October 21, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 285-286.

<sup>112</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, October 18, 1862.

commerce.<sup>113</sup> In authorizing a cavalry raid on the hinterlands, Sherman revealed his policy toward the people. “The people at large should be made to feel that in the existence of a strong Government, capable of protecting as well as destroying, they have a real interest; that they must at once make up their minds or else be involved in the destruction that awaits armed rebellion against the nation’s will.”<sup>114</sup>

Sherman delayed the exile of families in punishment for guerilla attacks for fifteen days. If within that time period, the Confederate military officially disavowed the brutal actions of the guerillas firing upon women and children on the “free Mississippi,” the Memphis families would be allowed to remain in the city. If such acts were done by the “direct or implied concert” of the Confederate authorities, the Federals would not “chase through the canebrakes and swamps the individuals who did the deeds, but will visit punishment upon the adherents of that cause which employ such agents.”<sup>115</sup> When no response came from Confederate authorities, thirty-two individuals and two whole families were ordered to leave Memphis. The listed persons and families had sons or husbands in the Confederate army or guerilla bands, were known ardent Secessionists, or had family to the South.<sup>116</sup> Although Sherman insisted that he had retaliated mildly by requiring the families of barbarous rebels to go south to their friends, he maintained that “all the Confederate allies and adherents shall feel the power of an indignant government.” By November of 1862, Sherman’s wrath toward the people of the South had intensified to new heights of severity: “The absolute destruction of Memphis, New Orleans, and every city, town, and hamlet of the South would not be too severe a punishment to a people for attempting to interfere with the navigation of the Mississippi.”<sup>117</sup>

## **Memphis and Sherman**

The audacity and determination of Memphis area rebels certainly fueled Sherman’s indignation toward not only the broad base of Rebel support in the area

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<sup>113</sup> Sherman to Rawlins, October 21, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 285-286.

<sup>114</sup> Special Order No. 285, October 22, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 289-290.

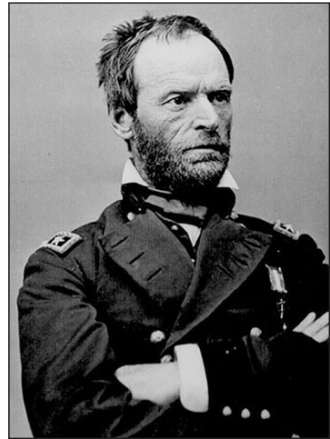
<sup>115</sup> Sherman to Miss P. A. Fraser, October 22, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 287-288.

<sup>116</sup> *Memphis Daily Bulletin*, November 1, 1862.

<sup>117</sup> Sherman to Mrs. Valeria Hurlbut, November 7, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 860.

but toward the southern people as a whole. Guerilla activity especially molded Sherman's philosophy of war and prompted him to implement harsh measures against the enemy. Sherman's four month stint in Memphis was his first experience with an occupied southern town. In the final analysis, to what extent should the people of Memphis and the nearby vicinity assume responsibility for shaping Sherman's famously aggressive approach to war?

This study reveals Sherman's views on the war and his enemy, articulated primarily through official military correspondence. But further examination of Sherman's personal communications with his family while in Memphis reveals personal beliefs and observations not necessarily appropriate for expression to his superiors. Less than two weeks after his arrival in Memphis, Sherman confided to his wife, Ellen Ewing Sherman, a conception that war extended beyond traditional battlegrounds. "The North may fall into Bankruptcy & anarchy first," he explained to Ellen on July 31, "but if they can hold on the war will soon assume a turn to extermination, not of soldiers alone, that is the least part of the trouble, but the People."<sup>118</sup> Not only would the war turn on the people of the South, but in order to conquer Dixie, the Union would have to colonize her. Writing to his brother, Senator John Sherman, the General explained his colonization theory. "My full belief is that we must Colonize the Country *de novo* beginning with Kentucky & Tennessee, and Should remove five millions of our people at once South of the Ohio River taking the farms and plantations of Rebels. ... To attempt to hold all the South would demand an army too large even to think of. We must colonize & Settle as we go south for in Missouri there is as much strife now as ever. Enemies must be killed or transported to Some other country."<sup>119</sup>



*General William Tecumseh Sherman learned important lessons about total warfare during his occupation of Memphis.*

Courtesy Library of Congress

According to Sherman, northerners underestimated the people of the South and

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<sup>118</sup> W. T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing Sherman, July 31, 1862, Sherman Family Papers.

their undaunted resolve to fight despised Yankee invaders. “It is about time the North understood the truth,” Sherman wrote to his brother, “that the entire South, man woman & child is against us, armed & determined. It will call for a million men for several years to put them down.”<sup>120</sup> Sherman believed they deserved whatever punishment they experienced. After three months in Memphis, Sherman concluded that “the adherents of the Southern cause have instituted principles of warfare that, when applied to themselves, will be destructive of material interests, and that if we retaliate they are estopped [sic] by their own practice.”<sup>121</sup>

Historians with a more complete understanding of Sherman, his personal development, and military career have already evaluated Memphis’ role in Sherman’s philosophy of war. Sherman biographer John F. Marszalek brings the General’s Memphis experience into context. “This period was to witness an important metamorphosis in Sherman’s thinking about war...The idea that war included the entire populace – its determination to fight and its material goods – became evident to him. A new philosophy of war that would govern him for the rest of the conflict was born during the Memphis months.”<sup>122</sup> Historian Charles Royster offers a similar conclusion in his book, *The Destructive War*. “He learned from his Memphis experience that the rebellion could not be quelled with garrisons of occupying forces and that the citizenry would side with the Confederacy until the United States hurt them enough to make them quit doing so. Before his stay in Memphis the limits on Sherman’s army included rules sharply differentiating civilians from combatants; thereafter he was limited only by his troops’ power, his own imagination, and the scruples his men chose to observe.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, August 13, 1862, Autograph Letter Signed, Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, California, published in *Sherman’s Civil War*, 272-274. Writing to Ellen on August 10, Sherman explained “if the North design to conquer the South, we must begin at Kentucky and reconquer the Country from them as we did from the Indians.” W. T. Sherman to Ellen Ewing Sherman, August 10, 1862, Sherman Family Papers.

<sup>120</sup> W. T. Sherman to John Sherman, August 13, 1862, Autograph Letter Signed, Library of Congress: William T. Sherman, published in Simpson and Berlin, eds. *Selected Correspondence*, 301-302.

<sup>121</sup> Sherman to George D. Prentice, November 1, 1862, *O. R.*, Ser. I, Vol. XVII, Pt. II, 859.

<sup>122</sup> John F. Marszalek, *Sherman: A Soldier’s Passion for Order* (New York: Free Press, 1993), 189.

The ultimate impact of Confederate sympathy in Memphis reached beyond Odd Fellows' Hall and the town of Randolph. Memphis' resistance seems to have played a significant role in the development of total warfare. If the North were to defeat the South, victory on the battlefield would be only the beginning. Civilians in Memphis, at least, presented a formidable opposing force. Judicial opposition, commercial exploitation, and guerilla warfare shaped the perception not only of a city but of an entire southern nation of civilians at war with the Union.

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<sup>123</sup> Charles Royster, *The Destructive War: William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and the Americans* (New York: Knopf, 1991), 108.