
TWO MEN, TWO MINDS:
COVERAGE OF SHERMAN'S
MARCH TO THE SEA
BY AUGUSTA AND SAVANNAH NEWSPAPERS

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Despite their plentitude, Georgia newspaper coverage of Union General William T. Sherman's march was limited by rudimentary communications technology, the general's own secrecy, and a lack of resources. By war's end, there were only 20 daily newspapers left in the South.¹ Before the fall of Atlanta, the survival rate of Georgia newspapers was good; at least 10 dailies were still publishing: the *Intelligencer*, the *Southern Confederacy*, the *Gate City Guardian*, the *Commonwealth* and the *Reveille* in Atlanta;² the *Macon Telegraph*; the *Chronicle and Sentinel* and the *Constitutionalist* in Augusta; and the *Republican* and *Daily Morning News* in Savannah.

The mere presence of a newspaper, however, did not guarantee that its readers would be well informed. Other factors often intervened to make reporting scarce or erroneous, including the availability (and reliability) of information and sources, raw materials for manufacturing newsprint and ink, manufacturing facilities, trained employees to write the articles, set the type and print the newspaper, and a safe location.³ Georgia newspapers were chronically short of resources and labor. As journalism historian Frank Luther Mott pointed out, there were few paper mills in the South, good printing ink came primarily from the North or from England, conscription led to major labor shortages, and many Southern papers were destroyed, suspended or censored by military commanders.⁴

The *Memphis Appeal*, for example, published in 10 other cities (three in Georgia) before being captured along with its editor, Col. Benjamin Franklin Dill, near Columbus.⁵ Milledgeville's *Southern Union* suspended publication in the fall of 1864, took its press out into the woods and covered it with dead pine straw until Sherman had left the area.⁶ Inevitably, then, the gap between reality and news reports was often substantial.

Fortunately, most Georgia papers were able to continue publishing, even if some of them did have to resort to half-sized sheets or homemade ink. As a result, a fairly good record exists of what Georgians knew and when they knew it about Sherman's campaign. This article looks at what was reported in the newspapers published in Savannah and Augusta, seen by Confederate authorities as Sherman's most likely targets. Several factors emerge for students of the Civil War to consider as they review civil war newspapers. Information often came from untrained sources, such as train passengers or citizens along Sherman's route, rather than trained reporters. Inevitably, articles contained wrong estimates of troop numbers, exaggerations of victories and atrocities, and even stories that were nothing more than rumors (fortunately, usually identified as such). Newspapers often exchanged and printed reports without any attempt at verification. Also, the editors and publishers of this era were not neutral in their outlook on the war, which influenced their papers' content. Finally, while modern readers can find the day's top stories on the front page, 19th century newspapers spread them throughout the newspaper. News, then, was less accessible and was easily missed by readers.

From the perspective of the newspapers, Sherman's campaign was divided into three phases. The first dealt with Sherman's march to Milledgeville and Macon (November 12-20). The second phase included Sherman's march through middle Georgia

(November 15-December 9), and also included much cavalry fighting between Confederate Cavalry Gen. Joseph Wheeler and Union Cavalry Gen. Judson Kilpatrick -- good for newspapers. The third phase covered Sherman's arrival at Savannah and the city's fall (December 10-21), although reported later in some Georgia papers.

Phase One: An 'Agreeable Sensation'

Never do I recall a more agreeable sensation than the sight of our camps by night, lit up by the fires of fragrant pine-knots. The trains were all in good order, and the men seemed to march their fifteen miles a day as though it were nothing. No enemy opposed us, and we could only occasionally hear the faint reverberation of a gun to our left rear, where we knew that General Kilpatrick was skirmishing with Wheeler's cavalry, which persistently followed him.⁷

Sherman's words are an apt description of the march south from Atlanta. He had laid his plans well, even conceiving a backup plan of moving to the Gulf Coast should his way to the Atlantic be blocked.⁸ Although his superiors were concerned,⁹ and the general himself was aware that "success would be accepted as a matter of course, whereas, should we fail, this 'march' would be adjudged the wild adventure of a crazy fool,"¹⁰ he knew that there too few Confederate troops in Georgia to stop his 60,000-strong force¹¹ (and Governor Joseph E. Brown had furloughed the Georgia militia, over Confederate President Jefferson Davis' protests¹²). As for the troops, "an unusual feeling of exhilaration seemed to pervade all minds — a feeling of something to come, vague and undefined, still full of venture and intense interest." Their enthusiasm may have been occasioned by their false belief that they were heading for

Richmond.¹³ In fact, for the infantry, the march to Milledgeville involved little more than a stroll through the Georgia countryside. The right wing under Howard reached Stockbridge and McDonough on Nov. 15 and 16,¹⁴ while Slocum's left wing advanced on Covington the following two days.¹⁵ On the 19th and 20th, Sherman's forces passed through Buckhead, Rutledge and Madison¹⁶ and occupied Monticello and Hillsboro,¹⁷ destroying a variety of property as they advanced.

Newspaper coverage of this early march reveals uncertainty regarding Sherman's intentions and contain much speculation. Unsurprisingly, published information was often contradictory. Any smidgen of news or rumor was passed along to the public, as was common in 19th century journalistic practice. It was up to the audience to determine what actually was happening. Unlike today, there was little interpretative reporting (putting the news into context and explaining its significance).

The *Augusta Chronicle* first covered Sherman's movements on Nov. 16 when a correspondent with the *nom de guerre* Troup in a "Letter from the Front" reported fighting near Atlanta, and the Federals' evacuation. The Confederate Press Association supplied a *Chicago Times* report of Nov. 9 that Sherman was on the verge of "a new movement of greatest importance . . . [A] winter tour through the cotton states."¹⁸ The following day readers were greeted by a baffling array of contradictory and speculative information. A reprint from the *Macon (Atlanta) Intelligencer* reported the Federal evacuation of Atlanta but predicted that Sherman was withdrawing behind the Chattahoochee for the winter. Another story told of a white woman who disguised herself as a black woman by boiling walnut shells, soaking her hands and face in the liquid and frizzing her hair to get into Atlanta to transact some business. She reported that she was told the federal troops were leaving soon for Macon and Augusta.

Another article, headlined "Sherman's Movements," said nothing was certain, but conjectured that he might be headed to Montgomery or Columbus, and reported that three Federal corps had entered Jonesboro. The very next story stated that Sherman was on his way to Macon, having already burned Rome, Marietta and Atlanta (in defense of Sherman, it must be noted that his orders were for the burning of public properties, or those properties which might in some way aid the Confederate war effort. In the case of Rome, Sherman's men burned a few select businesses and warehouses, most notably an iron foundry which manufactured cannon). A reprint from the *Montgomery Mail* complained of the contradictory information:

We are kept so much in the dark in regard to army movements that we know nothing of them until it is too late to be called news. I hardly know what to think of the prospect of going to Middle Tennessee. Sometimes it looks quite flattering, and then again becomes gloomy . . . Sherman was on yesterday reported with his forces lying between Decatur and Huntsville. To-day I was told he was moving in the direction of Pulaski. Well, let him move. We can move him back through Middle Tennessee as we did out of Georgia.¹⁹

Northern newspapers helped little, being quoted as reporting that Sherman was going to Charleston, but that this was discounted by Washington military circles. The *New York Herald* was cited in the Nov. 17 *Chronicle* as claiming that Sherman's advance into Georgia is a result of a speech given recently by President Jefferson Davis:

Grant has placed Sherman's advance in accordance with information furnished by Jeff Davis. Davis in his speeches and his message has furnished all the necessary facts to show that Sherman's march cannot be resisted. He has told us how the rebel armies are depleted and where they are. So onward goes Sherman towards Macon, Augusta and Savannah. He will be heard of next through the rebel papers. He will test somewhat Davis' hifalutin statement that none of the rebel cities are necessary to the vitality of the government, and he will prove to the complete satisfaction of Mr. Davis that he has not been compelled to "withdraw" and that he has not left Atlanta exactly "on line of his advance."²⁰

Davis spoke in Macon on September 23 during a dispute with Georgia Governor Brown over control of the state militia. Davis and Senator Benjamin H. Hill came to Georgia to remedy the situation. Davis portrayed the South's situation as being dire, the Confederate army having lost a third of its strength due to desertion and illness. He said he had removed Johnston from command because he had refused to fight, denied that Georgia was being sacrificed for Virginia, and denounced Brown. According to the September 26 *Savannah Republican*, Davis justified reinforcing Virginia rather than Georgia so that General Jubal Early could drive the Union army away from Lynchburg. He appealed to all Georgians to return to their posts and to resist Sherman. The Confederate president hoped to regain Atlanta by sending General John Bell Hood into Sherman's rear and to starve the Federal troops into "a retreat which would be worse than that

of Napoleon from Moscow."²¹ (The *Augusta Chronicle* used this speech later to oppose Davis' proposal to recruit newspapermen into the Confederate Army; the *Chronicle*, and many other papers, saw conscription of editors as a form of press censorship, and Davis' punishment for negative coverage.²²) The *Chronicle*, perhaps taking its cue from the *Herald*, also blamed Davis for giving away Georgia's weakened condition and thereby encouraging Sherman to undertake his campaign to the sea, since he would be essentially unopposed.²³

By November 18, Georgia newspapers began to grasp the direction and objectives of Sherman's campaign. The *Savannah Republican* reported the fall of Jonesboro and Griffin and the advance on Macon, relying on private telegrams for information. Another story reported that Sherman planned to leave two corps in Chattanooga and, with the remaining five corps, push through the South, foraging as he went. This remarkably accurate information arrived via telegraph from the Confederate Press Association, which had gotten the report from newspaper exchanges arranged with many Northern newspapers. Southern newspapers depended on newspaper exchanges for much of their news about Sherman's advance.²⁴ Access to Northern newspapers did not always clarify the picture; *Chronicle* readers could not have learned much on Nov. 19 from a *Chicago Tribune* report (obtained from the *Montgomery Advertiser*) that Sherman had left Atlanta with 75,000 troops and that the Union general

... will sweep with irresistible force into the heart of Georgia and South Carolina to Mobile and Charleston. He will march in three grand columns, well provided with artillery and cavalry, destroying roads and bridges

in his rear, gathering supplies from the country and receiving fugitives who will flock to him by thousands. It is believed Sherman will arrive at his objective point with reinforcements to the extent of fifty thousand men.²⁵

With such wide-ranging suggestions for Sherman's target, confusion was inevitable. On Saturday Nov. 19, the *Republican's* "Telegraphic News" section informed Savannahans that no one in Macon knew what was happening, but that the enemy was presumed to be near Griffin and was burning everything in its path. The *Republican* reported rumors that Sherman had arrived at the Jones County community of Wallace, and was threatening Milledgeville, the Central Railroad -- and the Georgia Legislature. Further, it reported that Gen. Howell Cobb, commander of the Georgia militia, had called for all men to take up arms and that all bridges from Forsyth to Indian Springs had been burned. Another article in the *Republican* reported that Griffin was under siege and that Sherman's army had burned Atlanta, Jonesboro and McDonough, but also stated that Milledgeville had probably fallen.²⁶ So there were contradictions even in single editions of the same newspaper. Northern newspapers were a useful but fallible source. The *Chronicle* carried a *New York Times* report on November 19 that Sherman was going to Savannah - true - but that he would leave on election day -- Novovember 8.

Resistance became an urgent issue quickly. In the same edition (November 19) the *Chronicle* dutifully passed on a letter from Georgia Sen. B. H. Hill, urging Georgians to resist Sherman, even though the Union general warned that anyone who resisted would have their property destroyed, and if it was unclear who had resisted, the destruction would be random.²⁷ The paper was obviously in a quandary here, as the interests of the state and community were not the same (the state wanted resistance; the

community probably preferred survival). On November 20 the *Chronicle* reported that Madison and Buckhead had been attacked, Confederate reinforcements had arrived in Augusta, and that General P. G. T. Beauregard was on his way.²⁸ The next day the *Savannah Republican* reported that Federal troops had crossed the Ocmulgee River about eight miles east of Indian Springs. The points of advance were far enough apart that as late as November 22, the *Chronicle* was still running reprints from Northern newspapers speculating about Sherman's destination. By then, however, coverage was shifting to the destructiveness of the advance. The *Chronicle* ran a *Macon Telegraph* story quoting "a gentleman from up the road" who had seen several fires near Griffin, and "the opinion prevailed that the enemy were devastating and burning everything in their rear." Monticello and Hillsboro were also reported burning. The story added that Macon was gearing up for a defense, but did not reveal how many Confederate troops were there. Another story reported that the Union troops had struck the Central Railroad at Griswoldville at 2 p.m. on November 20. This is the first mention of the Battle of Griswoldville, one of the larger engagements during the march to the sea, but few details were given.²⁹

As Sherman approached Macon, speculation about his plans intensified. The Nov. 22 *Chronicle* contained a *Macon Telegraph* report that Sherman was nearby, but that an attack was unlikely because of the strength of the garrison. The two Atlanta papers which had fled to Macon, the *Intelligencer* and the *Confederacy*, knew better and left town, while the two Macon papers, the *Telegraph* and the *Confederate*, announced they would continue publishing so long as the Confederate flag waved over the city. The *Chronicle* cited the report of a traveler that Sherman's march down the Macon and Western Railroad

line was a feint and that Sherman's two columns would likely meet up at Sparta and travel to Brunswick.³⁰ The *Savannah Republican* suggested Augusta, Savannah, Brunswick, Macon or Columbus as possible destinations, and ran a story from the *Port Royal (S.C.) New South* to the effect that Sherman was going to Virginia, via Savannah and Charleston. The *New South*, which was uncannily accurate in assessing Sherman's thinking, unnecessarily added that Milledgeville was only a short march from Savannah.³¹

Phase 2: 'The cruel enemy'

Sherman's eastward turn after Milledgeville led to the outbreak of serious fighting between the Union cavalry screen, under Judson Kilpatrick, and Joe Wheeler's Confederate troopers. Combat occurred on 11 days between November 15 and December 4, most engagements being full-fledged battles.³² Fighting began on November 15, when cavalry on the right wing drove Confederate pickets and skirmishers back six miles, through Jonesboro. The Confederates retreated to Lovejoy Station where 3,000 Georgia militia men occupied earthworks built after the evacuation of Atlanta. The Union troops followed and drove the Confederates out, capturing two guns and forty prisoners.³³ Between November 19 and November 22, Kilpatrick's cavalry engaged Wheeler's near Clinton and Griswoldville.³⁴ The Union held Griswoldville only after a bitter, see-saw struggle.³⁵ While his cavalry kept Wheeler at bay, Sherman pressed on, arriving in Milledgeville on Nov. 23 after having overseen the burning of Howell Cobb's plantation.³⁶ He promptly ordered an advance on Millen.³⁷ The *Savannah Daily News* unwittingly demonstrated the difficulty of covering these rapid and complex events by reporting that only about six

Federals had invaded Milledgeville and that the city hadn't been burned.³⁸ This is apparently a reference to a small advance group from Kilpatrick's cavalry.

Sherman (intentionally) confused the situation further by ordering Kilpatrick to feint toward Augusta, thereby occupying Wheeler and leaving the army unmolested.³⁹ Wheeler had some success, delaying the destruction of a bridge at Brier Creek for a couple of weeks,⁴⁰ but as George Nicholas (Sherman's *aide-de-camp*) noted, the cavalry's maneuvers worked perfectly as a blind for the main army's movement across the Ogeechee and to convince the Confederates that the army was heading to Augusta.⁴¹ Sherman reached Millen on December 3.⁴² A Confederate attack from Statesboro on foraging cavalry (December 4-5) was quickly turned back.⁴³ On December 5, Sherman found Confederate earthworks near Ogeechee Church, about 50 miles from Savannah, but the Rebel troops had already retreated into the city.⁴⁴ On December 8, Sherman reached Pooler's Station, eight miles from Savannah, and on December 9-10 his army was in position in front of the city.⁴⁵

Georgia newspapers were forced to rely on sketchy, contradictory and incomplete information coming in from the countryside, supplemented by often out-of-date Northern newspaper reports. On November 23, the *Chronicle* quoted a Central Railroad passenger arriving from Savannah to the effect that the line's Oconee River bridge had not yet been burned and was being defended by cadets from the Georgia Military Institute.⁴⁶ Confederates supposedly had re-entered Atlanta. A passenger from the Georgia line reported that the Federals had gone to Eatonton, and that the only Union troops who came into Greensboro were a few stragglers who were arrested.⁴⁷ The *Savannah Daily News* on Nov. 24 carried a report from Augusta that Milledgeville and Gordon had been captured on

the 21st and that the State House, Governor's Mansion and Penitentiary had been burned. It confirmed that the cadets held the Oconee Bridge. Northern papers confirmed that Sherman had divided his army into two columns, and they were moving toward the Savannah River. This article, originating from the *Cincinnati Gazette*, suggested Macon and Augusta (with Beaufort) as the probable targets. The fall of Gordon and Griswoldville was also reported.⁴⁸

News (and rumors) often had a short lifespan, leading to inevitable contradictions among (and within) papers. For example, the *Daily News* on the 24th reprinted an article from the *Augusta Constitutionalist* quoting Georgia Railroad passengers who said that the Oconee Bridge had been burned the previous Saturday. The *Savannah Republican* knew that the bridge was surrounded, not that it had actually been burned. The *Daily News* offered no news on the 24th about the location of Sherman's main army, while the *Republican* erroneously reported that it was moving north from the Sandersville area.⁴⁹ The *Daily News* did note a *Chicago Journal* report that Sherman was to meet Gen. Porter at the Atlantic coast, and that he might stop in Augusta or Milledgeville, and that the *Louisville Journal* saw Sherman's campaign as the most significant of the war. The reason for much of the confusion did come to light in the *Daily News* that day: a letter from a Union officer in Atlanta, obtained from a Northern paper, reported that no one below the rank of major really knew Sherman's plans. The officer wrote that Sherman's army was heading to Savannah via Augusta and Milledgeville.⁵⁰ While the officer's information was essentially true, it contained enough erroneous information to, nevertheless, contribute to the confusion.

On the 24th the *Chronicle* reported on the one area where it did not depend on rumor and unverifiable stories: Augusta's defenses.

Reinforcements, it reported, were arriving and the soldiers appeared to be in good spirits. General Braxton Bragg was on his way, and four brigadier generals were already in Augusta. The powder works, arsenal, armories, and machine shops had all been dismantled and moved to a safe location. Housing was sought for Confederate soldiers who could not afford to pay for lodging.⁵¹ The following day, a *Chronicle* editorial suggested that Sherman's destination might be Brunswick or Beaufort, not Savannah, because the Northern press thought that that was where he was going. The paper also speculated that Sherman was trying to get to the coast before a sufficiently large Confederate force could be raised to oppose him. This was all conjecture, although there was a rumor that the Federals were within 16 miles of Sparta and moving toward the Altamaha River. By the 27th, Sherman's columns seemed frighteningly close. While one report placed Union troops in Wilkinson County, others placed them near Camak and Warrenton. Another story from a private citizen reported that military leaders in Macon knew no more about Sherman's objectives than the ones in Augusta, but that Augusta was considered the likely target.⁵²

That view would have cheered Savannahans, but their access to information was getting worse just as they needed it more. On November 29, the *Daily News* suspended publication, while the *Republican* appealed for cotton or linen rags and printers. According to Mott, Southern newspapers commonly faced shortages of paper (sometimes printing on wrapping paper), and workers.⁵³ Government pressure could come from either side. The *Republican* closed when Sherman captured the city. Sherman ordered that newspaper proprietors would be "held to the strictest accountability and . . . punished severely in person and property for any libelous publications, mischievous matter,

premature news, exaggerated statements, or any comments whatever upon the acts of the constituted authorities; . . . even for such articles though copied from other papers."⁵⁴ Ironically, the most useful "other papers" had been Northern, but these were no longer much use as their hard information about Sherman's status dried up; a reprint from the November 22 *New York Times* expressed pessimism about Sherman's position,⁵⁵ demonstrating the impact of his secretiveness.

By early December, Augustans truly were in a bad/good news situation; frightening allegations of massive destruction by the Union army were pouring in, but Sherman *was* clearly swinging toward Savannah. On December 1, the *Chronicle* published letters and accounts regarding Sherman's movements, details regarding burnings and killings of people and animals, and mentions of Wheeler's continuing efforts.⁵⁶ Four days later, the *Chronicle* told its readers that virtually all of Griswoldville had been looted and put to the torch.⁵⁷ That same day, however, the paper correctly interpreted Sherman's movement toward Louisville as evidence that Savannah, not Augusta, was Sherman's destination. This bit of prescience was marred by the paper's conclusion that Sherman's slow pace resulted from fear that Confederate forces were massing against him.⁵⁸ These 'forces' were Wheeler's troopers, of course, who received much *Chronicle* attention. On December 5 alone, the paper reported on cavalry fights near Brier Creek, Walker's Bridge and Green's Cut, as well as a (false) rumor that Kilpatrick has been wounded near Waynesboro. To the average reader, however, personal accounts of the havoc of war probably made more of an impression:

Our condition can scarcely be imagined. To say that the cruel enemy have left universal ruin and desolation in their track would but imperfectly

convey the truth. Everything has been swept as with a storm of fire and the "besom of destruction." One third of Clinton is in ashes. The Court House is left, but the records destroyed. . . . The enemy has gone at last, but he has left desolation in his track. We invite you back to your homes, but you will find them to a great extent in ruins. There is but one spirit left in the breasts of the people, so far as we can learn, and that is the undying hatred towards the Yankees and eternal resistance to their tyrannical sway.⁵⁹

The Augusta newspapers covered the growing threat to Savannah, but did not seem overly concerned with its sister city's fate. A December 7 *Chronicle* reprint from the *Charleston Mercury* reported fighting at Pocotalgio, Coosawhatchee, and Station Two-and-a-Half, showing that Union troops were rapidly approaching Savannah. A letter revealed that Union troops had left Louisville quickly and were on the roads to Savannah, while another eyewitness claimed to have seen a Union telegraph wire near the Savannah River.⁶⁰ The *Constitutionalist* of Dec. 7 reported that Sherman's forces, estimated at 20,000 strong by "an intelligent scout," were east of the Oconee River and heading to Savannah or Port Royal, South Carolina, and claimed that Union troops were beginning to doubt whether they would ever reach the coast.⁶¹

This was wishful thinking, as Sherman's advance guard was only 8 miles from Savannah on December 8,⁶² with the main body 15-20 miles out.⁶³ While Georgia's most important surviving city was on the verge of falling, the *Chronicle* devoted great attention to the (still false) rumor of Kilpatrick's serious wound

and Wheeler's harrassment of Federal troops. The December 8 edition also contained a story about the *Republican's* acquisition of one of Sherman's railroad destruction machines, apparently abandoned (perhaps during combat).⁶⁴ Charles Nicholas conceded in his diary on December 9 that there had been hard fighting,⁶⁵ reported in the *Chronicle* in an independent article and a *Charleston Mercury* reprint.⁶⁶ On December 10 the *Chronicle* claimed that Federal troops had been driven back,⁶⁷ but follow-up reports on the 11th indicated this was untrue,⁶⁸ and that the destruction of Georgia was continuing: the devastation of Milledgeville was used by Troup as evidence that the enemy was "the most cruel of men."⁶⁹ As will be discussed later, the Georgia papers had some difficulty in seeing a connection between the destruction and looting, and Confederate cavalry leader Joseph Wheeler's inability to even slow Sherman down.

Phase 3: 'A Christmas-gift'

The critical fall of Ft. McAllister on Dec. 12⁷⁰ did not reach *Chronicle* readers until December 24, when the paper reported the fall of Savannah, two days after Sherman sent Lincoln the famous telegram:

To His Excellency President Lincoln, Washington, D.C.:
I beg to present you as a Christmas-gift the city of Savannah, with one hundred and fifty heavy guns and plenty of ammunition, also about twenty-five thousand bales of cotton.⁷¹

The *Chronicle* of December 13 did report Union capture of railroads and bridges, important information for Augustan travellers (and the capture of one of the road's presidents).⁷² On

December 15, the *Chronicle* reported a (true) rumor that Sherman was in contact with the Northern fleet. Two days later, the *Chronicle* ran a reprint from a New York paper that reported that the *Fulton* had left with mail for Sherman, sailing under sealed orders since Sherman's final destination had not yet been resolved. A rumor (not an actual report) of the fall of Ft. McAllister appeared in the paper on December 17.⁷³ The newspaper's editors must have believed this rumor, and interpreted it accurately, because from this point, the paper's tone becomes resigned, as if defeat finally loomed as inevitable. On December 18 (the day Hardee refused to surrender Savannah⁷⁴), the *Chronicle* reported a rumor from Charleston that the Confederates had already evacuated the city, conceding that there was no confirmation, both Charleston papers (the *Courier* and the *Mercury*) saying all was quiet around Savannah. The *Mercury* even claimed that the Savannah *Republican's* tone remained quiet and confident (in other words, confident but ignorant), but that there was no hint of where Sherman was or what his plans were.⁷⁵

The fall of Savannah was anticlimactic, and the same can be said of the coverage of the event. On December 21, a group of Sherman's men on a reconnaissance mission, walked into Savannah unchallenged. Sherman's headquarters were established on the 22nd.⁷⁶ That day the *Chronicle* quoted a traveller from Savannah as saying that a portion of the Savannah/Charleston Railroad was in the hands of the enemy and that many civilians were evacuating the city.⁷⁷ On the 23rd, the *Chronicle* followed with a dispatch from Richmond describing Sherman's ultimatum of December 14 threatening a shelling of Savannah if the city failed to surrender in two days. The dispatch confirmed the evacuation of Savannah.⁷⁸ On Dec.

24, the *Chronicle* finally ran an article which affirmatively stated Ft. McAllister, and its entire garrison, armaments and stores, had fallen into the hands of the enemy and that Savannah had been surrendered by its Mayor after the Confederate troops had left the city.⁷⁹

Reporting methods, especially in the South, were quite different in 1864 from what they are today. Southern newspapers followed the more typical 18th and 19th century pattern of copying news from other newspapers and relying on travelers and letters for most of their content.⁸⁰ This was changing in the North, thanks to the growth of the penny press with its emphasis on more "popular" news, such as crime and human interest stories. The penny press, which had its American genesis in New York, employed reporters to go out and collect crime news (the stories read very much like one of today's syndicated newspaper columns, "News of the Weird"), and, over time, this practice extended to other kinds of stories. But even 30 years after the appearance of the first penny newspaper in New York City, Southern newspapers rarely employed large staffs of reporters, even during war time. The Confederate Press Association did provide some enterprise reporting (where reporters go and obtain information on their own initiative) to its subscribers, and there were a few special correspondents employed by Georgia newspapers. For example, the Oct. 1 edition of the *Savannah Republican* carried a reprint from the *Constitutionalist* labeled, "In the Trenches Near Palmetto, Ga. Sept. 24, 1864 - Special Correspondence of the *Constitutionalist*," signed 'Mignonne' (pseudonyms were the norm). Competition among newspapers was not a consideration in the South, explaining the continued use of newspaper 'exchanges,' trading each edition of their own papers for those from other publishers.

As mentioned earlier, the major news stories could not necessarily be found on the front page. This was due to technological limitations and the desire to make money. Although advances in the printing press had occurred, type was still set as it had been by Gutenberg: by hand, one letter at a time, backwards, and in columns. The idea of running headlines across more than one column had not yet emerged, so stories were laid out in vertical columns with small headlines to indicate the beginning of each article. Because of the time it took to set type, articles were set as soon as they came in and placed in the wooden galley, a sort of frame that held all the columns of type. Once a galley was set, or even mostly set, it was not taken apart to put in a breaking news story; the story was placed wherever it would fit. Newspapers could do this in the 19th century because their subscribers were used to reading the whole, or at least most of the, paper, which can hardly be assumed today.

Major news also had to share space with advertisers. Front page advertisements were common in these newspapers,⁸¹ generally absorbing the two right-most columns. Then, as now (the *Chronicle* still runs one front page ads), it was possible to charge higher rates for front page ads, and, particularly by the end of 1864, these newspapers were hurting for money. Front page ads brought in the dollars.

The Georgia newspapers examined for this paper reflected the practices of their Confederate peers: so far as their newsgathering capacity was concerned, they were at the mercy of the mails, paper exchanges, functioning telegraph lines and trains' ability to get through (two of the most common headlines in the *Chronicle*, for example, were "From Below," and "From Above," both references to information being brought in by rail passengers and employees). It is obvious from how long it took for the story of Ft. McAllister's fall and the capitulation of

Savannah that, while the people of Georgia eventually found out what was happening, it took days, if not weeks, for important war information to reach the public. And, because of the reliance on paper exchanges and reports from untrained observers (such as passengers on the railroad), when that information did reach its readers, it was not always entirely accurate. Consider for example the *Augusta Chronicle* and the *Augusta Constitutionalist* reports of Kilpatrick's head wound. Neither Sherman nor Nicholas mention this in their memoirs, and the secondary sources consulted for this paper do not mention any harm coming to Kilpatrick during this campaign (other than nearly getting captured by the Confederates when he decided one night to camp some distance from the main body of his cavalry and had only one regiment with him as a guard).⁸² Although the story of Kilpatrick's wound is reported by both papers, the story should probably be discounted. There is no source offered for the information, and the two articles are very similar. An obvious explanation for this is that one newspaper picked up the item from the other (most likely, the *Chronicle* picked up the story from the *Constitutionalist* since the *Constitutionalist* had the story in its December 7 edition and the *Chronicle*'s story ran on Dec. 8). Probably the story was an exaggerated account brought to the *Constitutionalist*, perhaps by someone living in the vicinity of Walker's Bridge. If reporting methods at that time had been different, had each newspaper had its own reporter at the front, witnessing the fighting, and then both reporters filed stories of Kilpatrick's injury, then the report could be given more credence.

The newspapers also appeared to rely on wishful thinking. While the *Chronicle* was well known for its editorial calls for a negotiated peace, its editorials still indicate a strong support for the Confederate forces and for a Confederate victory. The other newspapers considered here, the *Constitutionalist*, *Republican* and

Daily News, all were fire-eaters to some extent. Reports of valiant fighting by the Georgia militia and stories about Confederate victories against Sherman's hoard are more the product of wishful thinking and, perhaps, a desire on the part of the newspapers to keep up the public's spirits. That is not to say that the Georgia militia and Wheeler's cavalry did not fight valiantly; it is obvious from Wheeler's dogged pursuit of Kilpatrick and reports of fighting from Griswoldville to Coosawhatchie that the Confederate cavalry fought valiantly. However, while the Confederates may have won a few skirmishes along the way, in the end, their defense of the state was doomed to failure since the odds so overwhelmingly favored Sherman.

And finally, there is the question of the papers' estimates of enemy forces. Sherman, in his memoirs, says his total force on the march was about 60,000 strong. There was a great deal of speculation about the size of Sherman's force, but the estimates that came from Confederate sources (eyewitnesses, train passengers, etc.) never reached much beyond 45,000, and many estimates of much smaller forces were published. One or two items were reprinted from Northern papers, the *New York Herald* particularly, which did estimate Sherman's force accurately, and those numbers were reprinted in the Georgia papers, but given little consideration.

The papers' problems in accurately assessing Sherman may reflect the cultural preference in the South for the elitist, knight-errant style of warfare exemplified in the South's worship of its cavalry leaders and troopers. Enthusiastic reports regarding cavalry battles seemed not to notice that Sherman's massive infantry columns were plodding across Georgia unaffected by Joe Wheeler's harassing assaults. The very fact that Wheeler was always fighting with Kilpatrick's cavalry should have

shown Georgia journalists what their cavalry was accomplishing - nothing. In fact, Georgia newspapers failed to see the connection between the cavalry fights and Sherman's destruction and looting. The looting should have reminded editors of something that they knew: Sherman was living off the land (not a new practice) and not relying on supply lines. If there were no supply lines to attack, the Southern cavalry could not prevail, because cavalry alone could never seriously damage the Union infantry formations. In the previous two centuries, cavalry had almost never successfully attacked opposing infantry single-handedly. This suggests that the South's vision of warfare lay even further back in history, perhaps even in the middle ages. Georgia journalists reflected their culture in this, and therefore could not accurately cover the campaign of a general who has never been accused of harboring a romanticized vision of war.

Notes

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6. *Ibid.*, 71.
7. William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of Gen. William T. Sherman, Vol. II* (New York, 1875), 193.
8. *Ibid.*, 179.
9. Jacob D. Cox, *The March to the Sea, Franklin and Nashville* (New York, 1882), 5.

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11. Cox, 21.
12. *Ibid.*, 6.
13. Sherman, 179.
14. Jim Miles, *Georgia Civil War Sites* (Warner Robbins, 1987), 92.
15. *Ibid.*
16. *Ibid.*, 94.
17. *Ibid.*, 95.
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20. *Ibid.*
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22. *Augusta Chronicle*, 20 Nov., 1864.
23. *Augusta Chronicle*, 23 Nov., 1864.
24. J. Cutler Andrews, *The South Reports the Civil War* (Princeton, 1970), 496.
25. *Augusta Chronicle*, 19 Nov., 1864.
26. *Savannah Republican*, 19 Nov., 1864.
27. Sherman, 191.
28. *Augusta Chronicle*, 20 Nov., 1864.
29. *Augusta Chronicle*, 22 Nov., 1864.
30. *Augusta Chronicle*, 22 Nov., 1864.
31. *Savannah Republican*, 23 Nov., 1864.

32. John W. Rowell, *Yankee Cavalrymen Through the Civil War with the Ninth Pennsylvania Cavalry* (Knoxville, 1971), 201.
33. *Ibid.*, 204
34. Miles, 96.
35. Miles, 96-97.
36. *Ibid.*, 97-98.
37. Sherman, 190.
38. *Savannah Daily News*, 23 Nov., 1864.
39. Rowell, 209.
40. Miles, 102.
41. Brevet Maj. George Ward Nicholas, *The Story of the Great March from the Diary of a Staff Officer*, (New York, 1865), 70.
42. *Ibid.*, 193.
43. *Ibid.*, 102-103.
44. Sherman, 193.
45. Sherman, 194.
46. *Augusta Chronicle*, 25 Nov., 1864.
47. *Augusta Chronicle*, 23 Nov., 1864.
48. *Savannah Daily News*, 24 Nov., 1864.
49. *Savannah Republican*, 24 Nov., 1864.
50. *Savannah Daily News*, 24 Nov., 1864.
51. *Augusta Chronicle*, 24 Nov., 1864.
52. *Augusta Chronicle*, 27 Nov., 1864.
53. Mott, 363.
54. William Harden, *A History of Savannah and South Georgia* (Atlanta, 1969), 463-464.

55. *Augusta Chronicle*, 1 Dec., 1864.
56. *Ibid.*
57. *Augusta Chronicle*, 5 Dec., 1864.
58. *Augusta Chronicle*, 3 Dec., 1864.
59. Letter from E. P. Birch and N. Kingman of Clinton, Ga. (Jones County), *Augusta Chronicle*, 5 Dec. 1864.
60. *Augusta Chronicle*, 7 Dec., 1864.
61. *Augusta Constitutionalist*, 7 Dec., 1864.
62. Sherman, 194.
63. Nichols, 85.
64. *Augusta Chronicle*, 8 Dec., 1864.
65. Nicholas, 85-86.
66. *Augusta Chronicle*, 9 Dec., 1864.
67. *Augusta Chronicle*, 10 Dec., 1864.
68. *Ibid.*
69. *Augusta Chronicle*, 11 Dec., 1864.
70. Sherman, 196.
71. Sherman, 231.
72. This was R. R. Cuyle, president of the Savannah, Albany and Gulf Railroad. *Augusta Chronicle*, 13 Dec., 1864.
73. *Augusta Chronicle*, 17 Dec., 1864.
74. Sherman, 211-212.
75. *Augusta Chronicle*, 20 Nov., 1864.
76. Sherman, 217.
77. *Augusta Chronicle*, 22 Dec., 1864.

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