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(Theme music)

- The following is a production of the Pritzker Military Museum and Library. Bringing citizens and citizen soldiers together through the exploration of military history, topics, and current affairs, this is *Pritzker Military Presents*.

(Applause)

- Welcome to *Pritzker Military Presents* with author J.D. Dickey discussing his book *Rising in Flames: Sherman's March and the Fight for a New Nation*. I'm your host Jay Williams, and this program is coming to you from the Pritzker Military Museum and Library in downtown Chicago. It's sponsored by members of the Museum and Library. This program and hundreds more are available on demand at PritzkerMilitary.org. On November 15, 1864, General William T. Sherman set out from Atlanta to begin his March to the Sea, a 300-mile scorched earth campaign that was intended to cripple the South's military, economy, and morale. The vast destruction of Sherman's march also forced Americans to grapple with difficult questions of past injustices and the future of the new nation. Newly freed slaves took on new roles as soldiers, builders, activists, and citizens. Women found themselves directly involved with Sherman's campaign, either rallying support and material goods for the soldiers or helping their destroyed towns recover after the army passed through. While the Civil War threatened to bring America to the brink of self-destruction, the conflict, and Sherman's epic march in particular, not only quelled confederate forces but dramatically transformed the nation. A story rich with despair and hope, brutality and passion, J.D. Dickey's book *Rising in Flames* shows how Americans found themselves and their new country in the midst of destruction. Drawing from a wealth of official and personal documents, J.D. Dickey brings military and social history to bear on Sherman's legendary march and suggests that this most brutal of American battles was also the most important event in shaping the nation that was to come. J.D. Dickey is the New York Times best-selling author of *Empire of Mud: The Secret History of Washington D.C.* He has written for The Independent and Daily Telegraph, and has made appearances on CSPAN's *Book TV* and *The Takeaway* on Public Radio International. Please join me in welcoming J.D. Dickey to the Pritzker Military Museum and Library.

(Applause)

- Thank you very much. I appreciate the chance to be here at the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, and I appreciate the work the staff did to get me to this point, and I'm happy to talk about my book. You know, when I came to Chicago and took the blue line in, one of the first things I wanted to see just north of the Monroe stop was the site of an old theater. It hasn't been here in quite some time. And the name of it is McVicker's theater. Do you remember McVicker's Theater? Okay. Well, it was torn down in the 1980s, and that was the third incarnation of the theater. The second incarnation of the theater was torn down in the 1890s after a fire, and the first incarnation was wiped out in 1871 with the Great Fire. But before that it was pretty important to the Civil War, because McVicker's Theater wasn't just a theater. It had all kinds of bawdy and serious plays, but on the ground floor was the office of the Chicago Sanitary Commission, the branch--the local branch--of the United States Sanitary Commission. And what this organization did was funnel the food, the medicine, the medical supplies to the troops that the US government couldn't--the commissary of the US government, and the quartermaster, whatever it lacked. And by the time the Civil War was done the people who operated the US Sanitary Commission had contributed twenty-five million dollars in

supplies with 70,000 boxes a month going out of McVicker's Theater. So what I want to talk about when I talk about Sherman's march is the way that Chicago especially and Illinois in particular and the states of the Midwest, or as they called it "the old northwest" or just the west, helped contribute to the success of the western armies, which controversially some might say was the key to the Union victory because it was in the west that Ulysses S. Grant had developed his military reputation as well as General Sherman. That's what my book is about, about how the great line of victory began in the Midwest and reached all the way down to the swamps of southern Georgia and the ports of Savannah and all the way in between. So with that as an overview, I want to start with Illinois because there are several key characters in the book that are from Illinois. In fact Illinois is the key to my book, and all different parts of Illinois, not just Chicago. But we'll start with Chicago because that's where we are. And the person running the show who was behind the Chicago Sanitary Commission with her partner Jane Hoge was a woman who was a celebrity at the time named Mary Livermore. I don't know if any of you have heard of Mary Livermore, but at the time she was a great celebrity. This isn't someone obscure who in researching the book I found and said, "Oh, this woman did some incredible things but only twelve or thirteen people her." No, in the Gilded Age she was actually America's best-paid and most famous woman orator. And you know, people came from miles around to hear her speeches throughout the country. She advocated for any number of topics that are still controversial today. She was by the end of her life a Christian socialist, which is an interesting combination, and she certainly wrote very well about what that meant. But during the Civil War she was fundamental to the success of the Union troops because her organization that she started was able to convey these supplies from the 4,000 individual soldiers aid societies that she helped set up throughout the Midwest. Travelling around, going from place to place, encouraging individual people to contribute anything they could to the war effort. Now this included medical supplies and linens. It included clothing, socks, jackets, you name it, and also food--from pickle to salt pork. And she encouraged each of her donors to send in one box a month. Doesn't sound like much but it did amount to 70,000 boxes coming into her office. And from that they were conveyed through US Sanitary vehicles down to the front into Tennessee and into Georgia. This was the backbone of the operation that helped to feed and cloth Sherman's troops in combination with the army's own commissary and quartermaster. So she had pioneered this organization through force of will. She had come from Massachusetts and left because she didn't find it comfortable to her way of being. She also wanted to get away from her dad. Her dad was a militant hardline Calvinist Baptist and didn't believe in forgiveness, believed in predestination, things like that. She herself was a Universalist. She was married to a Universalist preacher. Now Universalists are similar to Unitarians. In fact today I believe the religion is combined. But it basically was a social gospel. She believed she should be out there doing something. And so at the time she started with her pursuit of the Civil War funding, she was responsible for any number of charities in Chicago, including charities for women and children, charities for homeless children. She wrote for the New Covenant newspaper for her church. She attended the 1860 Republican National Convention that saw Lincoln be nominated as president, and she did all these things while having to care for several children. And her story is an amazing one, and it's a shame she's kind of overlooked by history. If not forgotten, at least she should be memorialized more. But for me, she's what Chicago is all about--Chicagoans coming together and transferring the rich material wealth and goods of the Midwest into the army and into the South. But it's not just that; it's also other people who were able in different parts of Illinois to come together and create something special and unique in terms of the way the western army operated. Going further south--we'll go town by town south into the southern tip of

Illinois--there was Galesburg, where a woman named Mary Ann Bickerdyke, who was an almost penniless widow, came out of nowhere as a botanic physician. She was basically a naturopath, and came to be one of the most critical nurses in the Union Army. She built 300 field hospitals. She challenged the Union generals who stood in her way. And Sherman famously said, "I can't do anything to help you," when a rival general complained about her, "she outranks me."

(Laughter)

- And she said, "Well, Uncle Billy Sherman, he's a big enough man to admit it because he knows I get my commission from God, not from the US Army." And it was through force of will that she managed to transform herself from someone who was poverty stricken into someone critical to the Union effort. She started doing it in Cairo, where she built six--well, not built, but she managed six different Union hospitals, taking them from a state of filth and decay into modern, clean, well run establishments staffed by women. Now, nurse as woman is a concept that's almost synonymous to us, but at the time often many nurses were male, and they were orderlies for generals. And it really didn't work out that way. A lot of them were not trained for the duty, and a lot of facilities were in terrible shape. But Mary Ann Bickerdyke comes along and through her force of will eventually changes the tenor and scope in terms of what army nursing looked like, and she works very closely with the US Sanitary Commission as well. Now going further south into Illinois, we come to Canton, and that's the home of a common soldier, who, if you've been reading about the Civil War you may know--his name is Charles Wills, and he was a captain, and he came also from obscurity, but his journal is one of the best records of the era because it tells us in very colorful and dramatic language what it was like to invade Tennessee and Georgia. It tells us about the brutal battles and about the way that he woke up to what the reality of warfare meant, including at one point in Missouri near Bird's Point finding a group of Southern terrorists basically who are carting around a group of Union soldiers' skulls and using them as soup bowls. It shocked him to the core, and he took that all the way down to Georgia, and being present for one of the rare battles on the March to the Sea at Griswoldville. The man had a lot of humanity, and it's expressed in his journal, which is one of the great common records of the era, and well worth reading. And at the end of the war he became what Southerners might have called a carpetbagger, but really what it meant was, he found things in the South to his liking and just wanted to go there to see if he could improve it. And he operated a sugar plantation until he died of malaria. It was Louisiana. So further south going deeper, we come to one of the key areas in Illinois, Bellville. Now in Bellville Illinois it was the home and farmstead of Friedrich Hecker. Hecker was a German immigrant. He had come to the US after the failures of the revolutions in Europe in 1848. His own state Baden Wurttemberg was an authoritarian one, and Hecker was a believer in universal human rights and civil liberties. Well, the Europeans of the time didn't take very kindly to such notions, and he was forced into exile. And he came here, and he was one of the most famous Illinoisans there was. If we were having this discussion in 1860 everybody would know who Friedrich Hecker was. And at the time he commanded the following-- quite a sizable following of people who were interested in what this former revolutionary had to say about things and what kind of infantry regiment he could command. Now it turns out plenty of people were willing to serve with him, and they weren't just German Americans. They were Swiss and Scandinavian, German Jews from Chicago, and other people who historically hadn't been represented. Many of them only spoke their own language in their regiments and with officers who spoke only that language. And if you look at it overall the story of immigrants in the US Army isn't just a casual one. We're not talking two or three percent. No, of the two million Union soldiers who fought, one quarter of them were foreign-born: 500,000. And of those, seventy percent were German

or Irish extraction. There are a lot of Germans in the US Army including in roles such as general like Carl Schurz. And Lincoln himself thought that he owed his reelection to them. The fact is if there weren't enough Germans in Illinois or Chicago, he might not have had a second term. Now that's debatable from a historical point of view, but nonetheless there's no doubt that Friedrich Hecker and his forces, the men that he marshaled in the 24th and the 82nd Illinois volunteer infantry, were critical to some battles. These men fought at Chancellorsville, and the battle was lost as we know, largely because of the incompetence of the commander Joseph Hooker, and Germans were blamed because they were an easy scapegoat. In fact many even called them the Flying Dutchmen, even though their record showed nothing of the sort. And this drove somebody like Hecker to distraction. He didn't know how to handle the criticism from the press and became very frustrated with the situation. How was it that you could possibly serve very nobly in combat, and then the press would declare war against you? And he ultimately had to drop out of the army, and the person who replaced him was a Jewish German immigrant named Edward Solomon, former Chicago city alderman, and many people thought a savior to certain people in the town. Famously on one occasion he had rescued an African American worker from a white mob on the streetcar, and Solomon's record preceded him, and he ultimately became the man that led those forces deep into the South. And finally on our trip through Illinois before we talk about Sherman, there was John Logan. Now you can't help but know John Logan because Logan Square is named after him. There's a great memorial in the center to the Illinois Centennial as a state. And there are monuments to John Logan around the country. Logan's Circle in Washington D.C. is named after him. And even in my hometown of Portland Oregon there is a Logan Street. The Logan Street in Portland, Oregon is kind of like Logan's reputation nationally outside of Illinois in that it's largely forgotten. There are a number of Civil War streets in Portland, named after Sherman and Sheridan, people like this. But only Logan Street was paved over by the construction of Interstate 5 in the 1960s. So Logan Street is one block long and is a completely uncelebrated street, and this is one of the reasons that got me thinking about this. This guy who was so critical to the Union Army effort in invading the South should be largely forgotten outside of Illinois. So without going too much into detail let me just describe a few of the things that he did and the journey that he took. The story of John Logan is a story of American transformation. It begins with someone who is a young legislator, authors the Black Law of Illinois. This is the law in 1853 that keeps African Americans from settling in Illinois, keeps them out of the state, and if they resist they can be sold into slavery. He goes into the war as a congressman from southern Illinois, from Egypt as it's called, from the Marion area, and he is reluctant to endorse the war effort. But Lincoln has confidence that he will fight on behalf of the Union, and he does. He comes around. And when he's actually fighting for the Union he is not some Rambo kind of figure who's at the front lines dodging bullets and leading his troops onward, although he does that. He's also someone that has almost been killed multiple times and keeps doing it. He's leading from the front at the Battle of Fort Donaldson with a shattered rib from a pistol that has exploded in his shirt, his jacket pocket, from blunt force to his shoulder, and he's riding his horse and takes one final bullet before the horse goes down and he blacks out. He wakes up in an army field hospital, and who should be there looking at him but Mary Ann Bickerdyke, the nurse. And so Logan recovers from that, eventually is made a general--one of the so-called political generals, but much more than that. He is someone who proves that citizen soldiers can exist in this army, and it's not just about regulars. It's about people, whether they're politicians or obscure former clerks like Peter Joe Osterhaus who came out of nowhere in order to do something to aid the Union. And Logan is perfect for that because not only does he represent that, he represents transformation. Through the

course of the war Logan goes from a near secessionist at the beginning, a Confederate sympathizer, to someone who is a radical abolitionist. By the 1870s he's in the US Senate and becomes one of the most famous abolitionists in the country. Frederick Douglass calls him the black eagle of Illinois. And the transformation happened in the Deep South based on what he saw on those plantations and the abuses that were going on of black people. It got into Logan's head, he paid attention to it, just like a lot of other Union troops did including Charles Wills and countless other soldiers, and they were transformed by it. They were completely changed. And so when people talk about what the Civil War was really about, you know, and there's sometimes this argument about states rights versus slavery. That's like an old argument. It used to be--the Lost Cause mythology said it was all about states' rights. At the beginning of the war many troops fought simply to preserve the Union. Many Illinois troops like those of other states were focused on secession, not abolition. But by actually seeing slavery in the flesh and what it meant, they were able to enact Lincoln's emancipation proclamation in the field. And this is critical because without that kind of direct experience that the forces of the west had in invading the South, there simply would not have been the same sort of cultural transformation that happened after the war with the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments outlawing slavery and giving African Americans the right to vote. And this was critical to it. Logan's problem however didn't stem from any of those things. He was a self-made man, he was confident, he was brave on the battlefield, and he was willing to change. His problem, according to William Sherman, was he didn't go to West Point. And West Point had a lot of sway in the opinions of people like William Sherman. Because as the general said, "The army is a good school, but West Point is better." Then why did he say that? Well, he had said that after the battle of Atlanta in which Logan almost singlehandedly had preserved victory for the Union by exhorting his troops from the front when his 15th army corps threatened to fall apart. He was waving his hat, his long black hair riding in the wind, looking like the very god of war, as some soldiers said to describe him, and he managed to preserve an incredibly critical victory, and one that ultimately ensured the Union capture of Atlanta. This man had been promoted to being head of the Army of the Tennessee after its leader James McPherson was killed in the field, but Sherman thought otherwise. After a couple days he revoked the brevet. He took it away and gave it to someone who wasn't even in the Army of the Tennessee, Oliver Howard. And this really bothered Logan. And he went home to campaign but ultimately joined Sherman's troops later. So now we're gonna talk about Sherman. What kind of person would revoke a military commission for John Logan, and why was West Point so special? Well it was special to him because of course he had gone to West Point. But in many ways this was an area in which Sherman's understanding of how this war was different than what was being taught in textbooks. Sherman was a brilliant general, but it wasn't because of what he learned at West Point. It was because of what he learned on his own in the field. Because the prevailing military doctrine, as some of you may know from studying the Civil War, was that idea that came from Jomini--I think I'm pronouncing his name correctly--which was essentially Napoleonic doctrine, which Henry Halleck who is army general in chief, and others had supported. And you could find brilliant tacticians of this sort of strategy. Robert E. Lee was one of them. And not so brilliant tacticians like George McClellan. But regardless, this ideology was what pervaded and what was fundamental to the way the army conducted itself. And Sherman at least on paper believed in this philosophy, but in the field he didn't. He executed his campaigns quite differently than what was taught in military textbooks and at West Point, and that's what's so infuriating about what he did to John Logan, and for which Logan never forgave him. He became a congressional antagonist to him in the 1870s when General Sherman was leading the army and Logan was a senator, and Logan made

sure his army was audited and all the books were checked out and the favors not granted to William Sherman because he never forgot that, his grudge against William Sherman. But at the time William Sherman certainly thought that Napoleonic tactics had their value but were limited in scope. And what he did on his campaigns was legendary. But to talk about Sherman we have to talk about what kind of person this was. How was he self-made? Now Sherman being something of a legendary figure himself, his background is not obscure. He had served as a captain in the armed forces and then later tried a number of pursuits in the civilian world. Among them he was a streetcar president, he was a banker in San Francisco and New York, he was a lawyer, he was the superintendent of a military college in Louisiana—didn't do too badly at that job, but then was called up with the Civil War by Lincoln and asked to lead a military department, the Department of the Cumberland in Kentucky. And this is where Sherman ran into trouble because Sherman was someone who needed to adapt, and the time in 1861 hadn't been his time to adapt. He became paranoid. He overestimated the number of enemy troops he was facing, and he worried that there were subversives behind every tree. A lot of people thought he was driven to distraction, maybe having paranoid reactions, and the newspaper the Cincinnati Commercial famously had a headline that said, "General William T. Sherman Insane." And it stuck with him for a few months, but luckily his father-in-law Thomas Ewing was able with a coordinated publicity campaign, I guess you'd have to call it, and pressure on others, politicians, to bring Sherman back into the fold. And Sherman caught a commission at the district of Cairo, which was formerly U.S. Grant's commission, and he was able to write a note after Fort Donaldson to Grant saying to this man who he outranked, and he had seniority over, "I have faith in you, command me in any way." And that was the first thing Sherman really did right. The fact that Sherman was able to overcome his ego, to put it to the side, and allow someone who had been a colonel only a few months before to give him orders is really the mark of someone who is not your common general. So of course after this before the events of this book he serves bravely at Shiloh and at Vicksburg and is asked to rescue the army at Chick--Chattanooga after the debacle at Chickamauga. Have to get those Chicks right. And it was because of the debacle at Chickamauga where William Rosecrans made some critical errors that led to the bloodiest battle on the western front. It was sixteen to 18,000 people killed, which was the second bloodiest battle overall after Gettysburg in the Civil War. And so Sherman had to come and help rescue him with the aid of his Army of the Tennessee and his 15th corps led by, as we know, John Logan. So they get to Chattanooga, and Sherman thinks he can approach this battle in the same way that other generals are approaching, in other words tactically. He's thinking Napoleonic tactics. Now General Sherman is many things, but he's not a brilliant tactician. This is not someone like Robert E. Lee or someone who's going to simply out maneuver another army and trick it into doing things against its will. That isn't Sherman's way. In fact at Shuttle Hill he tries at dawn to mount a dramatic push from the army left against the fearsome troops of General Pat Cleburne of the Southern Confederacy, and he finds he's on the wrong hill--Billy Goat Hill instead of Tunnel Hill. And the attack ends in incompetence, and Sherman is blamed for it. And what happens then is that a faint toward the center by the Army of the Cumberland, the disgraced army from William Rosecrans, ends up fighting without orders and charging up Missionary Ridge to take the day. It's a remarkable scene, and it is one that's lauded in military history, and yet one created by accident and having little to do with William Sherman other than he just didn't execute it correctly. The campaign for Atlanta continues from there in the spring of 1864, and he faces some setbacks, although he slowly proceeds toward Atlanta. And outside Atlanta he fights at Kennesaw Mountain. John Logan cannot believe that Sherman is asking his 15th corps to attack an entrenched defensively solid Confederate

troop front with superior numbers and the advantage of elevation. But Sherman does it anyway, and thousands of troops die. And at this point Logan is getting very frustrated with Sherman because on the tactical front he's not performing to expectation. But Sherman is a lot more than a tactician. As most people know he's a brilliant strategist, and perhaps the greatest strategist of the Civil War. And one thing he understands is that crippling the material resources of the South and sapping their will to fight is critical to ending the war early and to bringing the Confederacy to its knees. Now how are they gonna do that? Well, start with Atlanta. He has the advantage of facing John Bell Hood, who unlike General Johnston who he was facing in northern Georgia, decides to send wave after wave of Confederate troops against him in fortified positions and suffers four losses early on. The most critical one of those is of course the Battle of Atlanta, but others at Ezra Church and Peach Tree Creek end similarly in failure and guarantee that ultimately by September of 1864 the Union Army will occupy Atlanta, and here's where Sherman's theories start. So Sherman has taken control of the city, but he doesn't want to fully fortify it 'cause he doesn't want to deal with the population, so he has them evacuated. In other words he boots them out and makes them refugees. Now at the time, and even now, this is a controversial thing that Sherman does--he's depopulating a city before he destroys it. Now the city had already been damaged of course by the Confederates on the way out, setting fire to railcars and other ordinarates in order to prevent it from being of value to the Union military, but the evacuation of Atlanta, the bombardment that happened in August 1864 led many people to question him. In fact the Cincinnati Commercial, that same paper that called him insane, said, "General Sherman has walked all over Atlanta." And they didn't mean it complementarily. So among some quarters this is a questionable pursuit. And then when the general burns the city in mid-November of 1864, it's a shocking sight, one that I recount in my book, and yet it's not surprising because this sort of warfare that Sherman was developing, which he called hard war, was critical to him, and it wasn't just then either. As Charles Wills reports, as early as 1862 the troops of the 15th corps under the command of Sherman ultimately as head of the Army of the Tennessee are going into different small towns and demanding their inhabitants take a loyalty oath. If they don't take the oath, the town is burned. Also subversives are shot, by necessity, and at places like Jackson the land according to Sherman's own words, for thirty miles around is stripped of crops and burned and destroyed. The same thing happens in Meridian, Mississippi. So by the time it happens in Atlanta, no one is surprised. This was Sherman's developing plan. He had formed this idea called hard war. Now hard war in modern terminology is sometimes considered a forerunner to total war, but it's not really fair to compare the two. It's a forerunner; it's not the same thing, as many historians have pointed out. This isn't a situation where he's lining up the inhabitants of the village and shooting them and things like that. He is simply trying to crush their will to fight and to destroy their material resources--the railroads that supply them, the cotton gins that provide the commercial backbone, and also the arsenals and magazines and other fundamentals of warfare. So Sherman is doing this with an understanding that this is how he's going to fight his hard war, but this isn't what is most important about Sherman. This is what he's known for, this is his reputation, but Sherman's March to the Sea isn't just important because of the way he orders his troops to forage and take material resources from farmsteads and to take their cattle so Sherman can use them for his troops and to take their vegetable gardens and to hunt out treasure and to do everything else he did along with burning their buildings and also crushing their railroads and will to fight--it isn't just that. It's also the fact that what Sherman has done is disengage from another army. John Bell Hood, his nemesis around the time of Atlanta, has led Sherman on this wild goose chase in October of 1864 in north Georgia. Basically threatening to cut Sherman's supply lines.

But Napoleonic doctrine says you cannot cut your supply lines. You have to ensure your supply lines are functional in order to feed and cloth and outfit, provide weapons to your troops. But there's John Bell Hood in the background doing this very thing, and Sherman gets tired of it. And so he writes to Lincoln and Grant and asks for permission to disengage from Hood. But won't Hood go into Tennessee? Won't he attack places like Nashville that have already been held by the Union? Well, maybe. Sherman says, "He can go as far as the Ohio River for all I care." The fact is, that's not what Sherman is interested in. He's interested in executing his strategy without warfare, without bloodshed, but at the same time crippling the material resources of the Southern heartland where the food is grown--remember it's almost harvest time in Georgia--and where a lot of the troops are being supplied, where a lot of the mansions are and a lot of the plantations that rely upon chattel slavery in order to function. And so Sherman convinces his superiors that he be allowed to disengage, and to me in my mind this is one of the great gambles of the Civil War, one of the great risks, and Sherman made it--and only Sherman could have, maybe Grant, but only Sherman at that time could have done this, with relying on generals like Thomas and Schofield to take care of Hood in Nashville and in Franklin, which they did, but he didn't know that at the time. So he proceeds in the March to the Sea. And the March to the Sea, also known as the Savannah Campaign, is the first part in a multipronged attack. The first part is going to take care of Savannah by taking it out of commission by doing the damage to the Southern heartland, and then the second part is going to go up through the Carolinas and punish the heart of the Confederacy, because everybody in the Union Army by this point who has a memory for events from 1860 hates South Carolina because it's the cradle of secession. So off they go, and along the way this is where a lot of the transformation happens, and we find this in soldiers' journals, where some of the things that they had been taught and that they had heard from Southern rhetoric proves not to be true. These plantations are not just genteel establishments with people treated like family. These are places of horror and bloodshed. And they find slave collars. They find slave pens. They find all manner of implements used to torture people. They see in front of their eyes elderly African Americans being abused by children and other things that make their stomach turn. And throughout the course of the campaign men like John Logan, Charles Wills and countless other soldiers are changed by this. Not all of them, but enough to see that the war is more than about protecting the Union, keeping it together, like a lot of soldiers had fought for in the beginning. It's about slavery and eradicating a sin against humanity, and they get it. And Sherman leads them on the charge, because although he's not as concerned about slavery--and we'll get to that in a minute--he understands that it's the foundation to the material strength of the South. Forced labor is critical to how the South functions. And so plantations go up in flames, and railroad ties get bent and tortured into corkscrews, and gardens get raided. And pillars of smoke decorate the horizon as four different army columns proceed into the South. Now this is disproportionate warfare. There are 60,000 Union troops versus about 12,000 Confederate. The Confederates are not army troops. There are a lot of cavalry who are basically functioning as guerillas, and Georgia military--untrained Georgia military. These are elderly men and children. And the very few battles that take place there are stomach turning, like at Griswoldville, which results in a slaughter because these men that the Confederates are sending after Union troops are untrained, they have no business being on a battlefield, and a lot of them wind up bleeding in a trench, but it also brings out the humanity of people like Charles Wills who brings these men water after they nearly slaughtered them, and they had begun to put human face to the enemy while at the same time understanding what the conflict is really about. By the time they get near savannah, the 15th corps, which is led in this case--actually it's the

2nd division of the 15th corps led by General William Hazen takes Fort McAllister, which is the key toward taking the city of Savannah. Savannah is abandoned by the South, by General William Hardy, and Sherman's company take over, and that's when Sherman's Christmas happens in Savannah, and he becomes a military hero because of the execution of his doctrine, because of what it means to fight hard war, to disengage from the enemy, and to do all manner of innovative strategies in order to bring his troops into the heart of the South without supply lines. They're foraging, they're finding cattle, they're nearly starving to death by the time they get to Savannah, but they succeed. This is Sherman's second big gamble. It looks good to us from history because it was successful, but a lot of people were worried that his troops would get lost or that they would starve to death, and on several occasions they almost did both. But by the time they get to Savannah, success, and Sherman is feted as a hero throughout the North. And people forget that just a few years before the newspapers were calling him crazy and demanding he be removed from the army. But views change quickly because nothing sells like success, and Sherman is happy to be there. But at this point questions start arising from people in the Union. And one of the big questions is if Sherman can be adaptable in terms of his military rhetoric, why can't he be adaptable in terms of race as well? Now this isn't a modern perspective on this, this was stated at the time by Lincoln and Grant and other officers. You need to use African American troops, US colored troops, in order to fight these battles. Like countless other armies were doing in the Union and with success quite often as we know. But instead when potential black troops come to join Sherman's forces, he relegates them to garrison duty or disarms them completely and gets them to work building trenches or doing manual labor. And as the war goes on this upsets more and more people despite the success of Sherman's victories. But he persists in it because he has certain attitudes that among many things don't allow for the equal treatment of blacks. Now I want to say this about Sherman, because people have talked about his racial beliefs and things like that before, but we have to put it in context about what an unusual person Sherman was, and for the only time, I just want to read about a page from my book because I think this helps understand the mentality of how Sherman began the war. It isn't just how he feels about African Americans. In fact there were a lot of people General Sherman didn't like or trust. These included Jews, whom he saw as mercenary speculators and arms dealers who traveled in swarms. They included American Indians, who if not under control of whites might be inclined to rise up in guerilla bands to attack them. And they included Mexicans whose embrace of quote, "general equality and amalgamation for different races and peoples led in his mind only to anarchy, race mixing, and a collapse of civilization." He didn't stop there. In his fowler moods, especially at the outset of the war, he sprayed his spleen to just about every corner of society. So many people were ruining the country as he saw it, and for that they merited his deep scorn. The, quote, "old women and grannies of New England and their permissive politicians subverted the constitution and had allowed the rampage of uncontrolled democracy over the law." The Southerners had destroyed the nation with secession and enveloped it in what he would later call useless debates over, quote, "the political nonsense of slave rights, states' rights, uncontrolled freedom of conscience, license of the press, and other such trash." The urban capitalists had enriched themselves with the expense of the economy, and the great mass of people themselves had delighted in violence and chaos for their own depraved ins, because from, quote, "California to Maine, any man could do murder, robbery, or arson if the people's prejudices lay in that direction." He had contempt for himself as well, writing, I look upon myself as a dead cock in the pit, not worthy of further notice, and will take my chances as they come. About the only thing Sherman did trust or value was the US military. As he wrote at the beginning of the war, "My only hope for the salvation of

the constitution of the country is in the army." In fact he believed that only soldiers should vote in a time of war. In fact that makes his philosophy strangely familiar to readers of modern science fiction. Starship Troopers. If you've ever read that book or seen the movie, kind of embodies Sherman's philosophy better than any Napoleonic doctrine or anything else. He essentially believed citizen soldiers were the key to the republic, and only they should vote in times of war. If anything else happened it disgusted him. So Sherman may have learned a few things in the course of the war: that people in general weren't bad, that he himself was much better than a dead cock in the pit--he was critical to the Union victory--and that African Americans had a role to play in the army, but it took an effort for him to figure this out and a lot of political pressure. And by the time he's in Savannah, an incident has happened at Ebenezer Creek in which one of his generals ironically or perhaps appropriately named Jefferson C. Davis, no relationship to the Confederate president, allows the massacre and the drowning of hundreds of black people at a creek called Ebenezer. So this actually became a cause celebre in the North. And a number of politicians were trying to bring Sherman to heel for what they saw as his racial insensitivity, for his unwillingness to give arms to black troops, among many other things. In fact Henry Halleck, by that time chief of staff of the army, says of Sherman that some people in congress have said you manifest almost criminal dislike of the Negro. And Sherman can do nothing but take his lumps and wait for the secretary of war Edwin Stanton to arrive with the final verdict on Sherman's conduct, at a time when Sherman was overwhelmingly popular in the North having taken Savannah. Now what happens is critical to our understanding of Sherman because we provide a hint that he is able to learn from his errors and adopt a view that was surprisingly ahead of its time. In fact many people would be surprised if they didn't know better to know that Sherman himself is the coauthor of the forty acres and a mule policy of the US Army, which guaranteed freed men and women forty acres of farmstead and various implements and the freedom from having to live with whites other than US soldiers protecting them, and a strip of land through South Carolina and Georgia about thirty miles inland from the sea. In fact that was the conservative version. General Sherman had actually written the year before to Lorenzo Thomas and said, "We ought to take the entire Mississippi Delta region and repopulate it with freed men. We ought to strip these lands from the slave holders and give them to the people who'd been enslaved as a way to cripple the military power of the South and to strip their economy of its core foundation." Well that didn't happen, but forty acres and a mule did, and it was because of a compromise that he reached with Edwin Stanton who co-wrote the measure, and it was promulgated, and about 100,000 African Americans settled along that coastal strip. And it held for a few months, but once the war ended a lot of people, Sherman included, the new president, President Johnson after Lincoln had been assassinated, began to have second thoughts. This is a controversial policy, especially when the nation needed to be tied together. So what could be done with it? What do you do with this policy that's provoking controversy in the South? Because these former slaveholders, they take the loyalty oath and they want to be Americans again, but they really want their land back. Well, President Johnson with the advise of General Sherman rescinds the order, and so this becomes one of history's great what-ifs. What if forty acres and a mule had happened there or along the Mississippi Delta? Would life be different? That isn't the subject of this book, but it is critical to explaining the complicated character of General Sherman, because he wasn't just a misanthrope. He wasn't just a racist. He was also someone who was adaptable in his mindset, and he was someone who although fervently not an abolitionist did more for abolition than any northern politician. And these paradoxes are hard to explain, they're hard to describe, they're hard to accept, but all we can say is that Sherman the strategist was one of the greats in

US military history, regardless of his tactics in terms of military fighting. And so this complicated interweave of who Sherman was and what he represented is critical to this book, and he is in many ways, as I have a chapter title titled this, the tip of the sword, that's what Sherman is in leading his troops forward and developing rhetoric that is at odds of his own practice and also in support of it. He's a man of internal contradictions. But this book isn't just about Sherman. It's about everyone behind him and the troops of the West especially those of Illinois and those of Chicago, who with their manifold labors in support of the Union war effort enable Sherman to do everything that he's done and to test these theories and to go forward, and ultimately to guarantee the Union Army a victory and one that still resonates today. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

- Would Sherman have jeopardized his march if he had sent one of the columns to free the officers who were imprisoned in Macon and the enlisted men in Andersonville?

- That's a great question. So, prisoners of war are an important part of this book, because a lot of people did want to free Andersonville. It was known as a place of absolute horror and terror for captured Union soldiers. And I think it is with a hard heart that Sherman chose to stick to his original plan. I wish I had a map that I could show you, but there's a map in the book. And it shows you that Macon and Andersonville were considered faints. In other words, he had tricked the rebel generals into believing he was going to head further south than he was, toward Macon and Andersonville. And so he fainted in that direction in order to throw them off guard as to where he was actually going. So Andersonville was used--I mean, it's almost amoral to treat it that way, 'cause it was right there. He could have freed it. But according to his strategy and the way he operated, it was better to deceive the Confederates that way. Also there was a significant prisoner of war camp that they did capture, and that was called Camp Lawton, and the 20th corps had captured that, and once they saw the horrible burial mounds that had been created for Union troops and the misery that these men had been in, the captivity that they had been in before they were led away in advance of Sherman's troops, a lot of his men became infuriated, and they burned the local town of Millen. In fact one diarist said, "We burned everything that a match would ignite." And so there was this feeling of payback and revenge. And I ran out of time before I talked about South Carolina, but the burning of Columbia was one of the lowlights of that particular campaign, and it was completely accidental. But the reason it happened was because there were a lot of troops from Andersonville who had fled their captivity and who happened to show up in advance of the 15th corps at about the same time that Sherman had guaranteed the rebels that he would leave their capital alone. But the men were infuriated by the sight of walking skeletons, and they were fed liquor freely by freed men and by pro-Unionist locals, and they became drunk and basically helped set fire to the town. Now it was already kind of smoldering before that, but that's another story. So the idea of prisoner of war camps and their liberation was critical even though Andersonville was left alone.

- One quick question. How many days did it actually take once he left Atlanta all the way to Savannah?

- So it took twenty-eight days to go from Atlanta to the capture of Fort McAllister. And that's the critical sequence, those four weeks. They traversed--in fact, here are the statistics. I have them at the ready. 300 miles in a swath forty to sixty miles wide in four army columns. And did it in twenty eight days, which is, yeah, a pretty impressive march especially because they're carrying cattle and everything else they've stolen and everything else, and by the time they get to the Georgian swamps, they're having to haul rice, and freed men are teaching them how to do that and teaching them other aspects of how to live in the swamp, and hulling acorns and things like that. And so after Fort

McAllister is captured it's, I believe, about seven to ten days before the city of Savannah is fully invested. So yeah.

- So during his march, I mean, to what degree did he feel the positioning of the army was--were they close to crushing the South? Did he feel that this was necessary to kind of wrap it up, or I'm trying to kind of picture--along the continuum of, we're close, or we still really need to do something big.

- Right. So the fear at the time was that the South wasn't going to win, but it could dissolve into guerilla bands and basically keep fighting this bloody warfare, the kind that the US military did in Vietnam. Nobody wanted that. They wanted to wrap it up. But at the time it was beginning to look like that. If you think about the eastern theater and Grant, you know what was going on at the time. Horrible bloody battle in wilderness and Cold Harbor and things like that. And this miserable stalemate in WWI--trenches outside of Petersburg. So the Union Army needed a real ego boost, and Sherman understood politically that this would provide it to Lincoln--and he said that repeatedly in his letters--and also keep the northern spirit up, because if it absolved into guerilla fighting then who knows when the need--who knows how long it would take. Don't forget George Washington had done a number of these things in some southern--or northern states against the British, used guerilla fighting, and Sherman didn't want any part of that. So I think it was good politically as well as militarily.

(Applause)

- Thank you to J.B. Dickey for an outstanding discussion and to members of the Museum and Library for sponsoring this program. The book is *Rising in Flames: Sherman's March and the Fight for a New Nation*, published by Pegasus Books. To learn more about the Pritzker Military Museum and Library, visit us in person or online at PritzkerMilitary.org. Thank you, and please join us next time on *Pritzker Military Presents*.

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(Theme music)

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(Theme music)

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