

Southern Storm: Sherman's March to the Sea

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Review

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Trudeau, Noah Andre *Southern Storm: Sherman's March to the Sea*. Harper, \$35.00 hardcover ISBN 9780060598679

Narrating Sherman's March

In *Southern Storm*, Noah Andre Trudeau has given students of the Civil War the most meticulous and comprehensive treatment of the famous March to the Sea to date. In doing so, he brings to life a whole new level of interesting and revealing detail of Sherman's attempt to "make Georgia howl." Trudeau is the award winning author of *Gettysburg*, and is a former executive producer for National Public Radio.

Trudeau's goal is simple: he wants to paint a specific, yet coherent overview of Sherman's campaign. He has assembled an impressive bibliography of diaries, letters, unit histories, and many other primary sources. Using these, he constructs a day-by-day account of the movements of Sherman's army, the antics of its soldiers, and Georgians left quivering in its wake. His decision to divide the book into chapters based on days gives the reader the feeling not of looking over any particular general's shoulder, but of floating, ghost-like, to various points of observation throughout the whole of the campaign.

Trudeau argues that many of the March's previous historians have misunderstood Sherman, his purpose, and his effects. The March to the Sea demonstrates Sherman at his best, in operational command of his armies, leaving the tactics to his subordinates. By including the civilian and industrial areas of Georgia in the war, he did not inaugurate a new era of "total war." In fact, he intended to promote conservative ends. He wanted to demonstrate to the South that there was no place they were safe from marauding northern armies. This shock, he hoped, would force them back into the Union on terms much like the status quo antebellum. As such, he did not intend to inflict massive civilian casualties or perpetrate wholesale destruction of personal property. In the end,

the March to the Sea looked dramatic to Georgians who had been spared the horrors of war up to that point, but it did not historically distinguish itself for excessive cruelty, even when compared with other Civil War campaigns.

While an excellent book, *Southern Storm* does of course suffer from a few potential drawbacks, as any such massive undertaking would. The sheer amount of detail, while one of the book's strong points, make it difficult at times to keep the overall picture in mind. Also, the book's format—jumping from one perspective to another to another—can be a bit jarring. It sometimes interrupts the flow of the otherwise interesting narrative. Frankly, these are quibbles that emerge more from the fact that it is impossible to write a book that will please every reader than from a weakness in Trudeau's own efforts. For these and other reasons, in spite of the claim on the dust jacket that this is the "final word" on Sherman's March, it is quite likely that other books on the March will be forthcoming, and that they also will contribute to historians' knowledge of events, just as *Southern Storm* has.

The dust jacket also calls *Southern Storm* the "definitive new account" of Sherman's March. There should be little, if any, doubt about this. Trudeau has given historians and the reading public an excellent, detailed narrative that contains more evidence in one chapter than some other history books can marshal in their entirety. Trudeau's perspective on Sherman and the March, while not entirely new, is right on, and represents the more recent consensus of Civil War historians. It is an excellent work, and belongs on the shelf of any serious student of the Civil War.

Brian Melton is the author of Sherman's Forgotten General: Henry W. Slocum and is an Associate Professor of History at Liberty University.