

B&C CONSER

PROFILE: GEN. PHILIP SHERIDAN (1831-1888)

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The date of his birth was March 6, 1831. He never knew where, except it was along his parent's migration route from County Cavan, Ireland to Somerset, Ohio, where the family settled. He was a small, combative kid who quit school early to work in a dry-goods store. Here, Phil Sheridan learned book-keeping and parlayed an acquaintance with a U.S. Congressman into a Military Academy appointment.

In the 1840s, the American public held West Point, with its narrow focus on civil engineering, in low esteem. Half of the entering classes failed to graduate. Sheridan tutored himself in preparation. His roommate, a former schoolteacher, helped him with his studies. Short, argumentative, and a poor Irish-Catholic, Phil was goaded into a fight and was suspended for a year.

He graduated in 1853 in the bottom half of his class in all five graded subjects. Posted in Texas, Sheridan developed a passion for hunting. The following year he was transferred to the Pacific Northwest. Gold had been discovered in Washington. California gold rush veterans surged north, and the local Indians went to war. Over the next seven years, Sheridan was commended for both his "gallant conduct" and "calm temper" in this conflict. His year of cohabitation with the daughter of a local chief would conveniently never be mentioned in his memoirs.

CIVIL WAR

In 1861, when dozens of officers resigned to join the Confederate rebellion, Sheridan quickly made 1st Lieutenant, then Captain, and was transferred to the Army of Southwest Missouri. In his first assignment, as auditor, he uncovered fraud and sent a general to jail. He was next placed in charge of procuring and distributing provisions for the 15,000-man force. In April 1862, following the battle of Shiloh in Tennessee, the rebels withdrew south to Corinth, Mississippi. Sheridan was assigned to coordinate the supply trains as the Union forces slowly followed. Successful, he was promoted to Colonel, put in charge of a cavalry regiment, and finally got his wish to see action.

"Little Phil," only 5 feet 5 inches tall, proved to be a superb student of the battlefield. He mastered surrounding topography, insisted on accurate maps, and excelled in the art of using spies and scouts. His raiders traveled south of Corinth to destroy Confederate rail lines and supply trains. At the battle of Booneville, his brigade held off a larger enemy force while his panicked commanding General was ordering retreat.

Sheridan caught General Ulysses S. Grant's eye, was promoted to Brigadier General, and transferred to eastern Tennessee under the command of General William Rosecrans. In December 1862, Sheridan anticipated the rebel attack at Stones River and held his line long enough for the retreating Union army to regroup. He then withdrew in an orderly manner. His men suffered 40 percent of the union casualties. Grant recommended his promotion to Major General. Sheridan was a national hero.

Union forces took Chattanooga without a fight, simultaneous to the Union victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg. Chasing the rebels south, Rosecrans was defeated at Chickamauga Creek and retreated back to Chattanooga. Regrouping, the union troops attacked the rebel

forces in the overlooking mountains. Sheridan's divisions were to advance only to the base of Missionary Ridge but, to Grant's initial alarm, they continued forward, advanced over the top, and sent the enemy fleeing. Sheridan's casualties were half of the Union's total.

Early in 1864, Grant, now commanding all Union forces, placed Sheridan in charge of the Army of the Potomac's 13,000-man cavalry corps. The Union horse soldiers in Virginia had been underutilized, and Sheridan chafed when his superior, General George Meade, held back the cavalry at the battles of The Wilderness and Spotsylvania Courthouse. Sheridan argued with Meade that he could find and whip the famous Confederate cavalry under J.E.B. Stuart. Meade stormed off to whine to Grant, who responded that perhaps Sheridan should do just that. On May 9, 1864, Sheridan found Stuart at Yellow Tavern, 15 miles north of Richmond. During the three-day battle, Sheridan routed the Confederate forces. Stuart was mortally wounded.

Meanwhile, the confederate General Jubal Early had been using the Shenandoah Valley in northwestern Virginia as a base for raids into Maryland and Pennsylvania. Sheridan, with 40,000 troops, was sent after Early. In September 1864, at the battle of Winchester, the rebels broke through the Union line. Sheridan responded by flanking the enemy and won the battle, but his casualties were double that of Early's.

Sheridan's finest hour occurred one month later at the battle of Cedar Creek. Learning that Sheridan had sent part of his forces back to Grant, Early attacked, and the Union Army fled. Sheridan, holding his headquarter's flag aloft, rode to the front. The troops began to cheer and stomp their feet. Sheridan regrouped his army, reestablished the front line, and rode its entire length waving his hat. Two hundred Union buglers sounded the charge. The hungry



AN EQUESTRIAN STATUE HONORS GENERAL SHERIDAN OF THE UNION ARMY IN THE CIVIL WAR IN FRONT OF THE NEW YORK STATE CAPITOL IN ALBANY.
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VATIONINISTS

and exhausted Confederates soon were in fast retreat. "Sheridan's Ride," coupled with General William Tecumseh Sherman's taking of Atlanta, insured Lincoln's re-election three weeks later.

As Sherman did in Georgia, so did Sheridan in western Virginia. All crops and stored food sheds were burned, and bridges, culverts, and barns were brutally destroyed.

Rejoining Grant in Petersburg in March 1865, Sheridan was sent to prevent Robert E. Lee's escape into North Carolina. At Five Forks, he again rode the line with the battle flag unfurled. At one point, he leaped his horse over the enemy's breastworks and forced rebel troops to surrender at gunpoint. A week

later, when Sheridan cut off his escape at Saylor's Creek, Lee agreed to surrender.

Following Appomattox, Phil Sheridan was sent to Louisiana and Texas. Unreconstructed rebels still remained in office, and both states had a history of violence and intricate political scandals. French troops in Mexico supported the puppet regime of Austrian Archduke Maximilian, and border raids in both directions were common. Comanches harassed settlers in west Texas. Sheridan harbored a strong animosity toward all rebels, especially Texans, and his peremptory style of governance proved ineffective. After two and one-half years, he was transferred to the department

of the Missouri, which encompassed the western territory.

INDIAN WARS

The Plains Indians, victims of invasion, broken treaties, and diminishing game resources, were rising up. Sheridan declared total warfare. The Indians seldom undertook winter combat; Phil Sheridan gave it to them. He sent George Custer to surprise a sleeping Cheyenne village on the Washita River in now western Oklahoma. Custer's raid was an overwhelming victory. The same result occurred from a raid in January of 1871 on a village of Piegans along the Marias River in Montana. The excess of Indian casualties played poorly back East, where the

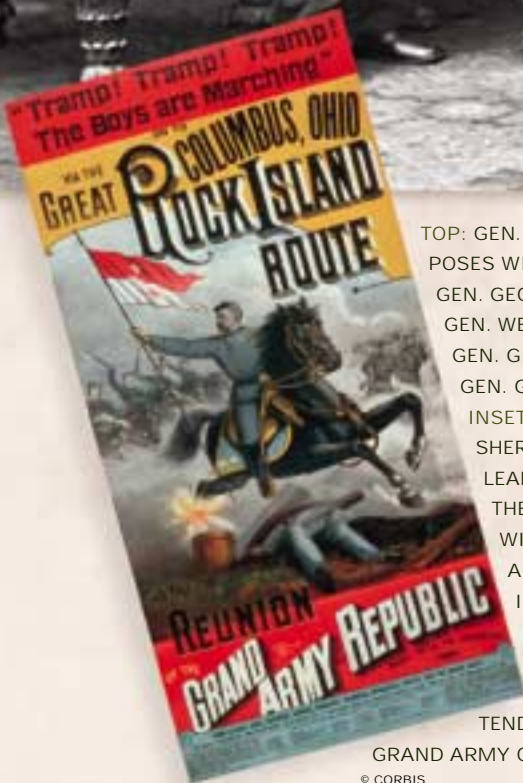
GENERAL SHERIDAN, NICKNAMED "LITTLE PHIL" AT CAMP DURING THE CIVIL WAR.

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B&C CONSERVATIONISTS

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TOP: GEN. SHERIDAN (LEFT) POSES WITH HIS GENERALS GEN. GEORGE FORSYTH, GEN. WESLEY MERRITT, GEN. GEORGE COOK, AND GEN. GEORGE CUSTER. INSET: GENERAL SHERIDAN IS SHOWN LEADING MEN INTO THE BATTLE OF WINCHESTER IN AN ADVERTISEMENT TO INDUCE CIVIL WAR VETERANS TO TAKE THE ROCK ISLAND RAILROAD TO ATTEND A REUNION OF THE GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC.

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clergy and the press vilified Sheridan.

In September 1871, Sheridan hosted a gala hunting party in the West for a select group of businessmen, editors and friends, taking along 16 wagons (one had iced wine) and a 100-man cavalry escort. Within two weeks, they bagged over 200 buffalo and hundreds of antelope, elk, and turkey. Three months later he hosted Grand Duke Alexis of Russia on a similar hunt arranged by the artist Albert Bierstadt, a future B&C member.

Sheridan was in his home in Chicago when the Great Fire broke

out. He assumed leadership for the civilian response, set up a command post, reestablished order, and blew up buildings to create a fire break. Following the fire, he declared martial law, called in tens of thousands of rations, tents, and blankets, and became a national hero once again.

Meanwhile, the problems on the plains were worsening. The Indians were not receiving their promised supplies, and the settlers and market hunters were slaughtering the buffalo. Sheridan turned a blind eye; he believed the Indians would be more readily subjugated if there were no buffalo to hunt. In 1874, he sent a large expedition

under Custer into the Sioux's sacred Black Hills to scout locations for two new forts. Paleontologist/anthropologist (and B&C Club co-founder) George Bird Grinnell accompanied Custer, who sent back exaggerated reports of Black Hills gold. The rush was on.

When the government offered to buy the Black Hills, Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse refused to even attend the conference. The government decided to "buy" the land even if the Sioux didn't wish to sell.

In 1876, Sheridan sent three separate columns of troops after the Sioux. One column of 300 soldiers was repulsed at Powder River. A 1,000-man force was turned back at the Rosebud River. Sheridan was in Philadelphia for the nation's centennial when word reached him that part of the third column, under Custer, with 261 men, had fallen at the Little Bighorn. The Indians, demoralized by their losses, scattered over the plains.

The following year, Chief Joseph and his Nez Pierce, whose crime was that their land contained minerals desirable to the whites, were chased for 1,700 miles across the Pacific Northwest into northern Montana. They surrendered after being assured that they could return home to Idaho. Sheridan did not honor the arresting officer's promise and sent Joseph to the Indian Territory of Oklahoma.

CONSERVATION

Phil Sheridan first heard rumors of the marvels of the Yellowstone area in 1870. The following year, he sent a small party to explore. Sheridan's report, and his friendship with then-President Grant, helped establish Yellowstone as America's first national park in 1872. The problem was that no one knew what a national park was supposed to be.

Between 1873 and 1876, Sheridan sent three more expeditions to the region. George Bird Grinnell, recently appointed as the

natural history editor for *Forest and Stream*, joined the second trip, and recommended military control of the park. Meanwhile, on June 8, 1875, 44-year-old Phil Sheridan wed Irene Rucker, age 22. They would have four children.

Sheridan first toured Yellowstone in 1881. The level of poaching alarmed him. He was also angered that the Interior Department had given a railroad consortium the right to build a spur and develop concessions in order to monopolize the park as a tourist attraction. Sheridan said the park should be in the national trust and not controlled by private enterprise. If the Interior Department would not protect the park, his troops would. He introduced a bold plan to significantly expand the park's boundaries, and appealed to all sportsmen to block the monopolists. Grinnell and Buffalo Bill followed Sheridan's lead, although his most effective ally was Missouri Senator George Graham Vest (a future B&C member). As chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories, Vest in 1883 had a bill passed that forbade monopolies within the park and authorized the U.S. Army to protect it.

In August 1883, Sheridan convinced President Chester A. Arthur and several political dignitaries, including Senator Vest, to visit the park. Guided by Sheridan, the party spent two weeks and rode 230 miles on horseback touring Yellowstone and the Tetons. The luminaries were wonderstruck. The new national interest in preserving Yellowstone was kindled.

By 1886, the Interior Department had proved inept at managing the park, and Sheridan got his wish for a military administration. The Army remained in control of Yellowstone for the next 32 years. Although Congress never did enlarge the boundaries, Presidents Harrison, Cleveland, and Theodore Roosevelt, from 1891 through 1902, set aside vast holdings around the park as forest reserves.

In November 1883, Sheridan replaced Sherman (another future B&C Club member) as General of the Army. The family moved to Washington. Two months after completing his memoirs, Sheridan had a massive heart attack. On August 5, 1888, our nation lost a remarkable hero. "Little Phil" was buried at Arlington National

GENERAL PHIL
SHERIDAN
BOONE AND
CROCKETT CLUB
HONORARY LIFE
MEMBER 1888



Cemetery, less than 100 yards from the pre-Civil War home of his most effective adversary, Robert E. Lee. During its first year, 1888, the Boone and Crockett Club made Phil Sheridan an Honorary Life Member. Unfortunately, Sheridan passed away later that year. It was a fitting tribute for the savior of Yellowstone. ▲▲▲

AN IMAGE FROM A
CIVIL WAR PHOTO
ALBUM CA. 1861-
1865 OF MAJOR
GENERAL PHILIP
HENRY SHERIDAN.
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