

## **“War is Hell:” Total War in ‘64**

11<sup>th</sup> Annual Civil War Symposium presented by the Friends of the Boy in Blue Civil War Memorial

Saturday, March 23, 2024 in Mankato, MN

Union General, William T. Sherman is usually credited with coining the phrase, “war is hell,” to justify the kind of warfare he and his federal army brought upon the Confederate States of America, during the fall and winter of 1864-65, in which civilians and soldiers alike became combatants, and millions of dollars of property was both plundered and destroyed. Sherman believed that Southern civilians were just as responsible for aiding the Confederate cause as the soldiers themselves, and therefore should suffer similar consequences. He reasoned the best way to end the war, as quickly as possible, and in doing so, prevent needless loss of life, was to break the Southern people’s will to resist. Both Sherman, and his superior, General U.S. Grant employed techniques collectively referred to as, “total war,” in order to do just that.

In 1864, the Civil War became a war that was unrestricted in its ferocity, in terms of the weapons used (trenches, telegraph, naval blockade and submarine) the territory or combatants involved, or the objectives pursued. The war was no longer only fought on distant battlefields, in which soldiers remained widely separated from the rest of the population; but it was also fought on peoples’ farms and in towns, where civilians were forced to experience the war first-hand--especially in Virginia, Georgia and South Carolina. The re-election of President Abraham Lincoln, in November, 1864, who supported these harsh measures, in an effort to reunite the war-torn nation, as well as to fulfill the promise of the Emancipation Proclamation to free the slaves, meant that there would be no conditions offered to the South except unconditional surrender.

The use of “total war” in 1864 was both effective, as well as setting a precedent for future wars. The Civil War became the world’s first “modern war;” it resembled World War I than the Napoleonic Wars or anything that came before it. This symposium will examine that bloody transformation.