

**GEN. GEORGE H. THOMAS: CHIEF CONSERVATOR OF THE UNION**

**AND VICTIM OF GROSS HISTORICAL INJUSTICE**

**A Compendium Of Sources In Support Of The Argument**

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June 15, 2003

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Most of us think we know the names of the great Civil War Generals. The greatest of them all, according to many, was the soft spoken Southern gentleman from Virginia. No, not the one named Lee who fought for the South. It was the one who remained loyal to the Union and fought for the *North*. *His* name was Major General George H. Thomas.

George Thomas, renowned only among a relatively small but vocal circle of scholars and students of history, deserves recognition as the principal conservator and savior of the Union. The argument goes like this. Lincoln's reelection in 1864 was necessary if there was to be complete Union victory in the Civil War. His reelection was doubtful, however, until the fall of Atlanta in September of 1864. It was Thomas who was the architect of that victory. It was he who provided the military muscle that produced that victory, and not Grant and Sherman, as popularly believed.

Thomas was the only Commander of a Northern or Southern Army who did not make a major mistake during the War, while at the same time establishing a record of remarkable military achievement. The reasons are simple. He was intelligent, innovative, resourceful and thorough. He was uniquely in the vanguard of modern military thinking. He was cool and clear headed in battle. He exuded

order and discipline and instilled those qualities in his Army. And he was prudently protective of his men which won for him their enthusiastic loyalty and support.

No novelty or originality is claimed for the proposition that Thomas was the greatest soldier of the Civil War on both sides, nor even that we owe our existence as one nation to George Thomas. There are several books that support those propositions, some implicitly, a couple explicitly. The purpose here is to synthesize and marshal those and other sources into a new, powerful whole, to be employed as a tool in gaining for General Thomas the recognition he deserves

**BUT FOR THE SUCCESSFUL ATLANTA CAMPAIGN IT IS DOUBTFUL THAT THE UNION WOULD HAVE BEEN PRESERVED AS WE KNOW IT, IF AT ALL.**

As it turned out, the key to Lincoln's reelection, and hence the fate of the Union, lay not in the East under Grant, but in the West, with Thomas. In fact, the Eastern campaign was a drag on Lincoln's reelection chances. Prior to November, 1864, there was costly stalemate in the East. The stalemate, which lasted throughout the war, consisted of a series of non-decisive battles that invariably the home team won, the South on its turf and the North on its. Nothing was decisive because no armies were destroyed. Gettysburg (and Vicksburg in the West) were followed by tactical Confederate victories at such places as the Wilderness, Spotsylvania Courthouse, and Cold Harbor. Overall Grant lost 60,000 men in the East in 1864 without gaining either Richmond or the annihilation of Lee's Army. Owing to the nation's absolute, resolute fixation on events in the East, and particularly that small patch of real estate between the capitols of the warring parties, in the Spring and Summer of 1864 the outlook was bleak indeed for Lincoln's reelection. A weary nation was longing for peace, and peace candidates.

Given the increasingly unpopular stalemate in the East, the key to the Lincoln administration's political survival in 1864, therefore, had to be a dramatic military victory in the West.<sup>1</sup> That victory was achieved in the Atlanta campaign

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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the central role of the military and its success or lack thereof in the 1864 election, Sandburg writes: "Could it be an hour to step out and form combinations and huckster a candidacy with an eye on November next? Before November would come terrific decisions of men with snarling guns and plunging bayonets. Beyond and out there where men lay rolled in their gray blankets by the bivouac fire under frost or falling rain or white moon--out there lay the dictates of the November election, the action that would sway the November voters." Sandburg, Abraham Lincoln, The War Years (hereinafter "Sandburg"), vol 4 of the six volumes, at 584

under the direction of Sherman (nominally) and Thomas. Thomas served as Sherman's chief advisor and the Commander of Sherman's principal Army, the superb Army Of The Cumberland.

The fact that Lincoln owed his reelection primarily to the fall of Atlanta is of course well known. What general history does not effectively record is the key role of Thomas not only in that immediate victory but theretofore in the critical continuing campaign and events leading up to it which were the *sine qua nons* of the Atlanta victory.

## **GEORGE THOMAS WAS THE PRINCIPAL FORCE BEHIND THE SUCCESSFUL ATLANTA CAMPAIGN**

### **The Recorded, Undisputed Facts Of History**

The long campaign that culminated at Atlanta began in Tennessee just outside Murfreesboro at the start of the New Year, 1863, with the battle of Stone's River. There, the Army of the Cumberland, under the command of General William S. Rosecrans, with George Thomas, then Commander of the XIV Army Corps, providing the resolve, achieved a victory by outlasting the Confederates under General Bragg. After Stone's River Rosecrans took the offensive, forcing the Confederates all the way down to Chattanooga, a city just a short distance North of Atlanta, and the key to that city's defenses. Arriving in Chattanooga Rosecrans, however, against the advice of Thomas, split his army into three parts. Thomas B. Buell, The Warrior Generals, Combat Leadership in the Civil War (1997) 259 (Hereinafter cited as "Buell"); Wilbur Thomas (no relation to the general), General George H. Thomas, The Indomitable Warrior (1964) 339-40 (Hereinafter cited "W. Thomas"). Bragg's Confederates, seizing the opportunity, and reinforced by Longstreet from Lee's Army, turned, and in September of 1863, defeated Rosecrans a few miles Southeast of Chattanooga in the bloody battle of Chickamauga.

There was, however, a huge silver lining for the Union in the cloud that was Chickamauga. It was the bursting of George Thomas on the national scene with the dazzling results that were to foreshadow his subsequent war performance and

career. Undisputedly, at Chickamauga, Thomas, alone, against all odds, and solely by his own courage and competence, saved the Union army to fight another day. He did so by staying and fighting after Rosecrans and his two other Corps commanders had fled the field. It was for good reason that he then and thereafter acquired the revered name “Rock of Chickamauga”. According to some, the Chickamauga battle by itself marked Thomas as the North’s outstanding General, based not just on his remarkably courageous stand at Snodgrass Hill, but also his sagacity in opposing the splitting of Rosecrans’ forces in the first place, and his actions in saving the Army from that mistake by extricating his 14th Corps from McLemore’s Cove and moving it on the night of the September 18th all the way from the extreme right to the perceived and actual point of danger on the extreme left, a move that emulated in terms of difficulty and surprise for the enemy anything Jackson ever did for Lee. W. Thomas 341, 350-51. Thomas’ night march of the 18th is described as a “ghastly night for all, but a crucial decision” in the long campaign to save the Union. R. O’Connor, Thomas: Rock of Chickamauga (1948) 30-31 (Hereinafter cited as “O’Conner”)

After the Chickamauga debacle (for all save Thomas) the Army Of The Cumberland, the Union's principal Army of the West and one of the two principal Union Armies overall (the other being The Army of the Potomac in the East) had retreated into Chattanooga where, for a time, it was virtually under siege. It was at this time that several important decisions were made in the Atlanta campaign. First, Lincoln placed Grant in overall charge in the West and sent him to Chattanooga. Second, to match the beefed up forces of the Confederates under Bragg, the Union commanders ordered Grant’s old Army, the Army of The Tennessee, under Sherman, and a detachment from the East’s Army of The Potomac, under Joseph Hooker, to Chattanooga. Third, Rosecrans was relieved of command and replaced by Thomas.

When Grant arrived in Chattanooga Thomas presented him with a ready made plan (developed by General Baldy Smith, under Thomas) to lift the siege of The Army of the Cumberland, now Thomas' own. Grant rubber-stamped it approved, and the plan succeeded.

After the siege was lifted but before Sherman had arrived Bragg dispatched Longstreet's forces to Knoxville to confront Burnside. On learning of this Grant wanted to go on the offensive immediately. He in fact ordered Thomas to attack the Confederate right some two weeks before Sherman’s arrival, before Thomas’ army was re-supplied and refurbished, and before the battle was ultimately fought. Thomas saved Grant from a disastrous blunder, however, by talking him out of the planned attack at that time.

Jean Edward Smith in his recent biography of Grant bluntly puts this matter of Grant's premature orders this way:

"It is understandable that Grant was eager to attack, but he was acting impetuously. Thomas' rocklike refusal to move prematurely saved the Union Army from disaster. Jean Edward Smith, Grant (2001) 272 (hereinafter cited "Smith")

Smith concludes further that the ensuing campaign proved that Grant's orders if followed would have led not only to a defeat, but to an outright slaughter of Union troops. (*Ibid.*) Others concurred, saying that Thomas saved Grant from "a colossal blunder." McDonough, Death Grip On The confederacy (1984) 106-08 (Hereinafter cited as "McDonough) As the astute and neutral observer Baldy Smith was later to observe, it was unthinkable what would have happened to Thomas if he, with only *four weakened* Divisions, had followed Grant's premature orders, when Sherman with *six sound* Divisions failed to carry the same Confederate right at the same location under the same plan two weeks later. (*Ibid.*)

Thereafter, the three newly combined Union armies or parts thereof (of The Cumberland, by far the largest and most powerful, under Thomas, of The Tennessee, now commanded by Sherman, and the part of The Army of the Potomac commanded by Hooker) became ready and able to go on the offensive. Bragg's army was entrenched on Missionary Ridge and Lookout Mountain, both of which menacingly overlooked Chattanooga. The Union offensive was to take place under a standard cookie cutter type of battle plan put in place by Grant. The plan consisted of feinting on one flank of the enemy, and attacking on the other, while holding the center for a finishing thrust after the chosen flank attack had succeeded. This was identical, for example, to McClellan's battle plan at Antietam, and numerous others on both sides, some of which succeeded and some not, depending on the execution. As Grant and McClellan both learned, it is not coming up with the plan that counts, but the plan's execution. It is like having the plan in football to establish the running game to set up the passing game, or vice versa. That is everyone's plan. Executing it, actually doing it, is something else. That depends, whether in football or in war, on having available talent, on the preparation, training and use of that same talent, and, especially important in Grant's case at Chattanooga (and later in Sherman's case at a place called Snake Creek Gap), choosing the right personnel for the various tasks at hand. At Chattanooga Grant assigned Sherman the key glory role of attacking the flank. He backed up that role by assigning Sherman the bulk of the available forces.

(Sherman had 25,000, Thomas 20,000, and Hooker 15,000. O'Conner 246.)) Grant's plan unraveled from the beginning, however, in that Sherman failed as the attacker. At the same time, however, Hooker, on the enemy's left flank as an assigned feinter there, exceeded all expectations (except Thomas', who had in fact recommended that the enemy's left be attacked, instead of his right) by taking Lookout Mountain in the famous battle above the clouds and then advancing to the enemy's southernmost defenses on Missionary Ridge. .

But Grant, despite seeing *Hooker's success* and *Sherman's failure*, stubbornly and unwisely persisted in his original battle plan. He ordered:

(1) Sherman to keep attacking (leading Sherman to remark later that such orders at that time led him to believe the old man (Grant) was daft) (McDonough 158)), and

(2) Thomas' Army of the Cumberland to add limited pressure on the center *to aid Sherman*. Specifically, he ordered Thomas to take the rifle pits at the base of Missionary Ridge and hold that position.

Instead, Thomas' well trained and motivated men rolled right on up the Ridge and over Bragg's defenses, routing the Confederates in the process.

Grant was not happy with the attack up the mountain, supposedly without orders (his express orders, at least). Even after it succeeded beyond his wildest dreams, he reportedly grumped about it, saying "damn the battle, I had nothing to do with it." O'Conner 252. This did not prevent his falsely taking credit for the victories at Chattanooga years later in his memoirs, however. The Library Of America, Grant, Memoirs and Selected Letters 1990, 450-51 (hereinafter cited "Grant Memoirs")

Missionary Ridge has generally been described by historians as something of an unordered and uncontrolled miracle, which, of course, in line with the popular view of Thomas, diminished Thomas's role in the day's proceedings. For a well documented view that in fact Thomas had prepared for the advance and impliedly if not explicitly ordered it, contrary to Grant's orders, see Redman, Politics in the Union Army at the Battle for Chattanooga, <http://americancivilwar.com/authors/bobredmond/article1.htm>, of which more later.

In any event,. Francis F. McKinney's account of Thomas' preparations for battle and his motivations at Chattanooga make clear that the advance and rout of the enemy by his Army at Missionary Ridge was, at the very least, indeed more

than accidental. He suggests that, if one is looking for the key to the success that was Missionary Ridge, one must assign the credit to the Commander of the men on the field, George Thomas, and not to some “miracle” as generally depicted. <sup>2</sup>

Thomas did Grant a triple favor that day at Missionary Ridge. He not only gave Grant and the Union a glorious victory, he also, as he had done just two weeks before, and would do again in many other cases, pulled Grant's chestnuts out of the fire, first, when he saved Grant from the failure of his original plan (Sherman having failed in his assigned mission), and second, when he saved Grant from his order to take the rifle pits and no more, an order that was militarily on its face a colossal mistake. Sheridan, Wood and Hazen, as well as Grant's own actions and remarks on the scene, all confirmed that the order was to take the rifle pits only. McDonough 166-67. That order, if carried out as Grant planned, would have placed Thomas's army at the mercy of the opposing forces.

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<sup>2</sup> According to McKinney

“There is a quintessence of combat energy which sometimes flows from one part of a battlefield to another. No one knows what it is, no one can control it. By its transfer good military leadership multiplies the strength of a command without increasing its fire power. Mahan tried to teach its principles but he never knew what made men defend an indefensible position or carry one that was unassailable. Thomas, with its aid, inspired his men to do both within sixty days at points ten miles apart on the same historic ridge. On November 25 this emotional energy seemed to flow from the Confederate battle line, with every advantage but one in its favor, to the tense Blue line of the Cumberlanders. It by-passed the Army of the Tennessee yet found lodgement (sic) in the one unit of that army temporarily under Thomas' command.” Francis F. McKinney, An Education In Violence, The Life of George H. Thomas and History Of The Army Of The Cumberland (1961) 304-05. McKinney goes on to remark regarding this transfer of “quintessence of military energy” to Thomas' men that “With varying intensities similar results are apparent in five of Thomas' battles--enough to nullify the theory of coincidence. By so stating he of course attributes the presence of that energy on the battlefields and its lodgment in Union hands to Thomas. He then concludes that it, the military energy generated by Thomas and instilled by him in his men, provides “the key to the mystery of Missionary Ridge.” (*Id.* at 305) Of course, the fact that Thomas's army was the best prepared, best trained and the best led in terms of use of personnel and in all other regards in the entire war, as suggested by numerous professional military scholars and historians, see pages 13-17, *infra*, most assuredly those factors had something to do with it, as well.

McDonough 165. As Thomas' men soon found out, the rifle pits were dangerously exposed to fire from the entrenched Confederate forces at the top of the ridge. So much so, in fact, that his men faced but three choices, all seemingly militarily untenable: retreat under deadly fire, stay put under deadly fire, or advance immediately toward the fire and seek to extinguish it. With courage, training and discipline instilled in them by Thomas, they chose the latter as the lesser of the three evils, and the rest became glorious history. Ironically, if Grant had ordered someone other than Thomas to advance and hold the rifle pits, it would have been a disaster. And all of this foolishness by Grant to no other end than to save Sherman. Again, Grant "succeeded" in spite of himself, thanks to Thomas, whom he had vilified and would continue to vilify throughout his career.<sup>3</sup>

Thomas's achievement at Missionary Ridge is all the more remarkable in view of the numbers. He had 20,000 attackers against Bragg's 15,000 entrenched defenders in the center on what all agree was highly strategic ground, to say the least. O'Conner 249-50 As indicated elsewhere, normally an attacking force against an entrenched enemy in those times must have had a 2 to 1 numerical superiority. McDonough 185. If the ground was not level, as of course it was not at Missionary Ridge, the recommended ratio became 3 to 1. O'Conner 249-50.

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<sup>3</sup> One may reasonably ask why Thomas did not voice objection to or seek to evade Grant's order if it was so foolhardy. One possible answer is that Thomas, a good soldier, was not about to argue about a direct order given him by his commander in the heat of battle. More plausibly perhaps, Thomas may have had information that was either unavailable to Grant or that Grant inexplicably chose to ignore. That was that Hooker was far more advanced on the Confederate left flank at Missionary Ridge on November 25th when Thomas began his movement than history records. That is Bob Redman's thesis, spelled out in his work cited earlier at page 6, *supra*, which is based on recently discovered military records. If Thomas knew of Hooker's advancement to the point Redman indicates, he may have seen not so much risk as opportunity. After all, from the beginning Thomas had urged that the major thrust on Bragg's flank take place on Bragg's left, not on his right. Grant, on the other hand, acted at least as if he was unaware of the extent of Hooker's advance, as evidenced by the well known fact that he expressed extreme displeasure and concern when Thomas's men started up the Ridge. If Grant had been aware he should at least have ordered Thomas to attack without pausing or otherwise altered his original plan and orders to Thomas, for example, by ordering Thomas to slide south to join up with Hooker's attack instead of sliding North to join up with Sherman's. If on the other hand Grant was not aware of Hooker's success, he should have been. In any case, whether aware or not, Grant's "to the rifle pits and hold" order must be considered a grossly flawed and dangerous decision under the circumstances. Fortunately for Grant's reputation and the Union it was, out of necessity, rendered moot by Thomas and his men.

Accordingly, Thomas should have had a force of more than twice his actual numbers to do what he did. Instead he did it at the astonishingly modest ratio of 1.3 to 1.

Apologists for Sherman might assert that Sherman failed and Thomas succeeded because Bragg shifted forces from the center to the right, thereby weakening the Confederate center. However, there is no proof or record of such shift having taken place, and evidence actually proves the contrary. McDonough 159; W. Thomas 446. <sup>4</sup>

Grant's original attack plan, whatever its merits, was in effect sabotaged from the beginning by his selection of Sherman to play the key role. The objective on the 24th was Tunnel Hill, and beyond the next day supposedly in conjunction with Thomas, who was to slide up along the Ridge and join him. But Sherman dawdled. Then he stopped one hill short at 4:00 p.m. in the mistaken belief that he was on Tunnel Hill, which he told Grant he had captured. In the meantime Bragg had time to occupy and defend the key ground. Buell 289. Sherman's timidity and confusion are indefensible because he acknowledges that he himself viewed the Tunnel Hill area prior to the battle from across the river. Redman has photographed and placed on his web site the view from the same spot. <http://www.aotc.net/SmithsMap.htm>. From the photo it seems clear where Sherman needed to get to on the 24th, and that he should have known he wasn't there when he stopped on that date. In short, Sherman had been given an opportunity to finally really win a battle, but he dropped the ball, presumably out of fear of failure, dooming Grant's plan in the process.

During the ensuing winter lay-up, in February of '64, before Grant went East, General Thomas proposed a comprehensive, overall campaign for Atlanta but

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<sup>4</sup> In typical acts of self aggrandizement at Thomas's expense, Grant and Sherman made the preposterous claim in their memoirs and correspondence that a major shift of Bragg's forces from the Center to the right had taken place, and that it had been Grant's plan all along that such shift take place, so that *Thomas* could succeed. Sherman Memoirs 390, and cited Letter of Grant to Sherman dated November 25, 1863. These claims of Grant and Sherman are not only patently false in view of the Grant battle plan itself as placed of record before the event, and also of Grant's well documented tendencies to favor Sherman in such matters, see pages 24-25, *infra*; it is also belied by the numbers which, as we have seen, overwhelmingly favored Bragg at the time of the battle, given Bragg's entrenched and naturally advantageous geographical position. See pages 8-9, *supra*. In other words, even if the plan, contrary to fact, had been to shift forces from the center, the numbers indicate that even that made up plan of Grant was a miserable failure, because it left Thomas, even after any alleged transfers from the Center, facing what by any objective standard were insurmountable odds, based on the numbers. And, of course, the fact that Grant was horrified when Thomas' men advanced to the ridge belies the fact that that was the plan all along, as well. Page 33 n. 16, *infra*.

Grant rejected it, no doubt out of hand, because he wanted his man Sherman to do it. W. Thomas 455.

When the Atlanta campaign resumed in the Spring of 1864, the Union Armies were at or around Ringgold and the Confederates in Dalton. By then Grant had been summoned East to supreme command, and had, despite the records of achievement, designated Sherman (not Thomas) to succeed him as overall Western commander. On the Confederate side, Joe Johnston had succeeded Bragg.

Again, it was Thomas who was ready with a plan for his new commander, in this case Sherman. The plan would have enabled him (his Army of the Cumberland) to get behind and destroy the entire Confederate Army dug in at Dalton. It would be done by moving through Snake Creek gap and occupying Resaca, Georgia, which would put Thomas across the railroad that ran between Chattanooga and Atlanta, which was Johnston's sole supply line. Sherman adopted the plan, but rather than executing it as Thomas proposed, altered it by denying Thomas the active role, assigning it instead to his former and the much smaller Army of the Tennessee, by then led by McPherson, a favorite of Grant's and Sherman's. Much to even Sherman's chagrin McPherson, with 20,000 men, versus only 4,000 Confederate defenders, stopped short of the objective, when it was there for the taking. The Library Of America, Memoirs Of General William T. Sherman 1990, 500 (hereinafter cited as "Sherman Memoirs") *If the plan had been executed as proposed by Thomas*, the Atlanta campaign would have ended quickly with a massive Union victory. Military historian Thomas B. Buell estimates it would have all been over within a week, instead of the approximately four months and thousands of lives it actually took. Buell 361. Author Wilbur Thomas concluded that McPherson's failure lost the opportunity to defeat Johnson and end the campaign at the beginning. W. Thomas 463. Historian Albert Castel, in a charitable understatement in view of the facts and the judgments of others, concluded that

"Had Thomas' personal relationship with Grant permitted him to command in Georgia in 1864 [instead of Sherman], almost surely the Union victory would have been easier, quicker, and more complete." A. Castel, *Decision In The West, The Atlanta Campaign of 1864* (1992) 565 (Hereinafter cited as "Castel")

Sherman made other mistakes on the way to Atlanta, most notably at Kennesaw Mountain, where he ordered a frontal assault by Thomas, over Thomas's objections. W. Thomas 476. This resulted in a bloody and needless slaughter of Thomas' troops. If, as Sherman himself later suggested, his purpose

was not necessarily to win, but to make a point, it was a bloody point indeed, and at Thomas' expense.

Otherwise, with Thomas as Sherman's chief Lieutenant and advisor, Johnston was forced back to Atlanta by a series of flanking movements.

At the outskirts of Atlanta, Johnston, said by Jefferson Davis to be too timid and defense oriented, was replaced by Hood, a disciple of Lee and his bold and aggressive tactics. Sherman split his command, sending 40% of his forces, under McPherson and Schofield, around to the East toward Decatur, where Sherman believed, incorrectly, that Hood's army was concentrated. Buell 369. Hood's army was instead fully concentrated against Thomas, who, following orders, was on the move in the vicinity of Peachtree Creek. In that condition Hood attacked Thomas in force. Thomas, at the battle of Peachtree Creek, again, as at Chickamauga, finding himself solely on his own (Sherman was unaware of the battle until hours after it was over), won for the Union not only a decisive battle, Buell at 369-72, and McKinney at 345-48, but what must be considered by all accounts *the* decisive battle for Atlanta.

It seems apparent that the battle of Peachtree Creek was *the* decisive battle for Atlanta, despite the occurrence two days later of what has come to be known as the "Battle of Atlanta". To begin, Peachtree Creek came when Sherman's army was highly vulnerable, due to the fact that (1) it had been divided, and the attack came against one of the isolated parts, and (2) the part of the army under attack was *de jure* decapitated because of the total ignorance of Sherman and his staff of what had occurred until after the fact. *Ibid.*, Castel 379, Sherman Memoirs 544, and (3) the attack against the isolated part came as a complete surprise because the whereabouts of the enemy was wholly unknown. As Sherman himself acknowledged, the enemy, "having Atlanta behind him, could choose the time and place of attack, and could at pleasure mass a superior force on our weakest points. Sherman Memoirs 544. Those same circumstances did not exist at the time of the later so-called "Battle of Atlanta". Sherman's forces were not split; he had full knowledge and control over them and the battle, and while he may not have known beforehand where exactly the next blow would fall, he knew more about the enemy's whereabouts certainly prior to that battle than he did before Peachtree Creek.. Hence, Peachtree Creek provided the true test of who would govern Atlanta because that was Hood's best opportunity to defeat the Union forces.

Nevertheless, once again, despite this freshest of achievements by Thomas, in the later movements around Atlanta that ultimately led to that city's fall Sherman employed either McPherson's Army of the Tennessee or Schofield's Army of the Ohio in the active roles, leaving Thomas the rather mundane role of

passively anchoring the center.

In sum, to outward appearances, Sherman took Atlanta. However, as between Sherman and Thomas, it was the latter who was by far the more competent and it was he who was responsible for the achievements along the way that made it all possible. As was his history, it was Thomas who was there with the plan or with the right move. He was the one with the sound advice. When his plan was followed (as in the case of the lifting of the siege at Chattanooga, or in those instances where Thomas was on his own, as at Snodgrass Hill and Peachtree Creek (and earlier at Mill Springs and later at Nashville), there was success. When it was only partially followed (as at Snake Creek Gap), there was but partial success, while there would have been complete success if the plan had been followed in full. If a Thomas plan or advice was rejected (as at Kennesaw Mountain, and at Chattanooga, prior to Chickamauga, when Thomas urged Rosecrans to consolidate instead of splitting his armies, and at Missionary Ridge, where Thomas urged that the Confederate left be attacked instead of its right, there was failure of the plan chosen over Thomas' (although Thomas in the latter two cases was brilliantly able, respectively, to minimize the losses and achieve the victory by other means, in spite of the plans' failures.

The Chickamauga disaster had necessitated a thorough reconstruction of The Army of the Cumberland and replacement of its failed officers, especially its Corps commanders, and it was Thomas who chose the new officers. Since the core of the western armies starting with and continuing throughout the Atlanta campaign and on to the end of the war would be The Army of the Cumberland, it would be his generals who would play the critical role in the Union's eventual success. Buell 283.

Thus it was that while the critical Atlanta campaign from its opening up to and including the city's fall was nominally in charge of Grant's hand-picked commander, Sherman, it was Thomas who was principally responsible for the Union (and Sherman's) success. Whatever the success of the overall Atlanta campaign, and the campaign can and has been described as very successful despite its shortcomings, credit for the success must be allocated after taking into account the quality of the input, and if General Thomas' input was mostly competent and positive, and Sherman's decidedly less so, the credit must go to Thomas over Sherman. More than once Sherman and Grant succeeded in the Atlanta campaign in spite of themselves, and mostly through the steadying efforts and hand and counsel of George Thomas, and the groundwork laid and corrective actions taken by him

In the opinion of some, the decisive moment in the entire war came not

during the part of the Atlanta campaign in and around that city itself, but before, when Thomas saved the Union's western armies from utter destruction at Chickamauga.<sup>5</sup> In any case, Thomas' work at Stone's River, Chickamauga, Chattanooga, Peachtree Creek and all along the way speaks for itself.

### **The Testaments Of Scholars**

The bare historical facts stated above are compelling evidence in and of themselves as to the key role played by George Thomas in the critical Atlanta campaign in terms of victories achieved and blunders averted, from its beginning at Stone's River through Chickamauga and Chattanooga to the end in Atlanta. A wealth of expert evaluations back up that evidence and give it even greater weight.

None other than Sherman himself early on, before Grant gained a dominating influence over him, praised Thomas' abilities when he argued successfully with Lincoln for the appointment of Thomas to high command at a time when Thomas' loyalty was in doubt due to his Virginian heritage. In doing so Sherman told the President that

“\* \* \* Old Tom is as loyal as I am, and as a soldier he is superior to all on your list.” Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln, The War Years*, vol 1, at 290. (hereinafter cited as “Sandburg”, by volume number of the overall series 1 through 6)

After Chickamauga Lincoln wrote of Thomas' professional skills:

“It is doubtful whether his heroism and skill exhibited last Sunday afternoon [on Snodgrass Hill] has ever been surpassed in the world” (Francis F. McKinney, *An Education In Violence, The Life of George H. Thomas and History Of The Army Of The Cumberland* (1961) 271 (Hereinafter cited as "McKinney".)

Carl Sandburg tells us that:

“At Mill Springs Thomas had shown a flash, at Murfreesboro, fire and flint, at Chickamauga granite steadiness and volcanic resistance. \* \* \*

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<sup>5</sup> "And here, now, at Snodgrass Hill, with Thomas in charge of what remained of the Union forces in this all-important godforsaken hinterland, was the *decisive* moment in the *war*." John Bowers, *Chickamauga & Chattanooga* (1994) 139-41. (emphasis added)

Slowly in the trampling and grinding of events the men of genius for war were being sifted out, and in this process George Henry Thomas was arriving at his own.” 4 Sandburg 435.

We have already adverted and will advert further to Albert Castel’s remarks signifying that Thomas possessed an extremely high level of competence, higher certainly than that of Sherman, who is widely praised as a military commander. See pages 10 *supra* and 23 *infra*.

Recent works praising Thomas' abilities include Thomas Buell’s work, The Warrior Generals, Combat Leadership in the Civil War, cited earlier, in which the author states that Thomas’ army, The Army of the Cumberland, “would become the most professional and modern of all armies in the Civil War.” Buell 142.

Earl B. McElfresh praised Thomas’ use of maps in his book Maps and Mapmakers of the Civil War (1999) 11, 161, 236, 244-45, and concluded that

“General George H. Thomas was probably the most completely professional soldier of the American Civil War.” McElfresh at 161.

John Bowers said of Thomas that:

“Like a competent surgeon, scalpel in hand, patient spread out before him, he [Thomas] could be counted upon for quick wits and an aggressive stance.” Like all great generals, he was decisive. John Bowers, Chickamauga & Chattanooga (1994) 139. (Hereinafter cited “Bowers”)

and

He doesn’t hem and haw and lose sleep over [his decisions]. He acts. He recoups. He focuses. He keeps going. ‘This army doesn’t retreat’ he had said at Stone’s River. *Id* at 139-41.

Wilbur Thomas called Thomas “\* \* \* the greatest soldier in the Federal Army. W. Thomas 267.

Thomas' innovations and expertise extended to such areas as the initiation, use and support of the signal corps, use of maps and map coordinates, remote fire control, supply and medical support, such engineering functions as bridge building and repair, both on land (railroad bridges) and over water (specialized pontoon operations), and, most importantly, intelligence operations. McKinney 318-321; Buell 188, 359.

Thomas also created in the office of Provost Marshall the job of imposing order in the rear of the army, which in time of battle was usually in absolute chaos, and the bane of any army's commander. He filled the position with one of his best officers and sought out and assigned his best regiment to the Provost. At Stones River, the Provost, Col. John Parkhurst, saved the day in the rear by recapturing the Union army's supply train, without which all would have been lost. Buell 197-99. According to Buell, it was men like Parkhurst who set Thomas' army apart from all the others.

It is the supreme irony that the main beneficiaries of Thomas' professionalism were the very men who, as will be seen, were responsible for the injustices done to him and for burying him in obscurity, namely, Grant and Sherman. This is true not only in the sense that, as will be seen, they took credits for his battlefield achievements, such as Missionary Ridge and the capture of Atlanta, while falsely attributing faults to him, it is also true in the sense that Thomas literally supplied the efforts and expertise that made their false claims plausible to the uninformed. Specifically, for example, during the Atlanta campaign there were supposedly three armies equally involved under Sherman, that is, three independent commands, The Army of the Cumberland, Thomas' own, The Army of the Tennessee, Grant's old army which had been handed over first to Sherman and then to McPherson, and The Army of the Ohio, commanded by Schofield. It is and was the responsibility of each independent commander to arrange for their own supply, intelligence, maps, etc. etc.. That is why they call it an independent command. But these commanders all let George do it. They all piggy-backed on his expertise and efforts in those areas. W. Thomas 452; McKinney 337 Sherman Memoirs 466-67. They even relied on him to do that most dreaded drudgery and dirty work, their armies' paper work and record keeping.

An excellent bibliography which plumbs deeply Thomas' skills and professionalism appears at the following award winning web site dedicated to General Thomas: <http://home.att.net/~dmercado/index.htm>. Another excellent web site for General Thomas and the Army of the Cumberland is at <http://www.aotc.net>.

The previously cited work of Francis F. McKinney, An Education In Violence, The Life of George H. Thomas and History Of The Army Of The Cumberland, is a balanced, thorough and respected account. Copies are once again in print.

Among the books cited in the dmercado web site bibliography are many which are represented to be outright advocate books on behalf of Thomas, such as Thomas B. Van Horne's The Life of Major General George H. Thomas (1882). Such works, while meant to counter the effect of the disinformation campaign waged by Grant and Sherman after the war, instead got drowned out due to the immense popularity of the latter individuals at the time. Van Horne's book, while out of print as a book, has been placed and appears in its entirety on the aotc.net web site referred to above.

To the abundant foregoing sources expounding the military skills of Thomas the author would add his own modest work Thomas Shows He's No Slacker In Taking The Offensive published in the Washington Times and reprinted with permission at <http://www.aotc.net/Articles.htm>. There Thomas is declared the best General of the War on both sides, and the mistakes made by the principal generals of the War other than Thomas, who are popularly touted as military geniuses, are catalogued and compared to the extensive record of General Thomas, who made no mistakes. <sup>6</sup>

As will be discussed later, the generic, popular histories of the Civil War, that is, those focusing on the entire War, have tended to ignore Thomas. In contrast, historians devoted to and focused in on the Western theatre, or more specifically the Tennessee or Atlanta campaigns, or on the leading generals, many of whose writings are discussed herein, have found the greatness of Thomas. It is apparent that as scholarly focus zeros in, Thomas' true nature emerges. The significance of this fact cannot be overstated. The general, popular historians have

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<sup>6</sup> That George Thomas was the best general of the War is indicated *inter alia* by the fact that the successful Atlanta campaign, which this author contends was primarily the work of Thomas, not Sherman, consumed only 32,382 casualties and took only about five months, whereas the far less successful Virginia campaign of Grant in 1864-65 consumed 60,000 and took nearly a year. W. Thomas 505. This despite the fact that Grant was blessed with more in men and material compared to that of opposing forces than was the Western army compared to those forces opposing it. Grant at the Wilderness commanded 100,000 to 118,000, augmented later by another 60,000 to replace his army's unusually high casualties, versus Lee's 62,000. This compares to Sherman's 100,000 to Johnston's 65,000 during the Atlanta campaign. Educational Materials Associates, Inc., Civil War Resource Booklet & Study Guide, Charlottesville Virginia, 1998; Buell, Appendices C and D. Of course, as indicated, if Thomas had been fully in charge, or even if his plan for Snake Creek Gap had been followed, comparisons of Thomas to his colleagues would favor Thomas by even more stunning margins.

attempted to lecture on Jupiter and Mars without ever examining them firsthand through a telescope. Those employing the telescopes, who have examined the matter closely, have discovered the true nature of things, a completely different and clearer picture. Whom to believe? Certainly not the general historians who have failed to focus and examine the evidence closely.

### **The Nashville Experience After the Atlanta Campaign**

Thomas's post-Atlanta record contains a crown jewel that bespeaks volumes regarding his abilities during the Atlanta campaign and otherwise. The crown jewel is the battle of Nashville that occurred in December, 1864.

The story is much the same as in the case of Chickamauga, Chattanooga and Atlanta--Union commanders make or are on their way to making big, risky or foolhardy mistakes, but Thomas is there to save the day. But in this case, in the case of Nashville, Thomas, in this recurring theme of his life, surpasses even his prior stellar achievements. Thomas biographer Thomas Van Horne, commenting on this post Atlanta to Nashville period, and how it was at the beginning of that period, put it this way:

"The duty of defending the vital communications in Tennessee with only two divisions of his army, besides his local garrisons, was thus devolved upon General Thomas. Unconsciously he had entered upon a campaign which, though beset with embarrassments through all of its stages, was in its outcome to bring the crowning glory of his career." Thomas Van Horne, The Life of Major General George H. Thomas 1882, 352.

The facts were these. After the capture of Atlanta had secured Lincoln's reelection Sherman went East to the Sea, leaving Thomas to fend for himself against Hood's still viable Army of Tennessee. Grant meanwhile got bogged down against Lee, suffering staggering losses in the process. At the same time, in December, Sherman had not been heard from, portending perhaps failure of that risky mission. And in the West all that was known by the eastern command was that another Rebel Army was advancing on Nashville, which all felt should have by then been safely tucked away in the "secure" column. 6 Sandburg 653. But it was not just Nashville that was threatened in the mind of Grant, it was what Churchill might have designated the Union's big Midwestern underbelly. Grant, at this time of great uncertainty and failure in the East, imagined a march by Hood to the Ohio River and beyond, with George Thomas alone standing in the way. And he and Sherman had stripped Thomas of his precious resources, not only

quantitatively, but more importantly, qualitatively. McKinney 376-79. The pressures were such as to evoke from Grant a wholly irrational response, a response which, in retrospect, calls into question the soundness of Lincoln's decision to place such an unstable man into overall command.

Fortunately, Grant once again was saved at the last minute from a colossal blunder by a combination of fate and George Thomas. For what transpired under Thomas, not surprisingly, was what all have hailed as a brilliant Union success. See, e.g., 6 Sandburg 653. Of the battle of Nashville, Sherman was to say that it was the only battle of the war "which annihilated an army," 5 Sandburg 637. Of Nashville Hood wrote that he beheld for the first and only time a Confederate army abandon the field in confusion. 5 Sandburg 634 (emphasis added) Sandburg writes that no rout of the war had been so complete, that one important factor was Thomas' cavalry, and that Hood's army as a unit vanished, except for Forrest's 15,000 cavalry. *Id* at 649, 653. By the time Hood reached the Tennessee River after the battle of Nashville there remained but 9,000 of his 55,000 troops at the beginning, plus all of his guns had been captured or destroyed, his ammunition was used up, and his supply trains lost. W. Thomas 580. According to Sandburg Thomas could have annihilated Hood totally, except "Grant's somewhat unreasonable anxiety, partly motivated by concern for public opinion, forced an earlier battle." 6 Sandburg 653. (This statement of Sandburg is an understatement, as we shall see later.)

Nashville was in fact the last climactic battle of the War. W. Thomas 581, O'Conner 324.

Buell described Thomas' Nashville campaign as a model of modern warfare and "the unsurpassed masterpiece of theatre command and control of the Civil War. Buell 388.

Lincoln later in his letter to Sherman in response to Sherman's "gift of Savannah" communication said of Thomas' achievements at Nashville:

"And taking the work of General Thomas into the count [at Nashville], as it should be taken, it [the capture of Savannah] is indeed a great success." 5 Sandburg 634.

The fact that Lincoln recognized Thomas' achievement and placed it on the same plane as his March to the Sea probably annoyed Sherman no end.

Thomas' achievement at Nashville might and perhaps has on occasion been down played on the grounds that Hood's Army was seriously wounded after

Hood's foolish attack at the battle of Franklin. Let us examine the facts.

First, in Tennessee in front of Nashville in mounted cavalry Hood initially outnumbered Thomas 4 to 1, with Hood's men commanded by the renowned Nathan Bedford Forrest.<sup>7</sup> 5 Sandburg 636, Buell 398. Ultimately Thomas had according to one source as few as 6,000 and at most 9,000 mounted cavalry against Forrest's 15,000. 6 Sandburg 637. Hood in an error of judgment sent Forrest and a large part of his command away during the actual battle of Nashville, but Thomas had to prepare on the valid assumption that Forrest and his men would be present at the battle, and he and they were present during the pursuit phase of it.

Apart from the cavalry imbalance, of Thomas's 55,000 total, 12,000 were perfectly raw recruits, replacing 15,000 veterans whose terms had expired.<sup>8</sup> Also included in the 55,000 were 7,000 quartermaster's men (*Id.* at 653), veteran reserves, convalescents, and Negroes under arms and busy on earth-works. *Id.* at 649. Sherman's stripping of Thomas' command qualitatively for his march to the sea continued to exert its pull, as well. McKinney 376-79.

In opposition Hood had 40,000 veteran infantry plus Forrest's cavalry, or a total of 55,000. O'Conner 298-99. (As noted, some of Forrest's troops were not present during the initial phase of the battle, but they all were during the pursuit phase) Looked at qualitatively and quantitatively, neither of the two forces was dominant.

When Hood and Thomas had squared off one on one at Peachtree Creek, Hood was at full strength and the margin of victory for Thomas less, which could be interpreted as weakness of Hood at the time of Nashville. But Hood had the advantage of surprise at Peachtree Creek while Thomas was on the move and not entrenched. At Nashville, on the other hand, Hood had the advantage of being entrenched and of having full knowledge of the forthcoming attack. Military analysts believed that at the time a numerical advantage of at least 2 to 1 was

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<sup>7</sup> Forrest has been equated with Jackson in terms of military capabilities, despite Jefferson Davis' asserted bias in favor of Jackson and Lee. 6 Sandburg 21 Sherman admitted that Forrest "gave him more trouble than any Confederate commander\* \* \*" (*Ibid.*) Like Thomas, scholars have given Forrest very high marks for his military skills. Castel 274.

<sup>8</sup> As Castel notes, "In a regular battle and if properly led a veteran regiment can whip three or four times its number of neophytes, and experienced artillery and cavalry units are quite literally irreplaceable." (pp 9-10)

necessary for a successful attack on an entrenched position. McDonough 185. If the ground is not level, as it was not at Nashville, the recommended ratio becomes 3 to 1. O'Conner 249-50. These tactical advantages of Hood would have offset Thomas numerical advantage (or, the other side of the coin, Hood's weakness in numbers), if any (considering both the quantity and quality of the numbers). Hood himself believed that he was safe and secure behind his defenses. McKinney 406.

Hence, Thomas' achievements were far from predictable based on the numbers alone. It must also be remembered that Hood's army was not only intact after Atlanta, it was also in Buell's eyes the most dangerous Confederate army at the time because it was totally free to maneuver at will, versus Lee's Army of Northern Virginia, which was saddled with the task always of defending Richmond. Buell 386. It must also be kept in mind that Thomas had to overcome quite a deficit to even get to where he was at Nashville. The deficit was created when Sherman left Thomas to face Hood with but 25,000 men, only one Corps of which, the 4th, was seasoned. <sup>9</sup> To get where he was at the time of the battle of Nashville was in itself a remarkable achievement on Thomas' part, and a tribute to his abilities to build an effective and efficient military force out of little or nothing. McKinney 376-79. Van Horne 252.

Finally, those who would downplay Thomas' victory on the grounds that Hood's army was weak and depleted and outnumbered tend to completely overlook the fact that Lee's Army was no less so, yet no criticism is leveled against Grant for failing to do promptly and efficiently what Thomas proved fully capable of doing, that is, destroying what is here described for the sake of argument only as a similarly weakened opposing army. Not only did Grant not destroy The Army of Northern Virginia until after about a year's time and the sheer weight of numbers and resources carried the day, he in effect for months did no better than a stand-off, and in fact on more than one occasion suffered serious defeats.

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<sup>9</sup> Sherman took Thomas' elite 14th Corps and his 20th on his March to the Sea. Thomas' command did include Schofield and his 23rd Corps, but, in view of Schofield's later treachery against Thomas, that was at best a mixed blessing. W. Thomas 518-19. Also, Schofield very nearly caused a Union disaster at Thomas's expense at Spring Hill when he disobeyed an order of Thomas to move to the North bank of the Duck River. Thanks only to the error of Hood in not attacking him in force on his flank on the night of November 29th was Schofield able to escape, regroup, make a successful stand at Franklin, and rejoin Thomas. W. Thomas 526, 616.

The inevitable conclusion is that the man whose remarkable achievements included Nashville, as well as Mill Springs, Stones River, Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, and Peachtree Creek, and who has been accorded the highest praise among the many experts who have examined the matter closely, had to have been more of a factor in the success that was Atlanta than the nominal commander Sherman, whose abilities and record were at best undistinguished.

### **The Invalidity Of The Popular Counter Record**

**(with an explanation of the extent it was falsified, how it was falsified, and why)**

Probably the most popular Civil War history in recent times was the Ken Burns series which aired on PBS in 1990. In that work, of Chattanooga, it was merely noted that Grant arrived on the scene and achieved the victory. The narrator then quotes Sherman's later remarks to the effect that Chattanooga

" \* \* was a great victory--the neatest and cleanest battle I was ever in--and Grant deserves the credit of it all." (emphasis added)

The popular historian Bruce Catton quotes the same remark (and then attempts mightily and, it is submitted, futilely, to establish its truth, of which more later). B. Catton, Grant Takes Command (1969) 93 (Hereinafter cited as "Catton")

That one quote of Sherman and the play it has gotten by popular historians demonstrates perhaps more than any other piece of evidence the damage done to Thomas and to history by the egregious and false statements uttered by Grant and Sherman over the years regarding their achievements versus those of Thomas. The statement, like others, was and is not only false, but assuredly was known to have been so by Sherman. In fact, as seen above, the Union Army won that most neatest and cleanest of battles in spite of Grant (and Sherman), and it was Thomas, as we have seen, and not Grant, who deserved "the credit of it all" because he took over and carried the event when Sherman failed in his assignment and Grant's plan became undone. And this after Thomas kept Grant from committing a most serious blunder during the campaign just two weeks before. For Sherman to have uttered the above quote in the face of the facts known to him is more than mere negligence--it is intentional wrongdoing.

Similarly, in describing the battle for Atlanta the Burns work does not even mention that the Confederate Army engaged Thomas' Army of The Cumberland,

Sherman's main force, in an all out battle at Peachtree Creek, that Thomas single handedly defeated the Confederates (Sherman being wholly unaware of the battle until it was over, Castel 379), and that Thomas in doing so salvaged a situation where Sherman, like Rosecrans before him, had put his force at serious risk by dividing his army in the face of unified Confederates whose location and intentions he had totally misjudged. Sherman Memoirs 544. Such critical errors (on Sherman's part) and valor in overcoming them and saving the day (on Thomas' part) is surely the stuff of which history should have been made.

Burns does mention Hood's second attempt a couple of days later to attack Sherman's forces in the battle that has come to be called, erroneously it seems quite clear, the Battle of Atlanta. See page 11, *supra*. That attack, it will be recalled, was an attempt to outflank the Union army on its left where Sherman's Army of the Tennessee, under McPherson, was located. In that battle Sherman intentionally held back support from his main army for the stated purpose of bolstering the morale of his old army, which led temporarily to what has been claimed to have been a touch and go situation. Sherman Memoirs 555. The point is that this time Sherman was aware of what was going on, and his army was not split. He had all of his resources available to use against Hood to the extent necessary. This was, in effect, like all of those battles in which Sherman managed to come out the victor, a safe victory, compared to Thomas's victory at Peachtree Creek, a battle that Sherman had unwittingly and unwisely thrust upon Thomas and knew nothing about until it was over. Yet Burns featured the former and completely overlooked the latter, which, as we have seen, was the far more interesting battle to history.

How could such flawed reporting come about? Could it be that Burns chose to report the so-called "Battle of Atlanta" and not Peachtree Creek simply on the strength of the name history has erroneously assigned to it? Given what we know now about the shallowness of popular history, it is certainly and regrettably possible. Or did he simply rely on Sherman's memoirs, which does not even mention the Battle of Peachtree Creek, but instead describes it on less than a page as a mere sally on the part of Hood, while his account of the so-called Battle of Atlanta goes on for several pages. Sherman Memoirs 544-47, 549-55.

But surely, one might say, what better source to rely on than the memoirs of the overall commanders involved, Grant and Sherman. And is it not true that they are the ones who were promoted to the high positions by Lincoln? How can it be that, if Thomas was so good, he was not given credit for his achievements, was not given supreme command or comparable promotions and responsibilities, and has failed of recognition ever since? As it turns out, there are ready and apparent--indeed obvious--answers to these questions.

First, as to the reliability of the memoirs and works stemming from them, Albert Castel addressed the question and concluded that those sources simply, to say the least, do not pass scholarly muster. To him this was a revelation, a rude awakening.

In his introduction Castel admitted to starting with the widely held belief that the credit for the successful Atlanta Campaign was due to its commander Sherman. What he came to write instead, however, without intending it, was a rather harsh depiction of Sherman as a commander. (Preface at xiv) What Castel found was that the accepted sources for the positive view of Sherman were full of “mistakes, misconceptions and myths” (at xiii) The reason was that they were based on “superficial and uncritical research”, an inadequate understanding of the nature of the Civil War and war in general, and “bias inspired distortions and prevarications.” (*Ibid.*) Castel ultimately came to believe, for example, that nothing Sherman said about Thomas in his memoirs was believable “[i]n view of the numerous false and malicious statements made by Sherman about Thomas both during and after the war \* \* \*” Castel 611n

As will be seen, the fact of the matter is that Grant and Sherman, in their memoirs, their official reports, and otherwise all too often falsely credited themselves with victories and accomplishments that were the work of Thomas and blamed him for their mistakes. And the popular historians have largely followed suit. This has resulted in the puffed up images for Grant and Sherman and the wrongfully deflated or even smeared image for Thomas.

Examples of false reports and statements by Grant and Sherman regarding Thomas as referred to by Castel and many others, and then in turn of mistaken reliance by popular historians on those pernicious sources, abound:

Item 1: [Falsification of record by Grant regarding Thomas's role in getting Grant restored to command after Corinth] After Corinth, Thomas, who had replaced Grant as Wing commander under Buell, lobbied to have Grant reinstated to his former position as Wing commander and himself restored (demoted, actually) to his previous Divisional command. He did so no doubt because he was aware of Grant's complaining about his being kicked upstairs in favor of Thomas. Such voluntary demotion of oneself as a favor to a colleague was probably without parallel. Yet how did Grant repay Thomas? By not mentioning Thomas' good deed on his behalf in his memoirs, and, even worse, being resentful of Thomas the rest of their careers. W. Thomas 217-18.

Item 2: [Falsification by Grant regarding Grant's orders, later rescinded, that Thomas attack two weeks prior to the battle of Missionary Ridge, at which time Thomas saved Grant from disaster ] As we have seen, Thomas saved Grant from a serious blunder two weeks before the battle of Missionary Ridge by artfully forcing Grant to withdraw his order for an immediate attack on Bragg's forces prior to the time Sherman was up and the Union forces were otherwise anywhere near ready (see p. 4-5, *supra*). And what was Thomas' reward for saving Grant from disaster? Grant accused him of failing him, due to slowness, in carrying out his own disastrous plan. McKinney 281. Grant in essence was saying to and about Thomas: If Thomas had let me destroy our Union army two weeks earlier, I could have saved two weeks waiting for the brilliant victories achieved on my behalf by Hooker at Lookout Mountain, and most significantly by Thomas at Missionary Ridge, which victories were achieved notwithstanding the failure of my overall plan and my disastrous order for my center to advance to the rifle pits at the base of Missionary Ridge and hold, from which additional disaster Thomas saved me by his hugely successful charge up the Ridge. This particular argument of Grant is especially preposterous, and his casting of aspersions on Thomas, his blaming of Thomas for his own mistakes and his unbelievable ingratitude toward Thomas for saving him from multiple disasters typical.

Item 3: [Falsification by Grant regarding the roles of Thomas, Sherman and McPherson in Grant's success in being elevated to Lt. General] In March of '64 Grant wrote a letter to Sherman after the battles of Chattanooga and his (Grant's) elevation as supreme commander in which he expressed to *Sherman and McPherson* his thanks "as the men to whom, above all others, I feel indebted for whatever I have had of success." Smith 123. In fact Sherman up to that point had failed Grant at Shiloh, at Vicksburg and at Chattanooga, and had otherwise delivered nothing positive. Thomas, on the other hand, had at that point not only not burdened Grant with any failures, he had lifted the siege of "Grant's" army at Chattanooga, saved Grant from a disastrous premature attack at Missionary Ridge, had saved him from another disastrous order to take and hold the rifle pits at the base of Missionary Ridge, and had handed him the victory of Missionary Ridge, despite the failure of Grant's overall plan and his potentially disastrous order to take and hold the rifle pits. He had also it will be recalled voluntarily stepped aside in front of Corinth so that Grant could be restored to his command, the group that later became the Army of The Tennessee, which act then led directly to Grant's Vicksburg campaign, which sealed Grant's reputation as a successful general, especially in Lincoln's eyes. Under all of these circumstances, that Grant would write such a letter crediting Sherman with "his" success and not even mentioning Thomas is patently disgraceful, especially since by then he must have

known that his words would become matters of record for historians. Later, Thomas would give Grant (and Sherman) Atlanta and Nashville, both smashing victories, and even it would appear Sherman his march to the sea, considering (1) that march most likely was Thomas's idea to begin with (see pages 29-30, *infra* for details), (2) that it was performed at the core with Thomas' troops, including his prized 14th Army Corps, his pontoon experts, etc., etc., (3) that Sherman faced virtually no opposition, (4) that he left Thomas behind with remnants to protect the Union's big underbelly from Hood's intact Confederate army in the West, and (5) that Thomas did the job admirably with what he was given.<sup>10</sup>

The unreality of this Grant/Sherman mutual admiration society which Grant's letter makes plain<sup>11</sup> is indicated by Grant's praise of McPherson in it, for in fact McPherson was to squander for Sherman (and the nation) two of the most golden opportunities in the war, the first at Resaca, and the second at Atlanta during the battle of Peachtree Creek. Sherman himself was compelled to acknowledge that McPherson had failed him grievously on the former occasion. Sherman Memoirs 500. And on the latter occasion it seems clear that McPherson could have captured Atlanta for Sherman at the outset if he had advanced against

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<sup>10</sup> According to Sandburg, Sherman, on leaving Atlanta, stopped to survey the burning city from a hilltop, accompanied by the glistening gun barrels of "his' 14th Army Corps, cheery and swinging boys and men." 5 Sandburg 619. (placement of inside quotes around the word 'his' added) These cheery and swinging boys and men were, of course, Thomas', not Sherman's.

Some credit must of course be given to Sherman and Grant for carrying off (if not conceiving of) the March to the Sea (albeit with Thomas' troops and experts) and for taking the risks involved, which paid off handsomely.

<sup>11</sup> The genesis of the Grant/Sherman mutual admiration society, apart from Grant's appreciation of Sherman's political connections, and, later, of Sherman's of Grant's, seems to have been the aid and support they gave each other during periods of failure. As Sherman said, Grant stood by me when I was crazy, and I stood by him when he was a drunk. Bowers 198. When Grant was packing his bags intent on leaving the Army on its way to Corinth, after he had been replaced by Thomas, Sherman came to him and talked him out of it. O'Conner 172. Instead of venting his anger on Halleck, however, who had relieved Grant of his command and placed Thomas in charge, Grant directed his anger at Thomas, who was wholly innocent. Thomas, being aware of Grant's state of mind, voluntarily requested Halleck to restore Grant to his command and himself to his division command, which cost him not only Grant's ungrateful enmity, but to some extent Halleck's, who then tended to "cast him in a freakish light" for having voluntarily given up command. O'Conner 174.

the token opposition he received from that third of Hood's army that was not committed against Thomas at Peachtree Creek.. McKinney 348, and see page 11, *supra*. But he failed to do so. (Ironically, Sherman at the very same time that the battle of Peachtree Creek was raging (1) believed Thomas could "walk" right into Atlanta because he believed Hood's forces were concentrated on the left against McPherson and (2) was criticizing Thomas for not doing so. McKinney 346, Buell 372, and see page 27, *infra*. As in all cases, it must be concluded that what would have been bad for the goose was bad for the gander.)

Item 4: [Falsifications regarding Chattanooga] As noted earlier, after the war Sherman wrote of Chattanooga that "It was a great victory--the neatest and cleanest battle I was ever in--and Grant deserves the credit of it all" Catton 93. (emphasis added) The fact is that Thomas, of course, deserved the credit. Grant "won" in spite of himself. The record was egregiously falsified. See pages 5-9 *supra*. Grant and Sherman also concocted the preposterous story in their memoirs that Thomas' successful charge up Missionary Ridge was their plan from the beginning, the flank attack of Sherman being subordinate all along to clearing the way for Thomas in the center. See note 4, *supra*, and surrounding text.

Item 5: [More falsifications regarding Chattanooga] Sherman in his memoirs had the effrontery to say that:

"The object of General Hooker's and my attacks on the extreme flanks of Bragg's position was to disturb him to such an extent that he would naturally detach from his centre as against us, so that Thomas's army could breakthrough his centre. The whole plan succeeded admirably \* \* \*" Sherman Memoirs 390.

Sherman knew better. He was obviously aware of Grant's battle plan which gave him the key role, and from which Grant stubbornly and at great risk never wavered. Such fantasizing could not be the product of faulty memory. It could only be intentional.

Item 6: [Falsifications on the way to Atlanta] Just prior to ordering the ill-advised assault on Kennesaw Mountain, Sherman wrote Grant that he was exasperated by Thomas' army's slowness of movement. McKinney 336-37. Yet Thomas was the Commander whose first victory at Mill Springs was essentially a search and destroy mission, and whose Corps at Chickamauga in a forced march solely on Thomas' individual initiative moved overnight out of McLemore's Cove on the extreme right to the extreme left, a move that saved the day for the Union forces the following morning, and whose army in a rarely successful and difficult frontal assault had swarmed over Missionary Ridge, and who had proposed the offensive strike with his army that would have been a decisive blow through Snake

Creek Gap in the Atlanta campaign, all of which Sherman at the time knew constituted the exact opposites of slowness, as the official records prove. *Id.* at 337.

Item 7: [Falsification by Sherman regarding Thomas' advice on the way to Atlanta] As a further example of unjustified put-downs, in his memoirs Sherman reports an instance in which Sherman proposed a particular offensive military maneuver to Thomas, and that Thomas merely shook his head and deemed it risky. That is where Sherman left it, with the implication that Thomas was a congenital foot-dragger/nay sayer. What Sherman does *not* report, however, but the Official Records do, is that Thomas sent his approval in writing within forty five minutes. McKinney 498. (One can envision Thomas, unlike Sherman, taking 45 minutes to check the facts and the pros and cons carefully before sending his men into battle. And for such habitual practices as that he gained Grant's and Sherman's eternal enmity)

Item 8: [Falsification by Sherman regarding the battle of Peachtree Creek ] Another example of Sherman's duplicity and bias appears in a letter from Sherman to McPherson the evening of the day of the battle of Peachtree Creek. As indicated earlier, see page 11, *supra*, Sherman on July 20, 1864 is oblivious of the fact that Thomas has been attacked that day by two thirds of Hood's fully prepared and focused army and has nevertheless won a major victory. Sherman had assumed incorrectly that Hood was concentrated further East in front of McPherson and Schofield. Not having heard anything from Thomas (who is once again extremely busy brilliantly saving Sherman's Union armies) Sherman tells McPherson that because of Thomas' slowness that very day the opportunity to take Atlanta has been lost. Buell 372. In fact, as Sherman later discovered, the quickness of Thomas saved the day, and the slowness of McPherson (as at Resaca) should have earned the latter Sherman's disdain, not Thomas. The quickness of Grant and Sherman to pin the tag of slowness on Thomas totally unjustifiably is once again vividly demonstrated. Did Sherman ever apologize and set the record straight, with official praise for Thomas and criticism of McPherson? It appears not. Sherman Memoirs 544-47.

Item 9: [Further falsification by Sherman regarding the battle of Peachtree Creek] The principal falsification by Sherman regarding Peachtree Creek, however, is in his dismissal of the Battle as a mere sally in the brief, less than one page account that appears in his memoirs. Compare Sherman's account with the accurate, factual treatments accorded the Battle by the writers cited at page 11,

*supra.* <sup>12</sup>

Item 10: [Falsification after the capture of Atlanta] Sherman's report after the capture of Atlanta was pure fiction. He placed the blame on Thomas for failing to pursue and capture Hood's army, when in fact he had ordered Thomas not to do so. Buell 375. He gave his own Army of the Tennessee credit for the best attempt at doing so, when he himself described the whole Atlanta operation as a mere "raid", and therefore not a serious attempt to capture and destroy the opposing army. Buell 377.

Item 11: [Further falsification after the capture of Atlanta] Sherman, of course, is given credit for "his" March To The Sea", a maneuver that has captured the minds of historians and public alike for years. But credit for the idea itself rightly would appear to belong to Thomas, because he proposed, shortly after the fall of Atlanta, taking "his little command eastward to the sea". W. Thomas 517; Van Horne 255. From the record it is probable, although not clear, that this proposal was made prior to any time the thought had entered Sherman's head. Thomas said he proposed it to Sherman shortly after the fall of Atlanta. Van Horne 255. Sherman in his self serving and grossly flawed memoirs asserted that he had thought of such a venture himself on or about September 21, the date on which Hood moved from Lovejoy's to Palmetto. Sherman Memoirs 615, 641-42. We may never know for sure whether this is just one more example of Sherman's after the fact fictionalizing or whether, in any case, Thomas' statement that he made his proposal "shortly" after the fall of Atlanta meant it was made prior to September 21 of 1864. What we do know is that Sherman rejected Thomas' offer only by saying that he would have to clear Thomas' proposal with Grant, and not by saying, as one would expect if it was true, that Thomas need not bother because he had already planned to do that himself and was working on it. Under all the circumstances, the likelihood is that Thomas was the author of the March to the Sea plan and not Sherman. (This time, at least, Sherman, having been burned by a subordinate's bungling performance at Snake Creek Gap, chose to execute Thomas's plan himself, rather than entrust matters to another subordinate). Did Sherman credit Thomas in any way for coming up with this daring and creative suggestion?. Not a word. Sherman Memoirs 641-42. Could Thomas have succeeded with the March the same as Sherman, and thus ensured his place in history? There can be no doubt that the answer is yes. But even if Sherman genuinely felt that he was better able to execute the March than Thomas (and we

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<sup>12</sup> Sherman did give Thomas credit for his placement of artillery, but then went on to belittle the battle by describing it as a mere "bold sally", which he then claimed "we" had repelled handsomely.

will never know whether his execution was better), he should at least have acknowledged the fact of Thomas' ability to propose such a daring offensive maneuver. Instead, he did the opposite. He assiduously adhered throughout and to the bitter end to the lie that Thomas was slow and incapable on offense.

Item 12: [Further omissions by Sherman and the popular historians regarding the March to the Sea] After the fall of Atlanta and the idea of the March to the Sea arose, Sherman at first and for a time, with Hood's major army still intact and behind him, lobbied hard to take his entire forces with him to the Sea. Van Horne 255. Not only Thomas but Grant as well rightly rejected these entreaties. To have done so would have obviously courted a major disaster. No mention is made of this dangerous proposal first, of course, by Sherman in his memoirs, nor later by popular historians in assessing Sherman's abilities.

Item 13: [Falsification regarding and during the battle of Nashville] Thomas suffered perhaps his greatest indignity and mischief at the hands of Grant during the Nashville campaign, when Grant ordered him flatly and repeatedly to attack no matter what (which would have been at the very least foolish, given the facts then known to Thomas and now history), drew up orders to replace him, in fact sent Logan with orders as his replacement, and to top it all off, began to travel personally to Nashville to oversee the campaign. Lincoln, Stanton and Halleck, except in one notable instance, mostly acquiesced in silence. Grant's actions vis a vis Thomas at Nashville--his loss of cool, to put it bluntly--is explained perhaps by the fact that that week had been, according to Col. Horace Porter, the most anxious period of his entire military career. 5 Sandburg 638. Not only was he personally stalemated against Lee in Virginia after a loss of 60,000 men, Sherman at that point remained unheard from, which for all Grant knew could have meant military disaster from a potentially risky venture that he himself had only reluctantly signed off on. This does not excuse his apoplectic lashing out at Thomas, however, who least of all deserved it (and who, once again, by refusing to be stampeded into a disastrous situation as a result of Grant's orders, , ironically was working in his antagonist's best interests) <sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> After the fall of Atlanta and decision of Sherman to March to Savannah, Thomas was ordered by Sherman to "fight him [Hood] cautiously, taking advantage of your fortifications and the natural obstructions of the country." Grant reviewed Sherman's orders explicitly and concluded that the best way to handle Hood was "that being pursued and recommended by Sherman" H. Hattaway and A. Jones, How the North Won (1991) 640. How ironic that Grant should have berated Thomas for refusing to attack Hood at Nashville in a sleet storm over ground covered with ice when Thomas' orders were to fight Hood cautiously. This is a perfect example of Grant's inconsistencies and free lancing nature insofar as military operations are concerned.

Item 14: [Falsifications after Nashville] At Nashville Thomas once again exasperated Grant with his success and, even more, his having thwarted yet another Grant attempt to visit disaster on a Union Army (Thomas' having resisted and overcome Grant's insistence on attacking before reasonable preparations had been made, and later on on a sheet of ice during an ice storm, etc.) Again, Grant responded not with gratitude, but with yet another attempt at humiliation. He did so by attempting to dismantle Thomas's army and disenfranchise Thomas on the specious grounds that he had proven himself once again too slow. H. Hattaway and A. Jones, How the North Won (1991) 656 (Hereinafter cited as "Hattaway). Such actions on Grant's part were reprehensible and spiteful, and even the popular historian Bruce Catton, a staunch Grant defender, found them to be too much to swallow. See page 33, *infra*.<sup>14</sup> Sherman, in true yes man fashion, was especially insulting and untruthful when he wrote to Grant in December, 1864, after the battle of Nashville, and said that he knew Thomas to be slow "in mind and in action." W. Thomas 539.

Item 15: [Admissions by Grant at City Point regarding real reasons for command decisions affecting Thomas (political or personal reasons, and not sound military reasons)] It was not beyond Grant to work unabashedly to enhance his own reputation and image at the expense of commanders under his control in the West whose interests would presumably be served and reputations enhanced by exercise of the best military options available. Thus, at City Point during the Petersburg standoff, Grant tells Lincoln after a meeting among Lincoln, Grant and Sherman, and after Sherman had departed, that he did not want the Western Army to win the final battle with Lee or even have them on the field as it would demoralize the Army of The Potomac, and give Western politicians grounds to criticize the relative performance of the latter, then, of course, headed by Grant. 6

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<sup>14</sup> Despite Grant's efforts to emasculate Thomas as a competitor Thomas reacted by fashioning his remaining cavalry forces into yet another supreme fighting force that continued to play a significant role with far reaching effects, as far even as Appomattox. Lee's objective at the end was to escape and unite with Johnston's forces in the Carolina's via Lynchburg or Danville, but Thomas had on his own initiative anticipated that move and had his forces positioned to block it. The scope of Thomas' reach at the end of the War is indicated by the fact that he had scouts in the Shenandoah Valley in April of '65, and at the same time forces capable of chasing and capturing Jefferson Davis far away in the Deep South. W. Thomas 507.

Sandburg 161 This particular intrusion of politics into military affairs is reminiscent of Grant's and Sherman's practice of picking favorites (among whom Thomas was not included) for the glory roles during the Chattanooga and Atlanta campaigns on other than military grounds. It also explains why Sherman was chosen over Thomas to succeed Grant as Western commander when Grant went East, and, ultimately, why history records that the Union's best commander did not end up as the Supreme Commander, East and West, as one would expect.

Item 16: [Falsifications by Grant and Sherman generally regarding Thomas' alleged 'slowness'] There are numerous references in Grant's and Sherman's memoirs and other writings cited herein to Thomas's alleged slowness. His actions at or regarding Mill Springs, Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge, Snake Creek Gap, Peachtree Creek, and Nashville, and his proposed own March to the Sea from Atlanta, all belie slowness in thought or action. There is in Sherman's writings, however, a fatal admission, and that is where, in a slip of the writer's pen, Sherman described Thomas not just per usual as slow, but as slow *and sure*. Sherman Memoirs 574. See also the letter of General Halleck included therein at 591, which is an objective confirmation of Sherman's slip. Sherman's slip is a fatal admission because it introduces, in sureness, a quality that overrides the issue of speed of action. In other words, one must conclude that it is better to have a General who is slow (or fast) and sure than one who is fast (or slow) and unsure. Sureness as used in these instances was obviously meant to connote a positive, admirable quality. Thus Sherman defined it *specifically* as the opposite of hasty or rash, both of which have negative connotations. *Id.* at 574. Halleck denoted slow as positive when he said Thomas was slow *but* sure, the use of the word "but" necessarily implying that any negative aspect to what preceded, slowness, was countervailed or cancelled out by what followed. It is the same as if he had said Thomas was slow yet sure. To take a concrete example, if Thomas' Snake Creek Gap plan had been executed as he proposed, it would have resulted in a sure, complete and optimal--indeed a smashing military victory. In those circumstances, who cares whether it was fast, medium or slow. <sup>15</sup> In fact, we know that as it turned out McPherson's performance was as fast or slow as would Thomas' have been, but unsure, that is, a failure, whereas Thomas performance at

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<sup>15</sup> If the contention were to be made that Thomas might not have succeeded at Snake Creek Gap either, because he would have moved too slowly, one need only refer to a single incident in Thomas' career in complete refutation. That would be the time on the night preceding the battle of Chickamauga when he moved his entire Corps from McLemore's Cove off the far right to the position on the far left overnight, to the complete surprise of the enemy. See page 4, *supra*. That maneuver alone demonstrates Thomas' ability to move as quickly as necessities require.

the same speed would have most assuredly been a sure, smashing success.

In any event, slowness cannot be judged in a vacuum. One must ask the question, on being asked to judge slowness bad: slowness in comparison to what? To Grant's and Sherman's speed? Surely Thomas' slowness with numerous major victories and no mistakes is better than Grant's speed in proposing to attack Missionary Ridge two weeks ahead of time, and attacking Johnston in Dalton in February of '64, and the speed with which he moved through the Wilderness, and at Cold Harbor, and to the crater at Petersburg, etc., etc. If Thomas was slow, slow in the context of historical fact can only be defined as always taking the time to make the correct military decision., versus the opposite, which is making a fast, wrong decision. As between Thomas's slow and Grant's fast, therefore, it is no contest as to which is the better. Slow is the winner. The fact is that Grant's reputation as a successful General rests on the fact, shown elsewhere herein in abundance, that where Grant's speed was leading him directly to disaster, Thomas stepped in and saved him (and others) with his sureness or slowness. Conversely, it must be asked: where did Thomas's alleged slowness ever lead to error or a mistake? Not at Chattanooga. Not at Snake Creek Gap. Not anywhere on the road to Atlanta. Not at Nashville. Never. There were no defeats suffered at any time, and there were no opportunities for victories lost. Rather, the result of his "slowness" seemingly was always being at the right place at the right time, making the right decision. Given the facts, all that Grant's and Sherman's allegations of slowness come down to are unfounded, petty slanders against Thomas, designed to deflect Thomas' glory to them and cover up their own deficiencies.

Item 17: [Falsification by representative popular historians based on patently false Grant or Sherman record or otherwise]

The Ken Burns series has already been alluded to as a prime example of faulty popular history. See pages 20-22, *supra*.

Bruce Catton's Pulitzer Prize winning series on Grant is another. There that noted author attempts to give Grant credit for the success at Chattanooga, concluding that Sherman's comment that "Grant deserves the credit of it all" for Chattanooga, which of course gives no credit to Thomas, is largely justified, . Catton at 93. In fact, as we have seen, Grant's contributions there had the makings of disaster until Thomas twice saved the day. Catton's rationale not surprisingly

therefore is twisted and internally inconsistent.<sup>16</sup> Catton, however, unlike other popular historians, at least raised the question of how much credit Grant deserved versus Thomas. And later he undermines his contention that Grant deserved the credit for Chattanooga and tips his hand when he records that the reason Grant took Thomas' infantry away from him after Nashville was because Grant, rightly or *wrongly*, *perceived* Thomas as unable to move fast.. Catton 406.. That statement betrays a belief or at least a surmise that Grant was wrong in his perceptions of Thomas at Nashville and an implicit acknowledgment that Grant could be terribly wrong about Thomas in other respects.

Similarly, the historian Stephan Oates, in an anthology used by teachers at American colleges and universities, refers to Grant as the one who “won the battles around Chattanooga”. Stephen B. Oates, Portrait of America, Volume 1, 1999, which includes excerpts from James M. McPherson's Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era, 1988, at 382. Oates goes on to describe Grant as the Union's best general. Meanwhile McPherson, in that part of his Pulitzer Prize winning book excerpted in Oates' book, comments on the best and the worst generals in the War. In doing so he

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<sup>16</sup> He says that the battle went just about as Grant planned before the first shot was fired, and that Grant dominated the battlefield from beginning to end. And as far as the charge up Missionary Ridge is concerned, he states that that also was part of the plan, and that Grant's only concern stemmed “from the fact that he had meant for them to pause long enough to organize a more coherent column of assault.” Catton at 93. In fact the order was for Thomas to “carry the rifle pits at the foot of Missionary Ridge, and when carried to reform his lines on the rifle pits with a view to carrying the ridge.” Catton at 79. McDonough states that it is clear that no attack on the Ridge was ever contemplated, at least none until Sherman had succeeded in breaking through on the flank. McDonough 161, and see also 163. And unfortunately for Catton the nasty little fact, acknowledged by the author, is that when Thomas' troops went charging up Missionary Ridge, Grant expressed his strong disapproval, and threatened to punish his subordinates if the maneuver failed. And earlier Catton himself in describing the charge wrote that “astoundingly, and against the odds” it was a swinging success. Catton at 84. Did he really mean that Grant had ordered something beforehand that could only be described as astounding, and against the odds? What kind of commander would do that? Finally, given what we know about Grant, there can be little doubt that he intended exactly what he said, which was that the purpose of this move and any and all moves by Thomas' Cumberlanders was to allow Sherman (and his, Grant's own plan) to succeed. Ordering Thomas to take over and succeed would have been contrary to Grant's wishes and habits as we know them. As we have seen, Grant was fully capable of rejecting sound military advice and options in order to protect the reputations of his chosen commanders and himself and to deflect criticisms of their and his failures and shortcomings. His conversation with Lincoln at City Point is a case in point. Finally, in opposition to Catton's thesis, Grant himself was quoted as saying of the affair “damn the battle, I had nothing to do with it.” O'Conner 252.

follows the familiar pattern of simply not mentioning Thomas at all. Oates (McPherson) 385. He deals with Thomas' achievements by asserting that they were brought about by "incompetent" Confederate commanders. *Ibid.*

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The foregoing items are but a sample of the falsifications in or leading to the popular record, but those included represent the universe, as proven by the fact that educated people, including many graduates of West Point, have never even heard of George Thomas, while everyone has heard of the Grant, Sherman and others. Taken together with the Grant and Sherman memoirs and writings, it is items such as these that constitute the crumbly bricks of sand on which Grant's and Sherman's reputations have been built, and under which Thomas' reputation has been buried.

The misreporting of the popular historians, such as Burns, Catton, Shelby Foote and others is difficult to fathom because it is not as if the facts were beyond easy grasp. As a prime example, it is clear to anyone who looks at the bare undisputed and readily available facts that the Atlanta campaign could have been hugely successful and untold lives would have been saved if Sherman had accepted not only Thomas's plan for Snake Creek Gap but his plan for execution of the plan as well. (page 10, *supra*) Similarly, the facts surrounding not just Thomas' outstanding performances at Chickamauga, Chattanooga, Peachtree Creek and Nashville, but Grant's harassment of Thomas and dangerously insecure behavior during those critical times, especially at the time of Nashville, are perfectly documented and undisputed. (page 29, *supra*) Most of the documentation exists in the official record, or has been furnished by direct participants in the War. For example, objective insiders such as James A. Garfield, Rosecrans' chief of staff and later our 19th President, spoke eloquently on Thomas's behalf, while criticizing those who he said could be recognized only by obscuring Thomas, a pointed reference to Grant and Sherman. W. Thomas 400-01.

Especially harmful is the omission from the historical record of those instances where Thomas saved his superiors, Grant especially, from ruinous blunders, such as the time two weeks before the Chattanooga battles when Thomas refused to attack prematurely (see pages 4-5, *supra*), the time during those battles when Grant ordered Thomas into the dangerously exposed rifle pits at the base of Missionary Ridge, the time in February of 1864 when Thomas refused to act on Grant's vehement suggestions that he attack Johnston's larger, entrenched army in Dalton, Buell 355-57, the time in July of 1864 when Thomas saved Sherman from an embarrassing defeat at Peachtree Creek after Sherman, like Rosecrans, had unwittingly split his army before a concentrated Army force just waiting to attack, see page 11, *supra*, the time when Thomas (and Grant) saved Sherman from the foolish mistake of taking his entire forces with him on the March to the Sea, leaving Hood behind unopposed (see page 29, *supra*), and, of

course, the times when Grant ordered Thomas to attack prematurely at Nashville. One would think that the popular historians would hunger for the opportunity to tell such compelling and untold (to the public) stories.

If indeed it is true that those who ignore history are doomed to relive it, then the popular historians are doing a gross disservice to our country by omitting to tell the facts--good and bad--about our leaders, especially our military leaders. We should know--indeed be constantly reminded-- that they can be small and untruthful, even at the highest levels. At the same time we should know there have been men of saint-like character that have served our country incredibly well. We lose by falsely idolizing the former and ignoring the latter. We need to learn to distinguish between types of militarists and their proponents.

Why did Grant and Sherman falsify the record in terms of Thomas's achievements and alleged faults, while puffing up their own achievements and downplaying their own faults? What motivated them to, as Castel put it, “pepper their memoirs” with “bias”, “distortions” and “prevarications”? Why did they give the glory roles and promotions to others and the bad assignments to Thomas? A little of that may be human nature. But what was done in Thomas' case goes far beyond what mere human nature would account for.

The following reasons have been suggested as to why Grant had such a bad attitude toward Thomas, none of which, it will be noted, has anything to do with merit: (1) Grant resented Thomas having been given Grant's command early on when Grant was kicked upstairs under Halleck's command; (2) Grant, like others, may have resented or questioned Thomas's Southern birth, even though it became apparent as time went on that his loyalty could not be doubted; (3) Grant felt intimidated and uncomfortable in Thomas' presence because he knew Thomas to be more competent and deserving than he; (4) Thomas had, according to some, but certainly not all accounts, treated Grant with what Grant perceived to be less than proper respect and solicitude the night when Grant arrived in Chattanooga to take command; (5) there was a culture clash between Grant and Thomas, in that Thomas, while fiercely loyal to the Union, was a true Southern Gentleman, while Grant was more the rough-hewn frontiersman. For example, both Grant and Sherman's headquarters were simple and Spartan, while Thomas' retained many of

the refined habits at table and in personal accommodations, despite being in the field. Grant and Sherman were known to have viewed Thomas' headquarters environment with disdain (though not so much as to not partake in many of the advantages, such as maps, intelligence, etc.). Sherman Memoirs 473. Finally, and perhaps most plausibly, (6) It seems that Thomas tended almost to befuddle Grant, in the sense that Grant could not abide Thomas' habit of taking his time to execute orders when he felt it necessary in order to achieve the objective in the most productive and efficient manner, when deep down he realized, sooner or later, that Thomas was invariably right to have done so.

In the words of John Bowers:

“Thomas seems to have always maddeningly done the right thing.”  
Bowers 239.

Bowers writes further that Grant simply didn't cotton to Thomas. He (Grant) was a man who either liked you and was loyal or didn't like you and found ways to diminish or leave you. Bowers 183. It has been widely reported that Thomas and Grant simply did not like each other. *Id* at 187.

In any event it seems apparent that Grant's dislike of Thomas was borne of a fear of dealing with a strong and talented competitor who was just the opposite of a yes man, whereas Grant preferred yes men as his associates and subordinates. Unfortunately Grant let his dislike of Thomas influence his professional decisions, chiefly through the denial of position and assignments to Thomas, to the detriment of the public interest.<sup>17</sup> Given the way Thomas was treated by Grant, his superior, Thomas' dislike of Grant is understandable. No one likes to be lied about, belittled, etc., especially by someone for whom one had done tremendous

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<sup>17</sup> “Prejudice and chicanery had kept [Thomas] from any quickly given and deserved promotions. A good case was made out by his friends that no promotion had come to him until it could no longer be decently denied.” 4 Sandburg 435 Similarly a pattern emerged early on insofar as assignments were concerned. If a thankless, sacrificial or mundane mission was in the hopper, Grant or Sherman chose Thomas to perform it. For example, attacking and holding the rifle pits at the base of Missionary Ridge, the attack up Kennesaw Mountain, and, after Atlanta, chasing, catching and containing Hood, which to Sherman seemed a particularly futile and thankless task. On the other hand, if a glory mission was in the works, it went to his old Army of the Tennessee or anyone else. For example, the key flanking movement at Missionary Ridge, the Snake Creek Gap operation, most movements toward, in and around Atlanta, and that ultimate glory trip, the March to the Sea.

favors, and from whom one would expect much gratitude instead. However, and this is a huge difference, Thomas, unlike Grant, demonstrably never let his feelings interfere with his military decisions and performance. As he said, he trained himself early on not to have feelings for that very reason. W. Thomas 604, O'Conner 195.

Castel takes a softer, more forgiving attitude toward Grant's conduct insofar as promotions are concerned. He reasons that commanding generals are entitled to a certain comfort level when it comes to choosing their subordinates and colleagues, that is, commanding generals cannot be expected to work with subordinates who challenge them and make them feel uncomfortable. Castel 86-87. However, this definition of leadership dooms an organization to the lowest common denominator of the commander's weaknesses, as opposed to allowing those weaknesses to be compensated for by competent subordinates. Certainly it does not have to be so. Less than perfect leaders (and none are perfect) can become great leaders by utilizing the strengths of subordinates, suffering the discomforts in the process. And history will reward them for doing so. The best examples of this are Abraham Lincoln, followed by Thomas himself. Lincoln selected for his Cabinet the strongest, most capable and most difficult men to work with that could be imagined, men like Seward and Chase, his bitter rivals. Unlike Grant, Lincoln had the inner strength and confidence in his own abilities to make difficult relationships work fabulously in the public interest. Similarly Thomas routinely surrounded himself with strong and difficult but capable men who blossomed under him and provided loyal support. Baldy Smith, Joe Hooker, John Beatty, John Palmer and Thomas J. Wood come to mind, all of whom became staunch Thomas supporters in the face of trumped up criticisms by Grant, Sherman and their supporters. McKinney 276-78.

As though the Grant/Sherman enmities were not enough Thomas had to bear the stigma of his Virginia birth, which translated directly into lack of advancement in rank. This dire effect was based initially on an ambivalence if not an outright distrust of his motivations by Lincoln and his advisors. Attitudes of mistrust were maintained initially despite Thomas' positive declarations of loyalty. For example, when told of the requirement after Ft. Sumter that all regular army officers must take a loyalty oath, Thomas not only did not complain, he replied that he would willingly take the oath every day if asked. At about the same time, Sherman, presumably because of his Senator brother's connections to Lincoln, was summoned to render advice to the President regarding the staffing of the expanding Union forces by the regular army. Sherman relates that Lincoln asked him about Thomas and raised the loyalty issue, and that he told Lincoln that Thomas was rock solid with the Union and the best soldier on his list. Lincoln responded that he would promote Thomas if Sherman would vouch for him, and

Sherman said he would. When Sherman saw Thomas shortly afterwards he told him about the encounter and inquired regarding Thomas' plans. Thomas replied: "I'm going south." Seeing Sherman's look of utter shock and dismay, he then quickly added, "At the head of my men." At Carlyle when asked what he would do if Virginia seceded, Thomas replied that he would help to whip her back again. W. Thomas 135.

More important in the long run was the total lack of any supporting political sponsorship by his native state or region in Congress. Thomas' lack of political support is to be compared to the virile political support given throughout their careers to Grant by Congressman Washbourne of Grant's home district, and, especially, the support given Sherman and also Grant by Sherman's powerful brother who served as Ohio's United States Senator. 4 Sandburg 435. It is no accident of history that the military establishment during and after the war was dominated by Grant favorites all of whom were from Ohio, namely, Sherman, Sheridan and Schofield.

While Thomas' place of birth cannot be laid at the doors of Grant and Sherman, it did nonetheless visit an injustice on Thomas that ought to be explained in history.

With the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, we of this time know that George Thomas was a loyal Union man. We owe it to him to correct the record, which is now needlessly incorrect, by at least having history conclude in those instances when he was denied promotion because of his questionable loyalty that he should and would have been promoted on merit and trusted, and had his talents recognized, if the true facts regarding his loyalty had been known.

Thomas no doubt was also hurt early in the War by his refusal of command as successor to General Buell. He later squelched all attempts by James Garfield, Horace Greely, and others to have him promoted and sent East as Commander of The Army of The Potomac (his grounds for refusal were he could not contribute in that theatre (perhaps because of his Virginia background, or the fact that he could not function in such a political atmosphere) (see McKinney 303-04). Similarly he later thwarted President's Johnson's attempt to name him General In Chief of the Army in place of Grant, with whom Johnson was feuding, because it was apparent the offer was politically motivated. *Id.* at 466. He also squelched all attempts to have him run for the presidency after the war. W. Thomas 611. But unlike the case of Sherman, the fact is little known or reported.

In short, he was several times over a victim of that well known law which states that no good deed must go unpunished, his good deeds having included his

decision to stay and fight with the Union after his state had left it, and his rare refusal of commands in the public interest, for both of which he paid dearly and unfairly.<sup>18</sup>

Luck also had a hand in it when it came time for Lincoln to appoint an overall Western commander. Based on their respective military achievements Lincoln should have appointed Thomas instead of Grant. But Grant had just come off the victory at Vicksburg, which had huge public relations benefits, whereas Thomas' stellar performance was associated with and probably overshadowed by an overall public relations disaster, Chickamauga. Vicksburg set the stage for the Grant war and post war dynasties which included himself, then Sherman, then Sheridan, then Schofield, all Grant favorites, and their placement in the key leadership positions in the army. History, of course, looked on those posts as validations of greatness, and the failure to achieve them as a basis for historical oblivion.

The luck of the draw in terms of names likely has also played a part. There is nothing catchy about the name George Henry Thomas, whereas there is about William Tecumseh Sherman, whose name always seems to be quoted with relish in full, for that wild west flavor. Similarly, what better name for an American military hero than one whose initials are U.S., especially when those same initials are also associated with that ultimate macho flag-waving goal of any successful general, an unconditional surrender. Such names can make any writer, especially a popular historian, pump his fist in the air as the creative juices flow.

Finally, Thomas' personality, which was not flamboyant, but instead quiet and thoughtful, some would say even phlegmatic, did not help. He was not pushy

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<sup>18</sup> As a further example of Thomas' bad luck and the seeming operation of the "no good deed" maxim, Thomas acquired among his colleagues the nickname Slow Trot. The casual observer would and no doubt has associated that name with the charges of Grant and others of Thomas' slowness in battle. The name had nothing to do with his aggressiveness as a commander, however--rather, it had to do with the admirable trait of preserving and using government resources to the best advantage. When Thomas taught at West Point, the Academy was somewhat of a badly funded step-child, and as a result its horses were of very poor quality. Whenever Thomas rode with students he admonished them to go no faster than a slow trot in order to conserve the horses, hence his nickname. The term thus was actually a compliment. This reverse image, this turning of a positive trait into a seeming negative image, is a perfect example of the bad luck George Thomas was destined to suffer, not only via the instrumentalities of his colleagues Grant and Sherman, but from fate as well.

except in his professional work as a soldier. He was the opposite of an egomaniac. General William Patterson said of Thomas that he was the most unselfish man he ever knew, a perfectly honest man. W. Thomas 135. After the War, both Grant and Sherman accepted houses as gifts from admirers and/or supplicants. Thomas, though offered, would accept nothing from anybody. W. Thomas 546. Thomas the man was no less remarkable than Thomas the soldier. As indicated from his childhood days, though from the South, he had beneficent views of the Negro. *Id.* at 563. His refusals of command when he deemed it contrary to the public interest was remarkable (see page 25, n. 11, *supra*), as was the fact that he took not one day of leave to return to his home or family during the entire course of the War. In his usual self effacing manner he refused all entreaties in the post-war period that he be a candidate for the Presidency. W. Thomas 611. When Sheridan, another Grant favorite, and next in line within the Grant dynasty, was elevated to Lt. General over him, Thomas' only remark was that he would much prefer to deserve a place and not have it than to get it without having deserved it. T. O'Conner, Thomas, Rock of Chickamauga (1948) 358.

It has been said that

“Thomas was never the life of a party. He neither rose from poverty nor went off the deep end through drink or craziness. He kept his life private and did not write his memoirs. Could it be that although Thomas is one of the great heroes of the Civil War, he is not as remembered as Lee and Jackson or as Grant and Sherman because he was not colorful? Could Thomas be a little too boring to fit comfortably into the American mythology? We want our heroes flawed and humbled at times, so they can be made into good copy. Thomas seems to have always, maddeningly, done the right thing.” Bowers 239

Only once did Thomas get fed up and pull strings to get what he deserved. It was, fittingly, only after the War, when the nation's security was no longer at risk. In reconstruction the South was divided into four military districts with a major general to be in charge of each. But there were five Major Generals. Grant, true to form, gave the districts to the four other than Thomas. Thomas appealed directly to President Johnson, with whom he had good relations, who not only gave him one of the districts, but created for him a district matching Thomas' desires, which happened to be comprised of the states constituting the heart of the old Confederacy. W. Thomas 598, 600.

Thomas' virtues and achievements as a professional soldier and as a man should of course outweigh in the eyes of history any publishing negatives which might arise from the fact that he is a good and stable man, much as Lincoln's

awesome intellect and his political, people and linguistic skills have rightly overshadowed his awkward physical appearance and general goodness in the eyes of publishers and historians, for example.

The case of Robert E. Lee is most interesting in this respect. Lee and Thomas were alike in many ways. Both were good men (read colorless, in this present context, which is that of selling popular history to the public) and highly skilled professionals. Yet history could not have treated the two men more differently. And to the extent there were differences, Thomas would clearly appear to have the edge. He saved the Union. He, unlike Lee, did not make any mistakes. And he cannot be said to have been disloyal to his country, which, in line with the modern view of Federalism, must be considered a paramount virtue to having been loyal simply to one's state. And to top it off, in terms of military capability there is no doubt in this author's mind that if Lee had been facing Thomas during his many campaigns, the latter would have never let Lee get away with the daring, high risk tactics that Lee typically employed. He would instead have been ready, taken full advantage of the opportunities they presented and decisively turned the tables, much as he did against Lee's men at Chickamauga (Longstreet) and at Atlanta and Nashville (Hood). So what can be said to account for the difference in treatment? Unfortunately, it appears that Grant and Sherman's biases and distortions and the apparent laziness of the popular historians in accepting them have tipped the scales and blocked Thomas from receiving accolades similar to those accorded Lee, accolades which any fair-minded person must conclude he deserves, and then some.

If it is true, as it appears to be to some extent, that American heroes must be flawed to be popular, then that would certainly help explain the portrayal of Grant and Sherman as heroes by the popular historians, and not Thomas. This is, needless to say, a highly troublesome truth.

For present purposes, the point is that the failure of Grant, Sherman, Lincoln and the popular press to accord Thomas his rightful due in the saving of the Union, though wrongful, is readily explainable on grounds other than merit, and the failure of Lincoln as Commander in Chief or of his superiors to choose Thomas for overall supreme command, instead of Grant and especially Sherman, does not provide counterweight to the point made herein that to Thomas, more than any other military figure, should go the nation's accolades and gratitude for saving the Union. The failure to choose him had nothing to do with merit. It had to do with bias, jealousy, envy, and, to some extent, just plain bad luck. Fortunately for George Thomas, the work of respected scholars who have looked at the matter closely keeps stubbornly arising, which threatens to clear the air. But, for the reasons noted by Castel, and through sheer inertia, these writings have yet

to bubble up to the surface and the public's consciousness.<sup>19</sup>

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Some closing thoughts: Much as Castel started out neutral and ended up writing critically of Sherman, in this project Grant's and Sherman's bias against Thomas has emerged far worse than was originally apparent when the reading and research on which this compendium is based was first commenced. At first, the Grant/Sherman machinations were not even on the radar scope, owing to the popular historians. Then at some point they came to be viewed as merely mean-spirited, or ungracious. The cumulative effect of all the reading and research, however, has been that they have since come to be viewed as something akin to malicious mischief and violation of duty and the public trust. The record indicates that Grant's views, based on his own seeming insecurity in the face of Thomas, were so fixed against Thomas that nothing Thomas ever did or could do would change them. It indicates a certain and unbecoming smallness in Grant which overall operated to the detriment of the public interest. In an almost black and white contrast, Thomas, like that other great man Lincoln, was able to slough off the slights against him and still contribute his all. A lesser man would have, like Hooker, voiced his displeasure and not so politely taken his services elsewhere. For not having done that, for that reason alone, the nation and history owes Thomas its deepest gratitude, and, in the case of the nation, its existence as it is.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Bear in mind that after the war Grant and Sherman achieved near God-like hero status among the victors and that they each left published memoirs. The victors' historians therefore wrote their bedrock histories of the war during the time when the heroes were alive or their memoirs had been published, or perhaps, as in Sherman's case, when both conditions existed. In these circumstances, historians no doubt experienced tremendous pressures not to contradict the heroes or their memoirs. As a result, as Castel noted, any attempt at objective truth was and has ever since been drowned in a sea of biased and deceptive reporting.

<sup>20</sup> Despite Chancellorsville, where Hooker lost his focus for a time, Hooker performed much valuable service for the Union thereafter, until the slights suffered at the hands of Sherman caused him to leave the service in disgust before the War's end. Interestingly, a popular magazine insert published a feature recently that purported to list the most over rated and under rated persons or things in various categories, and among the categories was one entitled Civil War Generals. The author or editors, whoever it or they were, gave the nod to Joe Hooker as the most underrated (as usual, having apparently never heard of Thomas). Apart from the gross error of not having chosen Thomas, this nevertheless speaks volumes to the point at hand, which is that Sherman and Grant could not abide competent subordinates serving under them such as Hooker, who refused for the sake of the public interest to suffer the frustrations and indignities that went with such service in total silence, as Thomas, remarkably, was able to do. Since it took the unique and almost super human near saintliness of a man like Thomas to endure such a

This is not to say that officers like Grant and Sherman brought nothing to the table and Thomas everything. All had qualities that contributed, Grant and Thomas especially.

Grant's Vicksburg campaign was not without its brilliance, especially the fact that he was able to fight successfully on two fronts, with substantial Confederate forces to his front at Vicksburg under Pemberton and to his rear at Jackson under Joseph Johnston, all the while tethered to what can be described at best as a long, highly tenuous and circuitous supply line. As this author has noted herein and elsewhere, however,<sup>21</sup> Grant and all of the other supposed, popularly acclaimed great generals of the Civil War on both sides made mistakes. But that fact alone, the fact that our Generals, like Babe Ruth, did not bat 1000 does not disqualify them as national heroes. That is the nature of the risky business of War. George Thomas, on the other hand, *with a full season of at bats, like the others, did bat 1000*, a fact that makes his achievements all the more remarkable and the popular historians' failure to record them all the more tragic.

Moreover, Grant possessed a plain, unadorned, no nonsense, can do attitude, a habit of action and stick-to-it-iveness, a spirit of trial and error; while Thomas possessed an awesome strength that comes with careful, intelligent thought, thoroughness and preparation and stubborn resolve to do the right thing, no matter what. Also, one detects in Grant a comfort level with command somewhat greater than with Thomas. Working together these two could have achieved so much more at so much less cost. That they did not is attributable exclusively to Grant, not Thomas.

Sherman must rightly be credited with the daring, risk taking and persistence required for his march to the sea in the face of substantial doubt about

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relationship and make it work in the public interest, Hooker is not to be blamed for leaving the Army in disgust, nor should he be denied his proper, more positive place in history.

<sup>21</sup> Article entitled Thomas Shows He's No Slacker In Taking The Offensive, published in the Washington Times on January 8, 2000.

such a venture by the higher-ups. But insofar as the idea itself is concerned, for which Sherman is popularly given full credit,, the credit rightly belongs to Thomas as we have seen, <sup>22</sup> as does credit for much of the execution as well, since the core of Sherman's forces consisted of Thomas' men, his engineers, his pontoon experts, his mapmakers, etc, etc., all principally from Thomas' elite Fourteenth Army Corps. Beyond a competent execution of Thomas' plan to march to the sea with Thomas' men, however, Sherman's main attributes seem to have been his personality, which exuded a certain energy, the fact that his brother was an influential U.S. Senator and the most important fact it would seem, he was adept at befriending and flattering Grant.

A trial lawyer who is flamboyant, but unprepared, and one who is prepared, but dull and overly cautious, can both be professional disasters. The same can be said of soldiers. Grant and Thomas as professionals were far from being wholly in either category, but their styles were different, and it may well be that each needed the other to form some sort of nearly perfect partnership. At the very least, however, this ideal working relationship between these two men would have to be considered a partnership, and not solely a Grant operation.

In any Thomas/Grant or Thomas/Sherman partnership, however, ideal or otherwise, Thomas would have to be considered the Senior partner, based on the record. There is no gainsaying that Thomas was and would have been Thomas with or without Grant and Sherman. Indeed he was his great and good self in spite of them. But neither Grant nor Sherman would have been Grant or Sherman without Thomas. Among other things, Thomas kept Grant from becoming a Hood--someone whose thinking was bold and dashing and who was highly successful and much admired early, but whose luck ran out, without his own Thomas to rein him in and correct his errors. In Sherman's case, Thomas propped him up and kept him away from a reputation that would have otherwise been lackluster and largely unsuccessful. Unlike Grant, whose career included both big successes and potentially colossal blunders but for Thomas, along with some actual blunders, Sherman's career was neither high nor low, but was instead, but for Thomas, mediocre. As it was, there was a failure to achieve anywhere near the full potential in the partnerships that existed, at great cost in men and material, and to the nation.

Nothing can be done about the slights suffered by Thomas during his lifetime. Thomas, in typical fashion, did not dwell at the time on those slights, but instead went ahead and saved the Union, while putting his faith in historians to

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<sup>22</sup> See pages 28-29, *supra*.

correct the record. That has not yet been done in anything close to an effective manner. The time to do it has long since passed.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to acknowledge and thank Bob Redmon for having read this Compilation and offered valuable comments and suggestions. Full responsibility for the contents nonetheless remains mine.

I wish also to express my supreme admiration for the many scholars who have made this work possible. As noted, George Thomas placed trust in history to judge him fairly. Broadly speaking, history has thus far failed to discharge that trust. When it finally gets around to doing so, the scholars whose work has been compiled herein will have been the torch-bearers in that fine work, and it will have been their labors which will have contributed mightily.

R.N.M.

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