



# Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society

Research Article

www.gwbhs.com

The following speech was presented by Chris Evans, the nation's leading first-person impressionist of General William Tecumseh Sherman. The event was the 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the speech given by General Sherman to the 2<sup>nd</sup> graduating class of the Michigan Military Academy. The following speech is not the prepared speech given by General Sherman himself but rather a compilation prepared by Chris Evans of comments and writings made by Sherman during his lifetime.

## MICHIGAN MILITARY ACADEMY Saturday, June 19, 1999

Address of E. Chris Evans as General Wm. T. Sherman

In 1836, as a young lad of 16, I left my hometown of Lancaster, OH, to attend the Academy at West Point. Since that time, except for a brief period of 8 years, I have served my country by following the call of the military bugle or drum. And yet, after all these years, one event stands out in the camera of my mind's eye. A scene from that 1<sup>st</sup> day on the Plains overlooking the Hudson.



As I stood there with my fellow newly arrived classmates, the colors were posted, and my young breast was filled with a passion and a love for my country, that still burns there today. The memory of that July 1<sup>st</sup>, of so long ago, was recalled by these 2 fine color guards here today. Perhaps this is an occasion where reminiscing is in order

Some here today may not remember, others may not even know, that my father, Charles Sherman was an Ohio Supreme Court justice at the time of his death, in 1829. Most of you do remember, I am sure, the story of that death. That it left my Mother, my 10 brothers & sisters and myself dependent on friends and relatives for support. That the 3 youngest continued to live with my Mother & the rest of us were scattered throughout Ohio. I was 9 years old and I went to live with our next-door neighbors, Thomas and Maria Ewing, along with their 4 children, 2 nieces and a nephew they were raising. Now Mr. and Mrs. Ewing had been close friends of my parents before my father's death, and I felt most fortunate that I, unlike my siblings, would be able to continue to live so close to my Mother.

Following tradition, my father named my oldest brother after himself, and again by tradition my next oldest brother after my Mother's father. Then, when I was born, I was named TECUMSEH, after that great Shawnee Indian chieftain. Now my father had never met Tecumseh, but he had always admired him, and he was determined, given a 3rd son, he would indeed name him after that great warrior. I can't help but smile, in thinking that had I been born in this area rather than Central Ohio, I might have been named PONTIAC. But Tecumseh, or CUMP it was!



This name did present a problem, however when I went to live with the Ewings. Now Mrs. Ewing was a devout Catholic and she insisted that if I was to remain in her house, growing up next to her children and her wards, that it would be necessary for me to be baptized into her faith. My Presbyterian Mother finally agreed to this, but, on the appointed day, the priest finding my name was a heathen name, refused to proceed. Now that day happened to be St. William's Day, so the priest just borrowed the good saint's name, and I was baptized William Tecumseh Sherman, and it's been that to this day. Except, I'm still called CUMP by my family and friends.

It's good to be here in this part of Michigan once again. I feel I'm no stranger to this area. I have traveled through here on more than one occasion, including attending reunions of the Grand Army of the Republic held in Detroit. Many are the familiar name from this area.

My aide-de-camp, Col. Orlando Poe, here with me tonight, was the first commander of the 2nd Michigan Infantry. General Willcox commands the Dept. of Arizona, and General Henry Hunt, also from Detroit, was the mentor of my artillery chief, Gen. William Barry.

I was a house guest several times of Gen. Alpheus Starkey Williams. "Old Pap" was commander of my 20th Corps, and represented the good people of Detroit in Congress for several terms. But I'm saddened to say, we laid "Old Pap" to rest in Detroit just 6 months ago, almost to the day.

There have been too many funerals of late. I think of General David Stuart, who served under me at Shiloh and Chickasaw Bluffs, who is also buried down in Detroit. Gen. Terry of the 5th Michigan is buried at Mt. Clemons, and of course Armstrong Custer, of my home state, who was adopted by Michigan and now lies at West Point comes to mind. Not only did Armstrong excel as a cavalry leader in the Civil War, but in action in the West he carved a place for himself that may live for all time in American history.

And I would be remiss if I did not mention the courageous and talented men of the 1<sup>st</sup> Michigan Engineers. They served with distinction without interruption in the West from the end of '61, to General

Johnston's surrender at Durham Station. By God, I could not have been successful in my Atlanta and Carolina Campaigns without the service of that fine group.

Serving with me on the National Board of Indian Commissioners is Coldwater's General Carlton Fisk. A fine soldier in war, a great citizen in peace, and a truly compassionate man in all his endeavors.

Michigan, an outstanding state! I am convinced that someday some newspaper scribbler, or some bookwriter, is going to figure out, and put down in print just how important Michigan was to the Union in that late Civil War.

Speaking of newspaper scribblers, there are some who allege that my style of warfare was cruel and inhuman. But I maintain that it is WAR itself that is cruel. There is nothing you can do to refine it. I believe that the greatest act of consideration that a military leader can perform, is to shorten a war as much as possible, while still accomplishing his country's goals, of course. I am convinced that my campaigns and my style of warfare, admittedly designed to ALSO effect civilian morale, did MUCH to shorten the war, and thereby saved thousands of lives.

Oh yes, many was the time that the ladies of the South came to my HQ complaining of the loss of their property. And always, my reply to them was the same, that war was visited upon them because of the actions of the South and not the North. That they found themselves in their present position, behind enemy lines, because that Rebel government that they had espoused so willingly, had failed to protect them. That if they had any complaints they should be directed toward Richmond, and not toward me. I felt that my kind of war, TOT AL WAR, was legitiment war and brought on wholly by the actions of the South.

I HAVE NEVER FELT IT NECESSARY, NOR FELT DISPOSED TO APOLOGIZE NOR EXCUSE ANYTHING I DID TO SHORTEN THE WAR!! Those people of the South made war on us. Dared us, defied us to come South to do anything about it. They boasted they would kill us and do all kinds of horrible things should we try. We accepted that challenge, and then for them to whine and complain of the natural results, was beneath my contempt.

I REFUSE TO BE BLAMED FOR THE CRUELTY OF WAR! To those that would rebel against a government so mild and just as ours, a punishment equal in return is not unjust. Rebellion, in any form, could not be tolerated. My aim was to re-impose the Union, to re-impose stability. I destroyed because it seemed to be a direct route to a desired end. I did not try to be cruel, but rather I tried to persuade the Southerners to stop the secession, to stop the war. Once they had done that, I promised them I would work as hard at reconciliation as I had at destruction. I admit we were harsh; I admit when we had a choice we were not often merciful. I admit we stole and we burned. I do not believe we raped, and I hope not!

But only literally. For metaphorically I hope we did rape, and metaphorically we had every right to! It is not on Northern shoulders that the corpses of 600,000 Americans should be draped. So when mourning the stolen jewels, the axed pianos and burned barns of Georgia and the Carolinas, remember to mourn the souls of those boys, too. I know I do.

One of the pleasures of being General-in-Chief of the Army is the opportunity to travel around this great country. That pleasure includes speaking to bodies such as this. But as I look upon the many eager young faces here at this Michigan Military Academy, I have a feeling that there are many of you who look upon war as all glory, and look to the day when you can use the skill you have acquired here. SUPPRESS IT! SUPPRESS IT, I SAY! You don't know the horrible aspects of war. I've been through 2 wars and I know. I've seen cities and homes burned and in ashes. I've seen thousands of men lying on the ground, their dead faces looking up at the skies. I tell you, WAR is HELL!

I want you boys to know that war isn't all glory, with bands playing, flags flying, and great victories being won. You see, I want you to know and to understand that the burden, and the boredom of peace, is the Kingdom of God on earth. That that other thing, war, is the red confusion of that other place.

I would not be surprised if I were informed there are no newspaper scribblers here tonight. They know what I think of them and they generally stay away. Frankly, I look upon them as LIARS and SCUM. Simple minded, simplifying jackals, they made the infectious ladies that followed our armies look almost virtuous. I recall that as Adm. Porter was attempting to move his boats past the Vicksburg batteries, one tug, with 4 scribblers aboard, took enemy shellfire and was sunk. Despite repeated attempts to find them, we were unsuccessful. It would not have surprised me in the least, to find dispatches from Hell arriving by the next morning.

Unwilling to shoulder a musket along side my men, they yet rush back to their HQ to disclose to the world every military secret they have uncovered. Their stories were more alarming, and did more harm than all the enemy's batteries firing upon us from the other side. Those stories, when read by the Confederate authorities, resulted in countless casualties that need not have been. Many times those stories resulted in a battle or campaign being lost because the enemy was prepared and waiting.

Ask them to wait at least until the battle was joined before giving away our position and our strength, and they scream "1<sup>st</sup> Amendment." After what they wrote about me after Chickasaw Bluffs, I wanted to 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment them, and almost did. Too bad war is hell on ALL THE WRONG PEOPLE.

Let me give you an example, at Vicksburg, in open defiance of a direct order, a reporter of the *New York Herald*, Thomas W. Knox, accompanied my command, and later wrote a report that was highly critical of me. I determined to arrest him on charges of (1) he was a spy, (2) of providing information to the enemy, and (3) of accompanying my army in violation of a direct order. I had Knox arrested and although he was a civilian, I had him courts-martialed. Under oath, that scoundrel stated that he regarded me as an enemy of his set, and of necessity must write me down.

Knox was found guilty of the 3rd charge, with penalty to be sent outside my lines, never to return under penalty of arrest. Knox's friends, including his editor, appealed directly to President Lincoln, who deferred to General Grant. Grant agreed that Knox could return, but only if it was agreeable with me. I promptly wrote to Knox, saying to him that if he returned as a soldier, musket in hand, ready take his place beside my boys, I would welcome him with open arms. But, if he came as a representative of the press, which even he admitted under oath made no distinction between truth and falsehood, then my answer to him was NEVER! Knox must have got the message because he never returned.

Needless to say, I received rather poor press coverage during the war. In Nov. 1861, I stated to a visitor to my HQ in Louisville, a man who by the way had not identified himself as a reporter, that I thought it would take as many as 200,000 men and perhaps as long 5 years to win the war. Imagine my surprise, and I must admit chagrin, when a short time later appeared a story in the *Cincinnati Commercial* under that man's -line, with the headline "GEN. WHILLIAM T. SHERMAN INSANE." That story went on, paragraph after paragraph saying I was stark raving mad my men refusing to obey me. Other newspapers picked up the story and day after day, week after week you could read nothing of but my insanity. Finally, with depression setting in, from the sheer injustice of it all you understand, General Halleck, my superior, found it necessary to relieve me and send me home to Lancaster for rest. There, in short order, Ellen, the children, my friends and neighbors soon had me in fine spirits and ready to return to duty. Interestingly enough, those words that I uttered in my Louisville HQ, those words that got me adjudicated "insane" by the press, later came true almost to the letter.



But this type of treatment was not reserved for me, and me alone. The same unjust and false treatment was also given to Gen. Grant. Case after case of unsubstantiated and untrue stories of his drunkenness appeared in the papers. Strange indeed it was, that in generals Grant, Sherman and Sheridan, Ohio had 3 sons who accomplished more than all the other generals put together, and yet, I never saw kindly notice given in an Ohio newspaper. On the contrary, there seemed to be a system of abuse designed and calculated to destroy us, both with the people and the army. Later in the war, I was asked why it was, that Generals Grant and Sherman, two men who should be natural rivals for the people's attention and adulation, instead seemed to be such steadfast friends. Without hesitation I replied that it was because General Grant had stood by me when I was insane; and I had stood by him when he was drunk.

I recently received a letter from the editor of the *Ladies Home Journal* asking if I did not agree with the premise that the pen was mightier than the sword. I answered by calling his attention to the complete quote, "Beneath the rule of men entirely great, the pen is mightier than the sword." Now this world does not often present that condition to us. "Men entirely great" are very rare indeed, and even George

Washington, who approached greatness as near as any mortal, found good use for the sword and the pen, each in its proper place.

You and I have seen the day when a great and good man, Lincoln, ruled this country with a powerful and prolific pen, and yet had to call to his assistance a million of flaming swords.

No, I cannot subscribe to the sentiment "The pen is mightier than the sword," because IT IS NOT TRUE. Rather, in the providence of God, there is a time for all things; a time when the sword may cut the Gordian knot and set free the principals of right and justice so bound up in the meshes of hate, revenge and tyranny that the pens of mighty men like Clay, Webster, Calhoun, Crittenden and the immortal Lincoln were unable to disentangle them.

That war our swords were engaged in, the Civil War, was a great war. Some may disagree with me, but I maintain that it was a Holy cause. For you see it was a war fought to preserve the greatest country ever put upon the face of the earth. And in the end, it became a war fought not only in America's interest, but of the whole human race.

That war has now been over some 15 years, but apparently some have yet to hear the news. Too many times, as I travel this great country, I hear those expounding on the greatness of THEIR part of the country. Telling all who will listen that the Far West, the Deep South, the Mighty Midwest, or of Old New-England is the finest, the greatest, the most important PART of these United States. I say to you that every American should be proud of the WHOLE country, and not just a part. America's glory rests in the fact that it spans from sea to sea.

Hundreds of thousands of lives were spent to guarantee that this would be a UNITED States. Let not those lives have been given in vain. Parents, and those here today who will someday be parents, bring up your children to revere and venerate those old veterans of '61 to '65. Do not let them EVER forget the sacrifice made by those boys to ensure that our nation would remain ONE UNITED country. Teach those children to show respect for the flag which is the symbol of our country. To always uncover their heads as it passes by. Instruct those children to love their country, that it is GREAT, it is SPECIAL, and that it was created with the BLESSING of God, Almighty. Teach these things, and this great country will live on forever.

Thank you, and good evening.