



# Little Phil: A Reassessment of the Civil War Leadership of Gen. Philip H. Sheridan

*Eric J. Wittenberg*

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**Little Phil: A Reassessment of the Civil War Leadership of Gen. Philip H. Sheridan** Eric J. Wittenberg Unlike Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and Gen. William T. Sherman, whose controversial Civil War-era reputations persist today, Maj. Gen. Philip H. Sheridan has been largely untouched by controversy. In *Little Phil*, historian Eric J. Wittenberg reassesses the war record of a man long considered one of the Union Army's greatest generals. From his earliest days at West Point, Phil Sheridan refused to play by the rules. He was fortunate to receive merely a suspension, rather than expulsion, when as a cadet he charged a superior officer with a bayonet. Although he achieved fame as a cavalryman late in the Civil War, Sheridan actually began the conflict as an infantry commander and initially knew little of the mounted service. In his first effort as a cavalry commander with the Army of the Potomac in the spring of 1864, he gave a performance that Wittenberg argues has long been overrated. Later that year in the Shenandoah Valley, where Sheridan secured his legendary reputation, he benefited greatly from the tactical ability of his subordinates and from his huge manpower advantage against the beleaguered Confederate troops of Lt. Gen. Jubal Early. Sheridan was ultimately rewarded for numerous acts of insubordination against his superiors throughout the war, while he punished similar traits in his own officers. Further, in his combat reports and postwar writings, he often manipulated facts to show himself in the best possible light, ensuring an exalted place in history. Thus, Sheridan successfully foisted his own version of history on the American public. This controversial new study challenges the existing literature on Phil Sheridan and adds valuable insight to our understanding of this famous, but altogether fallible, warrior.

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