1896-12-31

Interviews: Charles A. Dana's Recollections of the Civil War

Tarbell, Ida M.

http://hdl.handle.net/10456/27477

©Allegheny College. All rights reserved.

All materials in the Allegheny College DSpace Repository are subject to college policies and Title 17 of the U.S. Code.
Dec. 12, 1896.

We rode along the slope of Lookout Mountain. We went down this way, and I think that is probably the road we took -- we went partly up on the slope of the mountain. That is the road we took and General Rosecranz and the staff were there and I rode with them. We must have got there about dark or a little after dark. We started after luncheon about one o'clock or half past one. Burnside was a considerable distance off -- he was in Knoxville. It was a long crooked road to get there.

Crayfish Spring was a very remarkable spring -- it was really a stream breaking out of the ground, a subterraneous stream, and it flowed away a good sized creek constantly from this spring. Nothing remarkable -- I do not remember the houses. It was not far. The houses were pretty near. It is all a farming country. It is not very good -- it is not a country, I should say, where cotton could be raised. It is light land -- all that valley there is of light land, light soil.

Sheridan was there. His headquarters were at the Crayfish Spring. I was not with Sheridan at all. I was with Rosecranz all the time. I did not go there until Rosecranz went, and I should think that Rosecranz got there after Sheridan had. Sheridan got there and was pushed down out to the front.
Rosecrans stayed there all day and all night, and did not leave the Widow Glenn until five o'clock the next morning -- there was a council of war held there that night -- a very striking scene it was too. They had got through, the council of war began, I think, at 7.30 P.M. That was the last dispatch and the council of war must have begun about ten o'clock, I should think. There were present General Thomas, General Sheridan, General Rosecranze and McCook. I should say there were a dozen ten or twelve, general officers, and must have been there. They held a council of war and these officers were present. General Rosencranze first began by asking General Thomas -- Rosecranze stated the general result of the day's fighting, and then he asked General Thomas what should be done in his judgment, and General Thomas was so tired (I don't believe he had slept at all or the night previous) and he had been in battle all day and he was so tired that he went to sleep every minute, and said one thing every time. "I would strengthen the left", and then he would be asleep, sitting right up in the chair, and then the other officers gave their opinions, one after the other, and General Rosecranze discussed it -- he was commander-in-chief, and discussed each proposition, and to the proposition to strengthen the right, his reply was: "Where are we going to take it from?" There was no safety in taking the necessary additional strength
to be put in the right, and the place that you took the men from would be weakened so as to cause danger. So then adjourned, I should say, at about half past four in the morning -- this council of war. And General Rosecranz gave his general directions for the positions of the troops the next day and marked them down where each corps should be, and it was an awfully cold night. I remember that I got very tired and I lay down on the floor to sleep, and General Horace Porter lay down with me, and there were cracks in the floor of this old lady's house, and the wind blew up under and we would like lie there and go to sleep, and the place over the cracks, it was so cold it would wake us up and then we would turn over together. Finally after everything had been said, hot coffee was brought in and then (there was General Crittenden of Kentucky -- he was there) McCook called upon Crittenden to sing The Hebrew Maid. This was a song, I think, of Walter Scott's, and Crittenden sang that song and then they broke up and went away and we must have stayed there and slumbered twenty minutes longer, or an hour possibly, I don't know, and then when we got on our horses and went out to see that everything -- Rosecranz was going to ride the whole line -- he was -- The Widow Glen's house was pretty near on the mountain and he was going to ride quite out to the left wing and we rode along with him -- I went with him, I recollect, and everybody
that belonged -- that was around the headquarters -- they all went. We rode down to the left wing and saw that. We rode this whole line and then rode back, and Rosecranz gave in each place what instructions he thought necessary -- what additional new orders -- and when we got to McCook's front there we found a considerable gap without any troops in it, and Rosecranz fell into a great passion -- he was indignant because there was the centre of the line almost, and there was a gap there of, I should think, two hundred yards, perhaps more, and then he sent for General McCook and rebuked him for this, and McCook said he had taken the position that seemed to him the strongest, and he had not been fully aware that there was a gap left, and then Rosecranz gave the order from the right -- the troops should be moved up to fill this gap, but when they began to execute it, then the attack began. It was now about half past seven or eight, perhaps even later -- the sun was up -- and I remember noticing the ten pound shot that came right through the staff, right in among us while we were there. Nobody was hurt by it, and there that place where this gap was the place where the rebels finally came through.

We had not been sleeping for two nights, to speak of, and it was warm, and I got off my horse and lay down on the grass, gave my horse to my orderly and lay down and went to sleep.
Then I was waked up by the loudest racket, and the most infernal noise I had ever heard. The discharges of cannons unequalled, and I saw up -- I woke up -- that woke me up -- I sat up on the grass and I looked at General Rosecranz, and I saw that he was crossing himself -- he was a very pious Catholic. I said -- "hello, General is crossing himself -- we are in a desperate situation." I was on my horse in a moment -- I had no sooner mounted and looked around toward the front toward the enemy, than I saw our lines break away, melt away like leaves before the wind, and the gray-backs came through with a rush and then the bullets began to reach the place -- the rifle bullets -- the place where we were, and the cannon shot too, and the headquarters disappeared and my orderly stuck by me, and we went into the woods a little way, and Porter, Colonel Major Porter it was then, and Captain Drouillard -- he was a regularly Infantry officer attached to General Rosecranz's staff -- they halted fugitives and got them into line -- got half a dozen men into line, and then would come a round shot through the tree tops over our heads, and the soldiers would break and run again. They tried this a good while and finally I saw there was nothing going to be made there and the rebels did not come in. They did not pursue any further -- they merely broke away the lines. Then I said I will go and find Sheridan. Wherever he is, there, there
will be a solid body of troops, and I went and he was not there. He had gone, and I found that afterward he had made his way toward the left and had found men there -- found troops and participated in the strenuous resistance that was made by Thomas on the extreme left, and stopped the whole advance of the enemy. I went immediately from Sheridan -- I was about as far from Widow Glen's house where we had been all night, two days, about as far from here to Broadway, say one hundred or fifteen hundred feet, and there I found ambulance men, hospital men, carrying away the wounded and taking care of them, and I found also a body of organized troops. General Wilder, of Indiana, he had a brigade of mounted rifle men, rifle men who could fight on horseback, or who would dismount and leave their horses behind and could fight on foot, and General Wilder said: "Mr. Dana, what is the situation?" I said, "I do not know, except that this end of the army has been routed -- there was a cannonade at the front end, there seems to be fighting coming on yet." "Will you give me any orders?" "I have no authority to give orders, but if I were in your situation I should go to the left where Thomas is."

And then I turned my horse and rode to Chattanooga. That must have been twelve or fifteen miles, and the whole road was filled with flying soldiers here and there, a piece of artillery, with baggage wagons, and above the darkies. They were all fleeing
to get away, and I rode quite fast to Chattanooga, and when I
got there I found General Rosecranz had been there half an hour
or more before me, so he had started immediately and gone there.
The army was routed, and he did not know it was a considerable
distance to Thomas -- the whole line of the army must have been
fully three miles, perhaps more, and he thought he had best go
to Chattanooga, where it was a central place, and get up rein-
forcements and provide the best he could for the situation.

Garfield came in in the morning. Thomas was the
finest man in the world. He was a man, I should think, three
inches taller than I am, and weighed, without being in obese
at all, 200 pounds, 190 pounds, when he was reduced in fighting
trim, and a man of the greatest dignity of character. He had
more the character of George Washington than any other man I ever
knew. At the same time, he was a delightful man to be with --
put on no artificial dignity. He was a West Point graduate.
Very well educated. He was a man very set, very fixed in his
opinions, yet he was not impatient with anybody -- a noble
character.

Garfield was born in '31. He was not thirty-five then.