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

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I was not there. I did not see him. I don't think I saw General Rosecrans until I met him here one day. He came into this office one evening, long after the war, came right into this room and sat down over there and began by saying that he had thought and said a great many hard things about me but that he was convinced that I was not the man whom he ought to have blamed and he evidently turned against Garfield—-that is simply my impression—-he did not say that, and that he got his information afterwards from a publication of some document by Secetary Chace that had been published. I think it may have been my understanding from the reading of the testimony taken before the Committee on the Conduct of the War; that Committee remained in existence a good while and took a great deal of testimony and I think that they brought out the fact that a letter had been written by General Garfield from Chattanooga to Secretary Chace which had great weight with the President and Secretary in taking the command away from Rosecrans. Rosy came in and sat right down there and said he came to say this to me because he thought it was his duty. I hadn't heard of his having said anything about me in any way. I think it was very interesting credited but not discreditable to him.
I do not think I went with Smith. I started with him and this depended greatly on Smith's success. Smith and I started. We rode a considerable distance together and finally I got on board a steamboat to go to Bridgeport. On board of that steamboat I found General Palmer, who is now a Senator, and who was running on the Sound Money Democratic ticket for President and I travelled with him to Bridgeport and I talked with him a part of the night. We sat up pretty late. I am sure Smith was there as a member of the staff of that army afterwards. I think he was Chief Engineer of the Army, and he remained in that position. Yes, it was; about Smith; oh yes. He was a very gallant and brilliant man; he had distinguished himself in the Army of the Potomac where he had command;—I think he had command—of a division and came from Vermont. He is living now in Wilmington, Delaware. There were several things—I can't now say what they were, special military operations—that he had designed and that turned out to be very successful. I cannot tell what they are. I only have that general recollection. He was known then and is still known as "Baldy" Smith—everybody called him "Baldy"—that is, his intimate friends did. He was an instructor at West Point. He was a very religious man; we had the same room
together. He always said his prayers night and morning, no matter how tired he was. He was as brave as Julius Caesar. He was a man of great decision and energy but rather too talkative. He and I were great friends and have always been. He was at Bridgeport. Sometimes he was in bad humor. When he got there Grant was put over him. He had command of the Army of the Potomac and that had been taken from him and then did not when he came down here he succeeded Rosecrans but Thomas did and then the command of the whole campaign was put in the hands of Grant. He was not a happy fellow.

I dare say; there was not anything serious in that. It was after that, November 24th; I recollect it now. Grant asked me to go. Grant could not give me any orders; I was under the War Department and not under him. I was very willing to go.

I remember Wilson. I went up there and we had a very interesting journey together, indeed.

That is when we went up there and I sent dispatches every day, but they evidently didn't get through.

The battle of Missionary Ridge was a very remarkable affair. Chattanooga is on a hill, on a ridge, right parallel to the line of the river and that ridge is where we
were encamped—where the army was encamped. It was perhaps 500 feet high; it may not have been so high. Between that and Missionary Ridge was a broad valley; there may have been a little stream in it, but I don't remember; perhaps there was and perhaps there wasn't, and that was a mile in width or a mile and a half, and you could see from Chattanooga—you could look down over this valley and the first thing you came to on the other side was this ridge, stretching along, following generally the line of the valley—of the river. Chattanooga town was built in the ridge, near to the river; then came this ridge that you look down from upon the valley and then under that came this Ridge which was under the shoulder of Missionary Ridge and was known as Orchard Knoll.

The battle of Missionary Ridge began with what seemed to be a review, for two or three days, and General Grant and General Thomas had a body of troops out every afternoon in this valley, not near enough to Orchard Knoll to be hurt by rifles or by cannon, but near enough to be seen; it was intended that this should be seen from the rebel fortifications that were up on top of Missionary Ridge. The rebels also at that time held this Orchard Knoll, immediately under the slope of Missionary Ridge. One day the troops were
prepared for battle and all of them were supplied with ammunition and there were a lot of them; there was General Sheridan in the center, General Sherman on the left and the forces of General Thomas on the right; the command on the right I do not now remember, and Hooker on the Lookout Mountains. Well, in the valley between Chattanooga and Orchard Knoll were drawn up a great force of axxx men. Sheridan's whole command was there; Sherman was on the left of him and they were drawn up as if for a parade; there was a fort on the Chattanooga side; I don't remember what they called it—had some peculiar name—where you could stand and see this whole thing. Their music was playing and all of a sudden they had faced towards Missionary Ridge, towards Orchard Knoll, and then the first thing you noticed was the flags were all out. It was a grand scene. The first thing that you noticed was the skirmishers moving in front. A line of skirmishers consists of men that hide and move rapidly forward and they are 40 or 50 feet apart and an officer every half mile or so.
a theatre. You see the little corner of it where you happen to be, but here you saw the whole line; it was an extraordinary display; it was just like standing in a theatre and seeing the audience in front of you. Then when they got to the foot of Orchard Knoll they came right up and in 15 minutes from the time of this beginning, they had carried this height had taken possession of it. That happened one day and then the next morning I remember going out with General Rawlins. We had then taken possession of Orchard Knoll and it was the result of this first day's operations—we had taken Orchard Knoll before—well, we moved up and took the first line of rifle pits at the foot of Missionary Ridge. That was a pretty high ridge—a thousand feet, or perhaps more—high. It was a long slope, with trees on it in some places; it was not perfectly clear. We carried the rifle pits; that was all they were ordered to do; that was the utmost they were ordered to do, but when they were there at the foot of Missionary Ridge the men had got the idea that they were going up; nobody had ordered them to go up that hill and the rebels and their whole army was there. I went up the next day and said to General Sherman. You gave no orders to go up there, and he said, No, sir. But they moved right up the hill; you could see
them fighting away and shooting or running on the slope of this hill, and then the next thing they had got to the top of the hill and the rebels had fled; that was like a spectacle—and then Rawlins and Wilson and I had been with General Grant down there watching them. When this was all done and no more orders to give Wilson, Rawlins and I got on our horses and rode right up to the top of the ridge. All we saw there was dead men; the ambulance men were picking up the wounded and carrying them to the hospital; but the Missionary Ridge was
they were just beginning to pick up the wounded and there did not seem to be many of them, and yet the rebels had the advantage of firing down from the summit.

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