

FEDERALS, NOVEMBER 25, 1863

STORMING MISSIONARY RIDGE, WON A VICTORY WITHOUT ORDERS

It was a notable assemblage that gathered on Orchard Knob, a little out of Chattanooga, Tenn., November 25, 1863, 51 years ago Wednesday. Gen. U. S. Grant and Gen. George H. Thomas and their staffs were there, as were several other general officers. During the month he had been in command of the Union forces in that part of the South, Gen. Grant had made plans for a great battle, with a view to a crushing defeat for the Confederate lieutenant general, Braxton Bragg, and his large army. The commander and some of his generals, according to J. A. Watrous, had gone to Orchard Knob as the best available point from which to witness the carrying out of his plans, in part, for there was no spot from which he could see to advantage his whole line of battle.

Fight "Above Clouds."

The day before, November 24, Gen. Hooker had made his spectacular fight "above the clouds," and had driven the enemy from Lookout Mountain. Gen. Sherman had been given the difficult task of attacking Bragg's right and rear, while Hooker's victorious force and the Army of the Cumberland under Gen. Thomas were to look after the center and the enemy's left. That was a day of vital importance to the nation. Defeat would have been most disastrous so soon after Chickamauga, in the same vicinity, and, too, when the greatest generals of the war on the Union side, Grant, Sherman, Thomas, and Sheridan, were present.

The magnificent sweep of the Army of the Cumberland, which resulted in the capture of the enemy's first line of works at the foot of Missionary Ridge, is often and justly compared with Pickett's charge at Gettysburg.

The directions were to take that first line of works and to await further orders. The success had greatly pleased the generals on Orchard Knob. But there was consternation a little later when the generals there saw the army advancing.

Commanders Are Puzzled.

A story goes that Gen. Grant turned to Gen. Thomas and asked:

"Did you order an advance?"

"I did not, sir."

"Who did?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Somebody will hear from this," Gen. Grant is said to have remarked, and doubtless somebody would have heard from it if the day's fighting had not resulted in one of the great victories of the war.

There is good reason for the belief that the Twenty-fourth Wisconsin started the rush up Missionary Ridge without orders from Gen. Grant or Gen. Thomas. The Twenty-fourth was in Sheridan's division. Capt. E. B. Parsons, of the Twenty-fourth, caught sight of his division commander, who was well to the front as usual. When Sheridan swung his cap Capt. Parsons mistook the look and swing for an order, and ordered his company to push on. Officers on the right and left gave similar orders. When they saw the Twenty-fourth moving, other commanders started, and shortly the army was making that never-to-be-forgotten charge up steep Missionary Ridge. The Twenty-fourth led in the successful move, its flag, in the hands of Adjutant MacArthur, was first to be planted on the Confederate breastworks, and the command was personally thanked by Gen. Sheridan for its heroic achievements.

Win High Honors.

Here is one of the many sidelights which history and the story tellers have failed to mention:

Two young lieutenants and one young colonel who had a part in that day's battle have been heard from since then, not to mention many others. The young colonel was a brigadier general at the close of the war. Indiana sent him to the United States Senate for a term, and the nation made him President. That was Gen. Benjamin Harrison. One of the young lieutenants—who, by the way, was given a medal of honor for his service at Missionary Ridge—led the Twenty-fourth Wisconsin in nearly all of its many battles after Missionary Ridge. He came home with a commission as colonel and two brevet commissions in his side-pocket, not to mention a couple of bullet marks. Then he was given a commission as a second lieutenant in the regulars. And uncle Sam kept on giving him commissions until there were no higher ranks to confer. Few if any officers have had such a number and variety of commissions. At one time he had command of 75,000 men. That was the late Adjt. Arthur MacArthur, lieutenant general of the U. S. A.

The other young lieutenant was a Confederate. He became a lawyer, was attorney general of his State, and in 1900 President McKinley made him one of the Philippine commissioners. He succeeded Judge Taft as governor general of the islands, served as Minister to Japan, and then became Secretary of War. That was Lieut. Luke Wright, of a Confederate battery.