

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

William Starke Rosecrans

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Much of what the history books have told us about William Rosecrans is untrue. We have long been told that he ruined traps set by Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant at Iuka and Corinth, and that Grant won those battles in spite of errors by Rosecrans; that Rosecrans stumbled his way to a bloody draw at Stones River; that he delayed launching his Tullahoma Campaign until it was nearly too late, and by doing so endangered Grant's Vicksburg Campaign; that Rosecrans mishandled his troops at Chickamauga, then compounded the error by panicking and fleeing the battlefield while his army fought on; and that he was on the verge of pulling his starving and near-mutinous command from Chattanooga until Ulysses S. Grant removed him from command in the nick of time and salvaged the situation. In fact, none of those assertions are true. There is not sufficient space in this essay to formally challenge the "facts," but this can be a beginning. Let us lay out the truth, and see what history looks like when shorn of the distortions and the lies.¹

William Rosecrans was born in 1819, in Ohio. He had little formal education before he entered the U. S. Military Academy at age 19. Rosecrans graduated fifth in his class, and served for twelve years- including ten years in the Engineer Corps- taking no part in the U. S. – Mexican War. He resigned at the rank of first lieutenant, had an undistinguished business career (which included incurring facial scarring when an experimental kerosene lamp he was working on exploded), and rejoined the army a week after the firing on Fort Sumter. His first appointment was to the staff of Major General George Brinton McClellan, and he was quickly promoted to brigadier general in the Regular Army. During McClellan's Rich Mountain campaign Rosecrans led a flanking column designated to close a trap McClellan had set; but McClellan panicked, withdrew to a fortified position, and left Rosecrans to fend for himself. Although outnumbered (which he would ultimately be in nearly every battle he fought) Rosecrans and his command were victorious. McClellan, however, got the credit as army commander and was promoted to the post of General-in-Chief. Rosecrans was left in command of the little Union army in western Virginia. He found himself opposed by General Robert E.

¹ For greater detail on these and other misconceptions about William Rosecrans and his stormy relationship with Ulysses S. Grant, see Frank P. Varney, *General Grant and the Rewriting of History: How the Destruction of General William S. Rosecrans Influenced Our Understanding of the Civil War* (El Dorado Hills, CA: Savas-Beatie, 2013).

Lee, who was undergoing his baptism of fire as an army commander and saddled with incompetent subordinates. Rosecrans defeated the incomparable Lee in a campaign of maneuver, which helped pave the way for West Virginia to secede from Virginia and return to the Union as its newest state.

The following year Rosecrans commanded forces in Major General Henry Halleck's army during the ponderous, and ultimately successful, advance on Corinth, Mississippi. When Halleck was called east to assume command of the Union war effort, Grant was left in command of the Union Army of the Mississippi, with Rosecrans serving under him. Up until this point the history books pretty much agree; but this is where the story and the facts begin to diverge.²

Grant was in command and headquartered in Corinth when a Confederate army until Major General Sterling Price seized the nearby town of Iuka. Rosecrans designed an overly-complex and dangerous plan that called for a division of forces: he would swing south and approach Iuka from that direction while Major General Edward Otho Cresap Ord, accompanied by Grant in overall command, moved on the town from the west. Since the only good roads out of town would be covered by the approach of the twin columns, Price would find himself boxed in. Ord was to open the attack, with Rosecrans striking the Confederate rear once Price was fully engaged. Almost from the start things began to go wrong.

Rosecrans was delayed in his night march—which probably should have been expected given the condition of the roads—but it might not have mattered had Grant and Ord carried out their attack as scheduled. As they moved cautiously into position they received a message from Rosecrans in which he informed them that he was behind schedule but would still be in place to attack as planned, only a few hours late. Grant halted in place and was apparently overcome by some sort of inertia. There would be rumors that he was incapacitated by alcohol (not an uncommon charge during the Civil War whenever things went wrong, but perhaps warranted in this case) and simply failed to communicate with Rosecrans' column—or even to keep track of its progress. Instead he attempted to get Price to surrender based on a wildly-exaggerated report from McClellan that he had inflicted a crushing defeat on Lee on the banks of Antietam Creek. Price declined the opportunity but Grant and Ord did not resume their advance.³

Rosecrans also made a fateful decision about this time. Discovering that the two roads he needed to cover in order to ensure Price's entrapment diverged more rapidly than anticipated and were separated by very difficult terrain, he realized that attempting to cover both roads invited defeat in detail. He therefore chose to concentrate his forces on a single road, gambling that he could reach a road junction and shift forces to cover

² Much of the biographical data is from Ezra J. Warner, *Generals in Blue: Lives of the Union Commanders*, 1993 edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 410-11.

³ *Cincinnati Commercial* and *Cincinnati Gazette*, September 29, 1862.

both escape routes while Price was occupied with Ord's column. What he did not know was that Ord had never launched his attack.

Two of Grant's aides "rode around," in Grant's words, to find Rosecrans and attempt to discover what was happening. They discovered his skirmishers already engaged south of the town, and Rosecrans wondering what was going on with the other column. He was unable to reach the vital road junction, and after heavy fighting Price slipped away down the road Rosecrans had chosen not to cover. Only the next morning, suddenly aware that something was amiss, did Ord advance without orders from Grant, to discover the town empty: the rebels had escaped.⁴

Rosecrans would take the blame for it, in spite of the fact that he and his command had done all of the fighting; that he had not had a great deal of choice in leaving one road uncovered given the danger inherent in dividing his command in the face of a stronger enemy force; that he had dispatched his cavalry, with infantry support, in pursuit of Price's command as soon as he learned that the rebels had broken out; and that Grant and Ord had failed to launch their attack on time. In fact, by the time they had stirred into motion there was no rebel force on their front at all.

Grant's first report of the action acknowledged and accepted Rosecrans' decisions, but a later report—filed after the two officers had engaged in a strongly-worded exchange of messages prompted by a message sent to Grant from a sycophantic junior officer—was more critical. And Grant was more critical still in his memoirs, written decades after the fact, in which he claimed (falsely) that Rosecrans had never notified him of any change in plans, and that Rosecrans had failed to pursue the beaten enemy. In fact, all pursuit was ordered by Rosecrans—and it continued until Grant called him off.

Grant then divided his command, leaving Rosecrans in charge in Corinth with the largest share. Other forces were in Bolivar under Major General Stephen Augustus Hurlbut, Memphis under Major General William Tecumseh Sherman, and with Grant in Jackson, Tennessee. When Confederate forces under Major General Earl Van Dorn linked up with Price, the Union forces were conveniently scattered in an attempt—possibly ordered by Halleck—to cover all possible points of attack.

The rebels struck Corinth. Rosecrans hastily pulled in his outposts and conducted a fighting retreat, leading to a consolidation in the defenses of the city. Grant started a scratch force under Major General James Birdseye McPherson hastening to the assistance of Rosecrans. He also ordered Hurlbut to move into a position on the Hatchie River, where he could block any attempt by Van Dorn to withdraw, and ordered Ord to rush to the Hatchie and take command from Hurlbut.

⁴ United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office 1880-1901), Series 1, vol. 17, pt. 2, p. 68 (hereafter cited as *O.R.*, I, 17, pt. 2, 68).

The fighting at Corinth was savage, but Rosecrans and his hard-pressed men prevailed. That evening McPherson and his men joined the defenders, and the next morning Rosecrans began the pursuit. The retreating Confederates ran squarely into Hurlbut and his men; prospects seemed bright for a resounding Union victory.

But it was not to be. Several things went wrong. Rosecrans had been remiss in not initially leading the pursuing columns himself, and some elements of it bogged down due to poor leadership. Meanwhile Hurlbut, holding back the Confederate withdrawal successfully from his bank of the Hatchie, was joined by Ord, who drove the advance elements of the rebel army back across the river. Unfortunately Ord then launched an ill-advised attack that got his own troops pinned down below high ground on the Confederate bank. Unable to shift his forces, he watched helplessly as Van Dorn side-slipped to another crossing and escaped.

Rosecrans had hurried forward and assumed command of his forces, but the moment had passed. He added Hurlbut's force to his and pressed the pursuit, and seemed on the point of catching up to the fleeing enemy; but he was again recalled by Grant, who was worried that Rosecrans might encounter a stronger Confederate force. Over the protestations of both Rosecrans and Hurlbut and in spite of the misgivings of Halleck—all of whom felt that not only Van Dorn's force but Vicksburg itself was within reach—Grant called off the pursuit.

That was his prerogative as the commander on the spot. But he then began to loudly blame Rosecrans for ruining his plan—a plan for which no evidence exists—and for failing to make a vigorous pursuit. This in spite of the fact that it was Ord's mistake which had led directly to the failure (Grant made no mention of that) and in spite of the fact that Rosecrans was the one urging pursuit: it was Grant who had called it off.

Due in large measure to the tendency of too many historians to accept Grant at his word, and to lean too heavily on his memoirs—in some cases to the exclusion of other sources — Rosecrans is seldom credited with the victories at Iuka and Corinth, in spite of the fact that it was, in both cases, his command that did the bulk of the fighting. At Iuka, in fact, his was the only Union force engaged. Grant is given credit for victories to which he contributed very little; in the case of Corinth for a battle he was 58 miles removed from and over which he exercised little operational and absolutely no tactical control. In both cases Rosecrans is blamed for ruining traps set by Grant and letting the Confederates escape, when in fact it was he who won the battles and he who ordered pursuit—and conducted it until he was called off by Grant.

Shortly after the campaign Grant's chief of staff, Captain John Aaron Rawlins, received a message from a subordinate officer in Hurlbut's command. This person named Rosecrans as the author of the rumors in the press that Grant had been drunk in command during the Iuka campaign. In fact there are some very suspicious circumstances about that campaign, including a crucial 40-hour gap in which no orders were sent by Grant at the height of the fighting, and during which some, at least, of his staff officers seemed at

a loss as to what was going on. One of Ord's staff officers even questioned whether Grant "knew where his army was."⁵

The author of the message to Rawlins praised Grant in an embarrassingly sycophantic manner, and also accused Rosecrans of taking credit rightfully due to Grant (although what credit Grant was due is open to debate). In any case, Grant fired off a blistering missive to Rosecrans which, without naming the source, repeated the charges to Rosecrans. The latter's response was to deny any wrongdoing, and to ask for more specific information as to just what he was being charged with. When his request was met with an icy silence, he contacted Halleck and asked for reassignment. He was transferred to command of the army previously led by Major General Don Carlos Buell, which he renamed the Army of the Cumberland. While Grant set about the arduous and vital task of clearing the Mississippi Valley, Rosecrans began a campaign to clear Confederate forces out of central Tennessee.

First, however, he had to get his army in condition to fight—in itself an arduous task. The newly-designated Army of the Cumberland was considered a seasoned, veteran force—and yet although it had been in three major engagements, (Mill Springs, Perryville, and Shiloh) not a single unit had actually been engaged in all of them, and some had not seen combat in any. Armament was not homogenous, morale was poor, some units had not been paid in six months, it was rife with incompetent leaders, some cavalry units did not have horses—or weapons for that matter—and even mail delivery was very lax. The enemy cavalry were operating with impunity on his supply lines, and there were only rations enough for a few days, let alone sufficient supplies to support an offensive campaign.

Within a reasonable time he had retrained, re-equipped, re-officered, resupplied, and restored his army. Quibbles from some historians to the contrary, Rosecrans did not take an unconscionably long time to do so. When he was ready he advanced from his base at Nashville to Murfreesboro, where he engaged General Braxton Bragg's Army of Tennessee in the sanguinary battle of Stones River.

The two armies clashed just as the year changed from 1862 to 1863, and at first Bragg got the better of things. Both commanders had intended to strike their opponent's right early in the morning, but the rebels got in the first blow. With his right collapsing, Rosecrans stabilized the center and managed to halt the advance of his left and wheel it to the aid of the disintegrating right wing. Although he gets little credit for it, his personal leadership — with strong assists from Major General George Henry Thomas, Major General William Babcock Hazen, and Brigadier General Philip Henry Sheridan — saved the day. At one point an aide was decapitated by a cannonball at Rosecrans' side, but he maintained his composure and led his army to victory. Numerous firsthand accounts

⁵ Colonel A. Ducat to W. S. Rosecrans, December 29, 1880, William Starke Rosecrans Papers, box 31, folder 62, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles Young Research Library, Los Angeles, CA.

mention the seemingly ubiquitous presence of the army commander at every threatened point.

After the fighting petered out around dusk, Rosecrans called his corps and division commanders together and asked for their input as to whether the army should stand and fight or withdraw on Nashville. Thomas purportedly said, “I know of no better place to die than right here.” Rosecrans, after listening to all the arguments as to whether the army should stay or fall back, said “We shall not retreat; we shall fight it out here, or die.” As correspondent Whitelaw Reid put it, “Most men in that army were whipped, except the general who commanded it.” Veterans of the battle said, “[I]t was evident that his spirit was undaunted.” That evening he rode along his lines, encouraging his troops. Witnesses described “how his tone and whole manner inspired confidence of final success. . . . All spoke enthusiastically of the hopeful courage of General Rosecrans, who seemed to be everywhere. . . .”⁶

On the second day of battle, an ill-considered attack by Bragg was shattered by the determined infantry of the Army of the Cumberland, supported by massed artillery. “Just as he had been on the thirty-first, Rosecrans was in the thick of the fight now.” The Rebels were forced to retreat.⁷

Historians have tended to treat the battle at Stones River as either a draw or an indecisive and flawed victory. Perhaps they have been influenced to some degree by Grant, who said to Lincoln “Stones River was not a victory.” But consider the following facts: Rosecrans inflicted more casualties in killed and wounded than he took (according to most sources; some have the casualties fairly even); he held the field; and he thwarted Bragg’s advance on Nashville—the Army of Tennessee retreated past the point from which it had started the campaign. What more need he have done? And others disagreed with Grant, as well. Secretary of War Edwin McMasters Stanton, who for months had been enormously uncooperative as Rosecrans tried to get his army into fighting trim, in the flush of victory, promised that “there is nothing you can ask within my power to grant to yourself or your heroic command that will not be cheerfully given.” (He would renege on that promise within weeks.) Rosecrans was also the recipient of resolutions of thanks from the legislatures of Ohio and Indiana, from the St. Louis Board of Common Council, and from both Houses of Congress. Lincoln sent him a letter personally thanking him. The President said that Stones River came at a moment of crisis; in the midst of potential disaster, Rosecrans had produced a victory.⁸

⁶Peter Cozzens, *No Better Place to Die: The Battle of Stones River* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 173-4; Larry Daniel, *Days of Glory: The Army of the Cumberland, 1861-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 218; Whitelaw Reid, *Ohio in the War: Her Statesmen, Her Generals, and Soldiers* (Cincinnati, OH: Wistach and Baldwin, 1868), 333; L.G. Bennett and William M. Haigh, *History of the Thirty-Sixth Regiment Illinois Volunteers During the War of the Rebellion* (Aurora, IL: Knickerbock and Hodder, 1876), 369, 379-80, 398.

⁷ Cozzens, *No Better Place to Die*, 191.

⁸ Stanton, cited in Cozzens, *No Better Place to Die*, 206. Rosecrans Papers, box 80, folder 21.

It would seem that most of Rosecrans' officers and men, who were certainly in a position to know, thought that he had performed splendidly. Major General John McAuley Palmer, who disliked Rosecrans for his Catholicism, acknowledged the general's personal-leadership style by saying "If I was about to fight a battle for the domination of the universe, I would give Rosecrans command of as many men as he could see or who could see him." Correspondent Whitelaw Reid simply said, "Rosecrans was magnificent."⁹

The Northern officers, men, and correspondents were not the only ones who recognized the skill and courage of the Union commander at Stones River. Confederate Secretary of War James Alexander Seddon, before forwarding the report of one rebel officer on the battle, directed "Let this be copied at once for Congress, leaving out the clause of compliment to General Rosecrans."¹⁰

Having turned back Bragg's invasion, Rosecrans now wanted to take the fight to the foe. He was, however, still bedeviled by the same logistical issues he had faced previously, the most notable being the more-numerous and more-efficient rebel cavalry. Faced with the horsemen of Brigadier General Nathan Bedford Forrest and Brigadier General John Hunt Morgan, his lines of supply and communication were tenuous at best. He attempted to create units of mounted infantry, planning to procure the horses himself, mounting men who had previous experience on horseback, and equipping them with repeating weapons; but Stanton refused to let him buy the mounts or form the units, and Halleck refused to send him the weapons. The frustrated Rosecrans methodically took his time getting his ducks in a row; when he was satisfied that his army was ready he led it on a campaign that has seldom been equaled for meticulous planning and organization.

Although Grant (and historians) would later complain that Rosecrans was remiss in not having moved earlier, it is apparent that there were very real logistical reasons for what historians have characterized as the lethargy of the Army of the Cumberland. And there were other reasons besides the logistical. It should be recognized that, although the Army of the Cumberland was not marching into enemy territory, that does not mean it was not engaged in combat. In fact, during the time in question it was probably the most active force in Union service in terms of actual fighting, with an average of nearly 26 encounters per month—most of them involving clashes of cavalry—with collateral effort expended patrolling against and in pursuit of Rebel raiders. There were also a few incursions by Union raiders into Rebel territory. Even after Rosecrans' campaign was underway, Morgan, with a powerful cavalry force, struck Indiana and Ohio and nearly severed Rosecrans' supply line.¹¹

From January through June, Rebel cavalry disrupted communications, stole or destroyed supplies, interrupted the railroads, and sniped at shipping. In addition, they

⁹ Reid, *Ohio in the War*, 334; Palmer, cited in Daniel, *Days of Glory*, 216.

¹⁰ *O.R.* I, 20, pt. 2, 398.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I, 23, pt. 1, 4.

struck small patrols and isolated outposts, kept Bragg informed as to Rosecrans' movements, and screened the Rebel armies. They also kept the civilian population generally under their thumb; secessionists were encouraged by their activities, while pro-Union citizens were intimidated and terrorized. Rosecrans, despite simplistic suggestions from Washington that he rest his horses, was not able to do so. In the face of the intense activity his cavalry faced, such advice was simply impossible to follow. To the men in Washington, it seemed that Rosecrans was simply slow: in fact, he was moving as rapidly as circumstances would allow.

Complaints from Grant notwithstanding, there is certainly no evidence that Rosecrans' apparent inactivity improved Confederate fortunes by the smallest amount. His careful preparation and refusal to be hurried resulted in a sweepingly successful campaign which gets very little notice by historians, while there is nothing to indicate that Grant's Vicksburg campaign was delayed or endangered in the least by Rosecrans' methodical preparations. Three militarily significant events occurred simultaneously in the opening days of July 1863: Grant took Vicksburg; Major General George Gordon Meade defeated Lee at Gettysburg; and Rosecrans drove Bragg and his army out of Tennessee in what has become known as the Tullahoma Campaign. Taken together, they signaled a decisive upturn in the cause of the Union.

Once he put his army into motion, Rosecrans and his men executed his plans in a nearly flawless manner. In a magnificent campaign of maneuver, Rosecrans and the Army of the Cumberland pushed Braxton Bragg and the Army of Tennessee out of its namesake state. This was done in spite of abominable weather, flood-swollen rivers, miserable roads, and the presence of a Rebel army of comparable size. A professional geologist has described the yellow mud of the Tullahoma region as the most difficult to move through of any area in the contiguous United States. Even so, "[I]n nine days of maneuvering in almost continuous rain, Rosecrans drove an opponent of comparable strength 100 miles into his base, without fighting a battle and with a total loss to his army of only 84 men killed, 473 wounded, and 13 missing. Confederate losses are difficult to ascertain, but probably were about 5,000 men, most of whom were 'missing.' Seldom in military history has so important a victory been achieved at so little cost."¹²

Rosecrans was next tasked with taking Chattanooga, viewed as a vital staging area for any movement into Georgia. The city was situated in the midst of a mountainous, heavily-wooded region with a limited road network that multiple witnesses said was the worst they had ever seen. He drove the Army of Tennessee before him, with Bragg and his men apparently reeling in retreat. In fact, Bragg was buying time until he could be joined by reinforcements, including units rushed from eastern Tennessee, where they had been facing the inert Major General Ambrose Burnside and his command; troops from Mississippi, released by the failure of Grant to follow orders that he operate on

¹² Andrew Brown, "Geology and the Tullahoma Campaign of 1863," in *Geo-Times* 7, no.1 (July-August 1963).

Rosecrans' strategic right; and most notably two divisions of crack troops from the Army of Northern Virginia, under the redoubtable Lieutenant General James Longstreet.

With Stanton and Halleck urging him on, Rosecrans took Chattanooga and continued in hot pursuit of Bragg and his forces, and in the process allowed his forces to become scattered as they traversed the mountain passes on the few, narrow, unimproved roads available. When Bragg turned at bay, Rosecrans was barely able to reform in time to meet the attack. The fighting on the first day, along the heavily-wooded banks of Chickamauga Creek, was bloody and indecisive. Rosecrans chose to anchor his left on high ground, under the skillful command of George H. Thomas. Rosecrans then undertook to shift his army to the left, in the direction of Chattanooga — a difficult undertaking given the terrible terrain and the constant pressure from a foe that outnumbered him.

That evening Longstreet and his attenuated corps arrived and were rushed into position opposite the Union center. The next day would prove to be the most fateful of Rosecrans' career. As the fighting renewed all along the front, he was informed by an aide that a gap existed in his line. The general hastily dashed off a note to Brigadier General Thomas John Wood, one of his brigade commanders, ordering him to shift his unit to cover the gap. In fact, no such gap existed; there were troops in position, but the aide had not seen them in the heavy undergrowth. Wood, however, knew that they were there. In spite of that, the hot-tempered Wood, still smarting from a reprimand by Rosecrans the day before, undertook to carry out orders he knew to be incorrect. Rather than send to Rosecrans for confirmation, he pulled his unit out of line while knowing full well that there were heavy enemy forces to his front.¹³

It would not have mattered, perhaps, had that not been the precise location and the precise moment that Longstreet launched his attack. Like the blow of a massive hammer, a powerful column of veteran troops, ably led by the combative Major General John Bell Hood, drove through the gap Wood had left. The units to both side were shattered and hurled backward; the Union right and center were on the verge of collapse. Rosecrans and his staff did everything that they could to rally the fleeing troops, but to little avail. Finally, he had to face the vital question: what should he do next?

The history books tell us that at this point Rosecrans made the worst mistake of his life; that he panicked and fled the field, abandoning his still-fighting army. That in a state of hysteria (or depression, depending on the source cited) he fled to Chattanooga and collapsed, weeping, at the feet of his priest.

The history books are wrong. The story is based on the accounts of four men: Brigadier General James Abram Garfield, Rosecrans' chief of staff — and future President of the United States; Charles Anderson Dana, assistant secretary of war, sent by Stanton to spy upon Rosecrans and build a case for his removal, but who was not present

¹³ Colonel Henry M. Cist, *The Army of the Cumberland*, 1959 edition (New York: Scribners, 1882), 219-20.

when Rosecrans supposedly fled; Major General Jacob Dolson Cox, who although frequently cited as a source in fact was not present either and reportedly heard the story from Garfield; and Alfred Lacey Hough, who actually never said it. The accounts that cite him are in fact citing comments made after Hough's death by his son; comments that are in direct conflict with letters written by Hough in the immediate aftermath of the battle. On the other hand, four other staff officers—and George H. Thomas—consistently denied the story, some of them repeatedly and angrily.¹⁴

But history has taken the story and run with it. Thomas carries to this day the richly-earned sobriquet “The Rock of Chickamauga,” while Rosecrans, unfairly, is the general who ran. In fact, he ordered Garfield back to Chattanooga to take command of things there, rally the retreating troops, and put the city in a state of defense. He intended to ride to the still-fighting Thomas, on the left. But the flustered Garfield did not seem up to his task, so Rosecrans sent him to Thomas instead to give that warrior a situational update, while Rosecrans rode back to his base to direct things from there.¹⁵

Garfield would later have a secret meeting with Stanton, when the newly-elected Congressman was on his way to Washington to assume his duties. In that meeting the Secretary of War told the general what he was to say about Rosecrans. Putting his political career ahead of the truth—and ahead of his friendship with Rosecrans—Garfield carried out his mission all too well. Remorse would later lead him to strenuous efforts to help his old friend salvage his reputation and career, but the damage had been done.¹⁶

The Army of the Cumberland fell back into Chattanooga, and Bragg and his forces settled in for a siege. According to the history books, heavily influenced by Grant and Dana, Rosecrans lost the confidence of his men, let his army nearly dissolve due to starvation, and was on the verge of abandoning his vital post when Grant, newly-appointed to overall command in the west, had no choice other than to relieve him.

None of it is true. There are myriad accounts in the letters and journals of the men, and in the reports of such notables as Philip Sheridan and Quartermaster General

¹⁴ Alfred Hough, *Soldier in the West: The Civil War Letters of Alfred Lacey Hough*, Robert G. Athearn, ed., (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), 146-51.

¹⁵ Confidential letter from James Roberts Gilmore to W. S. Rosecrans, May 23, 1864, Rosecrans Papers, box 9, folder 148; James Gilmore, “Garfield’s Ride at Chickamauga,” *McClure’s Magazine*, May 1887, 132; Garfield in conversation reported by General Jacob Cox, in *Military Reminiscences* (New York: Scribner, 1900), 10; Cist, *Army of the Cumberland*, 225-6; Rosecrans Papers, box 9, folder 149.

¹⁶ The meeting was reported to Rosecrans in a letter from Brigadier General Francis (Frank) Darr, who in turn had heard it from Major General Christopher Columbus Augur. The latter was the officer whom Stanton ordered to procure the train that took the Secretary of War to meet with Garfield (and future President Andrew Johnson) in Kentucky, and Augur was present for the conversation between the Secretary of War and two future Presidents of the United States. Augur, who did see action during the war (but by no means a great deal of it) was promoted three times during the conflict and twice after it was over, and remained in various command postings for two decades until his retirement in 1885. Rosecrans papers, box,9, folder 148. .

Montgomery Meigs, that the Army of the Cumberland, although on tight rations, was in nothing remotely like the situation Grant and Dana had described. Sheridan and others also strenuously denied that Rosecrans had lost the confidence or affection of his men. And, in spite of the claims of Grant—repeated uncritically by most historians—that he took command of the situation and, within days, had opened the “Cracker Line” and gotten the supply lines open, in fact that line was open (and being referred to as “the Cracker Line”) more than a week prior to the relief of Rosecrans.¹⁷

Finally, the message from Dana upon which Grant purportedly based his decision to make the change from Rosecrans to Thomas, and which supposedly said that Rosecrans was preparing to abandon his post, in fact never existed. It is not in the records of the War Department or in the Grant papers, and Dana denied having sent it. The only message from Dana during the period in question is not nearly so strongly worded, and in fact was sent hours after Grant had issued the order relieving Rosecrans from duty.

Rosecrans was not at home long, however, before he was placed in command of the Department of Missouri by President Lincoln at the urging of Garfield and Senator Benjamin Franklin Wade, and over the protests of Grant, Stanton, and Halleck. Once he reached his post he was dismayed to find that the three men were determined to do all within their not-inconsiderable power (Grant was now general-in-chief and Halleck was chief-of-staff of the army) to make his job as difficult as possible. They refused to let him have officers he requested, even if they had requested reassignment to his command—and even if they were not otherwise assigned. He was refused equipment and supplies, his attempt to have his volunteer units mustered into national service—as was the case in all other states — was rebuffed, and his best troops were stripped from him for service under other generals. He sent a staff officer to Washington to inform Lincoln of a plot he had uncovered which intended to sponsor sabotage, insurrection, and assassination in the North, only to have the officer arrested by order of Stanton (the officer, Major Frank Bond, was court-martialed and cleared of all charges). Just as things seemingly could not get any worse, Rosecrans found himself once again locked in combat with Sterling Price.

The old rebel launched a massive raid into Missouri which Rosecrans, left in command of only a skeleton force, had difficulty dealing with. He and the forces he still did command finally managed to drive off the invaders, only to find that Grant and Stanton used what they claimed was his ineptitude, sluggishness, and uncooperative attitude as an excuse to relieve him once again of his command. William S. Rosecrans, once a rising star, suddenly found that his war was over.

¹⁷ There are myriad examples of these letters and journals: a few include M. H. Welty, 6th Wisconsin Battery, to W. S. Rosecrans, December 19, 1863, Rosecrans Papers, box 9, folder 44; Alexander Dallas Bache to W. S. Rosecrans, January 12, 1864, *Ibid.*, Box 9, folder 57; Calvin Goddard to Adjutant General of the Army, October 1863, *Ibid.*, box 53, folder 78; Phillip H. Sheridan, *Personal Memoirs of P. H. Sheridan* (New York: Charles Webster, 1888), 1:300.

He had served from very nearly the beginning of the conflict until very nearly the end of it, and had tendered good service. Under his command Union forces had been victorious at Iuka, Corinth, and Stones River. He had been defeated at Chickamauga, but it was not the crushing disaster it has been sometimes portrayed as, and he most assuredly did not suffer the breakdown he was later charged with. He performed competently when faced with Price's Missouri Raid, and was even courted by both political parties.

One strong faction of the Republican Party approached him in 1863 to see if he would consider opposing Lincoln for the nomination; he refused. The Democrats sounded him out as a potential candidate to run against Lincoln in 1864. Although a lifelong Democrat, he declined on the grounds that he believed Lincoln was the perfect choice for the nation in its time of crisis. In 1864 he was offered the vice-presidential spot under Lincoln. He accepted, but the telegram appears to have been intercepted in the War Office by Stanton, and Andrew Johnson won the nomination. Rosecrans would also decline the second spot on the ticket with Grover Cleveland in 1884.¹⁸

After the war he was appointed minister to Mexico by Andrew Johnson, but was removed from the post when Grant assumed the presidency a year later. Rosecrans served in Congress, where he unsuccessfully attempted to block a bill designed to help Grant with his mounting debt. The animosity between the two haunted Rosecrans for the rest of his life, and sadly still does so today. The damage done to his historical reputation, in large measure by Grant and historians who take his memoirs at face value, has resulted in Rosecrans not being recognized for what he was: a highly-competent and loyal officer who contributed greatly to the cause of Union.

¹⁸ Lamers, William. *The Edge of Glory: A Biography of General William S. Rosecrans, U.S.A.*, 1999 edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), 424-5; L. Mulhane, "Major General William Starke Rosecrans," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia*, September 1924; W. Lamers to Harry Gilligan, September 17, 1964, William Mathias Lamers Papers, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles Young Research Library, Los Angeles, CA; F. Lamb to Joseph Pickens, October 25, 1880, Rosecrans Papers, box 54, folder 66.

William Starke Rosecrans

Born	September 16, 1819 on a farm near Little Taylor Run in Kingston Township, Delaware County, Ohio
Died	March 11, 1898 Rancho Sausal Redondo, Redondo Beach, California
Buried	Arlington National Cemetery
Father	Crandall Rosecrans
Mother	Jemima (Hopkins) Rosecrans
Career Milestones	Graduated from West Point in 1842 Professor at West Point 1843-1847 Resigned from the Army 1854 May 1861 promoted to Brigadier General in the regular army July 1861 led the West Virginia Campaign and later promoted to Commander of the Department of West Virginia May 1862 transferred to the Western theatre, given command of two divisions of the Army of the Mississippi, and in June given command of the Army Led the army in the Iuka- Corinth Campaign October 1862 promoted to Major General of Volunteers and given command of XIV Corps, later renamed The Army of the Cumberland December 1862 Led the army at the Battle of Stones River June 1863 led the army in the Tullahoma Campaign August 1863 led the army in the Battle of Chickamauga Replaced after Chickamauga by George Thomas and took no further part in fighting June 1866 promoted to Major General of the regular army for his service at Stones River March 1867 resigned from the regular army 1868-1869 appointed US Minister to Mexico 1881-1885 elected Congressman from California 1885-1893 appointed Register of the Treasury
