

# General Thomas Ewing's Great Military Feat Fifty Years Ago

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## **HIS DEFENSE OF PILOT KNOB SAVED ST. LOUIS**

How a single regiment held back Price's army of twenty thousand men, escaped capture and inflicted heavy in a five days' engagement, is told by C. A. Peterson and J. M. Hansen in "Pilot Knob," – Neale Publishing Company, New York, from official reports and the stories of survivors – a fine memorial tribute to a great action.

The following account made up from the pages of this interesting book with some additional matter appeared in the Yonkers Herald of September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1914.

## **SKETCH OF GEN. EWING**

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General Thomas Ewing was the third son of Thomas Ewing, twice Senator from Ohio, and Secretary of the Treasury in President Harrison's Cabinet, and the first Secretary of the Interior, under President Taylor. General Ewing's mother was the daughter of an Irish patriot emigrant, Hugh Boyle, clerk of the court at Lancaster, Ohio, where General Ewing was born, Aug. 7, 1829. He was private secretary to President Taylor in 1849-1850; graduated at Brown University, studied law in Cincinnati, married Miss Ellen E. Cox, moved to Leavenworth, Kansas, and practiced law, being active in the fight for free soil. He was elected the first chief justice of Kansas, on its admission as a free state.

The outbreak of the Civil War soon found his law partners in the Union Army, as Col. Dan McCook, Gen. Hugh Ewing, General William Tecumseh Sherman, and Judge Ewing resigned from the bench and raised the 11<sup>th</sup> Kansas regiment having been elected its Colonel.

He was with his regiment in the battles of Cain Hill and Prairie Grove, and as Brigadier General was placed in command of the district of the Border, with headquarters at Kansas City, where he broke up the bands of guerrillas, that had raided Kansas and Missouri. He was in command of the district of St. Louis when Price's raid occurred. He resigned in March, 1865, and practiced law in Washington, becoming an adviser to

President Johnson whose policy of reconstruction of the South he supported and he opposed General for President on his reconstruction and financial policies.

Returning to Ohio, he took an active part in politics, representing his district in Congress during Hayes' administration and was Democratic candidate for Governor.

In 1882 he moved to Yonkers, practicing law in New York until his death Jan. 21, 1896. His grave is in Oakland Cemetery, this city. He served some years on the School Board of Yonkers, and was the first President of the Ohio Society of New York, and was a member of the old Yonkers Board of Trade.

### **THE DEFENSE OF PILOT KNOB BY GENERAL THOMAS EWING**

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After the failure of the Red River expedition under General Banks, the most prominent event in the war beyond the Mississippi was the invasion of Missouri by a large army under the command of Maj. Gen. Sterling Price, in the fall of 1864. It had been ordered by the Confederate authorities at Richmond with the object first of seizing St. Louis, with its great army stores and private wealth, then poorly defended by a handful of troops in nine miles of fortifications, and with a large number of its citizens favorable to the Confederacy. Second, its object was to seize and hold the capital of the State, Jefferson City, and install as Governor, Gen. Thomas C. Reynolds, who accompanied Gen. Price, and to call out to the defense of the Confederacy the Southern sympathizers and enrolling the guerillas [sic] to raid Kansas or in the event of pronounced success cross over into Kentucky and Tennessee and effect such a diversion of Union forces in their defense as would relieve the heart of the Confederacy by weakening the invading armies of Grant and Sherman. All these plans were overturned by the chance encounter of the invading army with a mere regiment of Union troops under Brig. Gen. Thomas Ewing at Pilot Knob in the southeasterly part of Missouri, September 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup>. The failure to capture the regiment, intrenched [sic] in Fort Davidson, and the time lost in a vain pursuit of its remnant, turned the formidable invasion into a cavalry raid which ended in rapid flight back into the wilds of Arkansas, shorn of much of its plunder and demoralized by its losses and defeats. This first clash of Price's second raid makes one of the most extraordinary incidents of the war.\* [\* citation: Pilot Knob (C.A. Peterson and Hanson: Neal Pub. Co.)

Price was ordered on the 11<sup>th</sup> of August by Gen. E. Kirby Smith, commanding the Confederate forces west of the Mississippi, to take command of the cavalry forces of Arkansas, invade Missouri, capture St. Louis and hold the State. The prospects were good as great numbers of recruits were reported ready to join an expedition if made in force. The Union troops in Arkansas could do little to interfere with gathering of the invading army. Brig. Gen. J.O. Shelby was operating in the northeastern part of the State and had inflicted a loss in killed, wounded and captured of 700, had destroyed six forts and torn up ten miles of railway. Gen. Price drove in the Union forces in the neighborhood of Little Rock and marching northward took command of the divisions under Gens. Marmaduke and Fagan and was joined by Shelby September 18<sup>th</sup>, entering

Missouri the next day with a veteran army of 12,000 cavalry and irregular forces already numbering eight or ten thousand to gather which was one of the chief purposes of his invasion. His large wagon train and abundant supplies raised his expedition above the standard of a mere cavalry raid no matter in what force it might be attempted.

The Confederate army marched in three divisions by parallel roads ten to twenty miles apart. Gen. Shelby in the lead with Col. Shanks' and Col. Jackson's brigades and Col. Coleman's command. His superior quality and great activity and the prestige of his recent successes made this command the most mobile and effective of the army and in the end perhaps saved the entire army from utter destruction which was just avoided. Slight skirmishes at Pender's [sic] Mill and Patterson brought them in touch with the scouting parties from the outposts in Missouri.

Gen. Price was with the division commanded by Maj. Gen. J. F. Fagan, who had the brigades of Brig. Gen. W. L. Cabell, and Colonels Slemmons, McCoy and Dobbins and the commands of Col. Lyle, Col. Rogers and Capt. Andrews. Under Maj. Gen. J.S. Marmaduke were the brigades of Gen. John B. Clarke and Col. Freeman. Col. Kitchen's regiment and Lieut. Col. R.C. Wood's battalion of artillery.

At Fredericktown Gen. Price determined to leave the direct line of march on St. Louis against the earnest advice of Gen. Shelby, and to attack Pilot Knob, an insignificant post held by Maj. James Wilson with a force represented to Price as 1,500 men. Large quartermaster and commissary stores and the looting of merchandise and farms in the valley of Arcadia offered an immediate prize to his irregulars; but his chief motive was probably the moral effect of the capture of a fort, though a small one, prior to this attack upon the larger defense of St. Louis.

He sent Gen. Shelby with his division to Farmington to seize and hold the Iron Mountain railroad whose terminus was Pilot Knob, the point of attack. Shelby in the end seized the road, destroyed four bridges and interposed his command between the outpost and St. Louis. He also prevented any reinforcement of the post by the Union forces then lying at Mineral Point. With the two divisions of Marmaduke and Fagan, Gen. Price marched on Ironton and Pilot Knob having no doubt of a speedy success. In this he was fully justified, for the force defending it was only a little over 1,000 men; but he had been deceived as to the artillery strength and he woefully misunderstood the spirit of the defenders.

“On the 26<sup>th</sup> of September, soon after sunrise, his advance brigade halted on the lofty ridge and looked down upon the valley of Arcadia, studded with its three adjacent towns of Arcadia, Ironton and Pilot Knob, their church spires glittering in the early morning light,” wrote his chief engineer, Col. T. J. Mackay. “But of far more interest to us was the long line of blue, tipped with steel, on the crests of the hills that commanded the narrow entrance to the valley known as Shut-in Gap.”

On the other side Maj. Gen. William S. Rosecrans, in command of the State of Missouri, had been warned of an expected invasion of the State from early summer, from

the reports of the activities of secret societies., from an attempt to officer certain companies of the enrolled militia with men of pronounced Southern sympathy, from an abortive insurrection in Plate county, and from the renewed activity of guerilla bands; but in the uncertainty of its coming and of its magnitude, little could be done to meet it, in view of the great preparations for Grant's and Sherman's operations in the East. The defense of St. Louis was of first importance because of its great material resources and its possession would have delivered the entire State into the hands of the Confederates. The loss of Jefferson City would have been almost as great a blow to the Union cause giving as it would the political control of the State. At Rolla and Springfield were great depots of supplies. Kansas City and the border towns of Kansas must not be left defenseless. Some 15,000 Union troops were scattered among fifty posts not one capable of defense by the force in charge against a considerable body of invaders.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of September definite information was furnished Gen. Rosecrans of the gathering of Price's command at Batesville, Arkansas, and at his request Maj. Gen. A. J. Smith was halted in his march to join Sherman's army and was subsequently sent down the Iron Mountain road to get in touch with the enemy without losing communication with St. Louis. His forces had taken part in the Red River expedition and knew the quality of their foe. He moved down as far as Mineral Point; Gen. Sanborn concentrated his forces at Springfield and Gen. McNeill at Rolla; Gen. Rosecrans called for troops from Illinois, getting Hundred Day men from Gen. H. E. Paine. Enrolling citizen soldiery and mustering in the militia he made every preparation for the defense of St. Louis, if it should be attacked, time being the one thing necessary for his success.

#### Ewing in Command.

Gen. Ewing, in command of the district of St. Louis, was ordered to concentrate the men at various posts, at Cape Girardeau and at Pilot Knob, going himself to the latter post. Here also was sent Capt. W. J. Campbell with the veteran 14<sup>th</sup> Iowa regiment of infantry, who, however, left various companies along the line of the railroad. Taking only five companies to Pilot Knob, he arrived there some hours after the Confederate van had seen the hostile bayonets that guarded Shut-in Gap. Gen. Ewing had with him officers who had seen service with him in Kansas. Maj. H. H. Williams and Capt. Charles S. Hills, and Capt. Garvens of his staff. His surgeon, Dr. S. D. Carpenter, a fellow-townsmen in Ohio, came by a later train and took charge of the hospital.

Gen. Ewing's instructions were to use his utmost exertions to find out whether more than Shelby's men were operating in southeast Missouri, and to have Maj. Wilson hold the fort against a mere detachment of Price's army. It was for a like purpose that companies of the Iowa Regiment had been left along the railroad. Gen. Smith's force of six thousand men were to present the real obstruction to the movements of the Confederate cavalry. There were at the fort aside from the Iowa troops, six small cavalry companies of the third State militia and one company of the second cavalry; Company G of the first infantry; and Capt. Montgomery's battery of light artillery, making in all 562 men that had seen service. With these were 489 raw troops made up of Capt. R. L. Lindsay's company 50<sup>th</sup> militia infantry and six companies of the 47<sup>th</sup> that Col. Thomas

C. Fletcher was just mustering into service. Col. Fletcher was the Union candidate for Governor of the State and his death or capture would have changed the political situation without regard to the subsequent fate of his opponent who was with Price's army. There was an immediate enrollment of citizen soldiers into three companies of white and one of blacks, the last commanded by Capt. Lonegran. A number of citizens of Southern sympathy were drafted into service in digging trenches to keep them out of mischief.

The valley of Arcadia was entered from the north by the Iron Mountain railroad which ended at Pilot Knob south of which lay the little earthworks called Fort Davidson. An attempt had been made in the summer to find a better place for defense but none had been found. South of it the valley was cut in two by Shepherd mountain through which the creek made its way by a pass to the lower valley where lay Ironton and further down Arcadia near the pass called Shut-in Gap and the road to Fredericktown by which the Confederate forces had come. It was the only practicable entrance to the valley from the southeast and near the narrow gap was the scene of the first defense of the valley.

On his arrival at the post Gen. Ewing sent forward two companies to reconnoitre [sic] the road to Fredericktown and a small scouting party under Capt. Powers to find out from the inhabitants what Confederate forces had passed. Both parties were stopped by the enemy at Shut-in Gap. The advance of the Confederates had struck a small picket near the gap and a sergeant of the 47<sup>th</sup> Missouri carried the news to the fort warning on the way a company of the 47<sup>th</sup> at Ironton and a detachment of the third cavalry. Maj. Wilson, with more of the cavalry, attacked the advance and drove them into the gap where they were able to hold their ground with men posted on the hillside. A second time the advancing line of Confederates was met near Ironton, two Iowa companies and a battery having come up. Here, under terrific fire, the Union line was halted and again fell back to Ironton. In the hottest of the fight Maj. Wilson was wounded in the head and knocked from his horse, but remounting ordered the columns to fall back. An officer wrote of his service: "He took in the whole field at a glance; he was the life and soul of the entire force outside the fort: he appeared to be everywhere at just the right moment and every man under his command seemed to believe that success with him was certain."

From their lines Maj. Wilson made a brief report that night: "I found it impossible to get possession of the Shut-in, the Rebels having a very strong position. I was compelled to fall back to near Ironton. No reinforcements came to me until I had fallen back. I did not have time to get them up. The Rebels are encamped within hearing of us (I think). At least they are in artillery range of Ironton."

Gen. Ewing had himself gone into the lower valley to observe the situation, returning to the fort at nightfall. It was becoming obvious that the force of the enemy was no mere detachment of Price's army. Other reports that night indicated the serious work they looked forward to the next day. Capt. Hills wrote: "We shall need a box each of calibre 38, 44 and 54, elongated ball cartridges. Do you not think it best to send down two (2) pieces artillery? The Major is of opinion that it would be best. We will probably be attacked at day break. Shall I come up at that time?"

Maj. Williams reported that he had sent forward the Iowa troops to support the cavalry and needed men to support two guns if they were to be kept out, as he had but three cavalymen. This elicited the penciled response "I think the two guns had better be brought in. You may leave the infantry out if you see fit. E."

Maj. Wilson's small force of cavalry and the Iowa companies under Campbell and Lucas watched the Confederate cavalry and artillery arrive in large force, and Capt. Campbell met Maj. Wilson and talked over the situation, both concluding that it was Price's main body they were opposing. They at last received permission to fall back to Ironton where they spent the night, the cavalry lying east of the road and the infantry west of it.

Meanwhile at the fort preparation was made to resist an assault. All but the two guns left at Ironton were mounted on platforms in the fort, and a train loaded with surplus stores prepared to go by rail, a wagon train under escort of twenty men started by road, and everything made ready for the fight.

That night Gen. Price slept in camp with part of Gen. Fagan's command six miles below Ironton, still confident of an easy victory on the morrow.

#### Confusion at Pilot Knob.

While the lower valley of Arcadia was the scene of spirited skirmishes and some heavy fighting at Shut-in Gap, Pilot Knob was in the greatest confusion, with the dispatch of non-combatants and the preparation for the defense of the little fort. Surgeon S.D. Carpenter, coming in from St. Louis at 7 o'clock in the evening of September 26<sup>th</sup>, says: "I never saw such a panic as prevailed there. The streets were full of people, loaded with plunder, while more fortunate ones were moving off in great haste, in every kind of vehicles. I enquired what was up. They said the 'Rebs' were at Arcadia two miles below just about 100,000 strong. I asked for the General; they said he was at the front fighting, but most probably killed or captured. I hastened to the fort and about 8 o'clock Gen. Ewing made his appearance. He was quite cheerful, said the enemy were at the front sure enough in very strong force, and what to do was a very uncertain problem. He had had nothing to eat since morning and up to that time had not been scared out of his appetite. He cried aloud for rations and while an orderly obtained a tin-cup of coffee, some hard bread and bacon, I held a lantern and he wrote dispatches on the head of a barrel. He had about a thousand men. They had just come into the fort and were in great confusion; he had to bring order out of chaos, assign all to their places and instruct them what to do. He said I must get the trains started with the quartermaster's and commissary supplies, attend to the telegraph office and answer all the questions asked by Gens. Smith and Rosecrans that I could without sending to him."

That night a wagon train was dispatched with an escort of thirty men under Lieut. Tate, the men making their way to Gen. Smith's troops in safety but without their wagons. Capt. Garvens of the staff conducted the railroad train through in safety to St. Louis. On consultation with the officers it was decided to await an assault on the fort. A

hospital was prepared in a church but as this was found to be under fire, safer quarters were found in a hotel. "By 8 o'clock of the 27<sup>th</sup>, our outposts were driven in," writes the surgeon, "and our artillery opened upon them; pretty soon their guns opened but at too long a range, not doing much damage, at 10 ½ the telegraph ceased to work, they had cut the wires." Gen. Ewing now knew that Shelby was between his little force and Gen. Smith's command, its nearest support.

Fort Davidson was a strong hexagonal redoubt, located, as the Confederate engineer saw it, on the swelling of a wide plateau with a command above the plateau of nine feet, and was surrounded by a dry ditch ten feet wide and seven deep. It could conveniently hold six or seven hundred men. A ditch had been run from the north and from the south front used as rifle pits by troops that could not be got into the fort. A return made in August showed four 32-pounder, iron, smooth-bore guns; three field howitzers, 24-pounders, and two Cohorn mortars, 24-pounders. The light artillery brought in six 10-pounders. Lieut. David Murphy, placed in charge of the artillery, mounted four guns in the fort on platforms, but left two outside as there was not room in the fort for all. To the south and west lay Shepherd Mountain, a rocky, wooded hill about five hundred yards from the fort. Eastward was Pilot Knob, rocky and bare of timber, having on its summit an iron furnace with an immense pile of charcoal. The gap between these hills lay 1,200 yards from the fort. This was the scene of the second day's fight.

At daybreak the cavalry pickets were driven in from Ironton pursued by the Confederate cavalry who turned to the east on meeting the fire of the two pieces of artillery. Another column was seen in the southwest approaching Shepherd Mountain. Maj. Wilson rode up to Capt. Campbell and ordered the artillery to the fort and the Iowa infantry to fall back on the double quick to Shepherd Mountain, where they formed at its base in the gap. East of the road, Maj. Wilson, with one company of the second and a hundred men of the third cavalry, contested every inch of the ground and was forced back to the base of Pilot Knob, his men fighting on foot and at close range. The gap between them was swept by the fire from the fort, and was presently filled by the Confederates, forcing the Iowa men up the slopes of the mountain and cutting off Wilson's men from the fort. Maj. Wilson ordered Lieut. Shattuck to form a portion of the third on the railroad to resist the attack on the fort, for which he could see Confederates massing their men. Gen. Price had awaited the arrival of Marmaduke's division before ordering the assault. Shattuck's command later reached the rifle pits. After sending in Lieut. Smith of the second to report that he was very hard pressed, Maj. Wilson rode with a few men into the thick ranks of the enemy and was never seen again. Returning with Gen. Ewing's order to fall back and hold the town, Lieut. Smith met the remnant of Wilson's command and the news that he was a prisoner. At this time the Confederates were pressing upon the fort from all sides and there was a heavy column between Lieut. Smith and the fort. He took the north road with about twenty men and was pursued for miles by some five hundred cavalry, which he escaped and made Gen. Smith's command, with the first news of the battle.

Some days later, Maj. Wilson with six of his men was taken out and shot by order of one of Price's brigade commanders, not the first but about the last act of perfidy that marked the raid, one ominous of the fate of the garrison if the fort were taken by assault.

As the Iowa troops fell back up the mountain, Capt. Campbell found that Gen. Marmaduke had seized the crest so he faced his men about, forced the Confederates back and withdrew into the ditch of the fort. A little later he was ordered to take his men to the northwest end of the mountain just before the assault began on the fort. From this point he could see the mounts of the enemy massed beyond the mountain and directed the firing of shells that caused some confusion. Finding the assault certainly making ready he reported to the fort and his men were soon brought back to play a most important part in the stubborn resistance that was made. An earlier reconnoissance to the west somewhat delayed the movement of the Confederates that later swept around the mountain and seized the village of Pilot Knob. This party was not able to get back into the fort until night.

The assault was begun by artillery from Shepherd Mountain on the south, but a few well directed shot by Lieut. Murphy soon drove the guns from their commanding position to a point over the ridge from which less damage could be done. Guns mounted on Pilot Knob near the furnace store were not effective.

A demand for the surrender of the fort had been curtly refused by Gen. Ewing, who said: "They shall play no Fort Pillow game on me." About two o'clock in the afternoon, Fagan's division deployed from the gap and began the advance from point blank range, breaking into double quick and then the charge. Marmaduke's men swarmed over Shepherd's Mountain enfilading the south ditch, and driving in the Iowa troops. The cannon from the mountain again threw shells into the fort, and a fusilade [sic] of rifle shot swept the parapet. Around the fort on three sides was a dense mass of the dismounted men rushing across the plain and on the north and west Slayback's and Freeman's cavalry blocking the lines of retreat. But the Rebel yell was responded to by the entire armament of the fort. At long range heavy shot from the guns met them. As they grew nearer grape and canister with musket balls from the small arms poured in such a stream of lead and iron that the lines could not reach the fort. The charge was made, as Gen. Price described it, in a most gallant and determined manner, officers and men vying with each other in both divisions in deeds of unsurpassed bravery, charging up to the muzzles of the guns. Gen. Cabell coming within forty feet of the intrenchments. But the troops were repulsed and ordered out of reach of the guns.

In the fort it required no small exercise of courage and skill to keep the men at their work. The walls were lined with men firing musket whose barrels wore as hot as if placed in boiling water. Old men stood below tearing off the ends of the cartridges to hasten the loading of the muskets for there were no breech-loaders. Ammunition for the cannon of the fort and those mounted on platforms was passed up from the gun-proof magazine, and men had to replace those killed at the guns and those worn out with the continued swabbing and loading of the guns. Above all it was necessary to keep up their spirit. Lieut. Murphy, in charge of the artillery, seized a rifle that a soldier hesitated to

use, leapt upon the parapet and fired it off at the advancing line. Then with a handful of rocks he challenged them to come on. Leaping back into the fort he took a breathless man's place at a gun.

#### Climax of the Battle.

“At the climax of the battle,” writes Sergeant H.C. Wilkinson, “I saw the stately form of Gen. Ewing, his arms folded, his mouth tightly closed, and his face, slightly pale, but firm as a stone wall. He was walking erect from side to side, looking here and there at the surging mass around us. Then came the wounded lieutenant of the brave old 14<sup>th</sup> Iowa (Smith Thompson) limping hither and thither, cheering the boys to do their best. I could see Capt. Campbell, Adjutant Murphy and other gallant officers encouraging the boys who were down on their knees on the parapets pouring lead into the charging lists of the enemy. Oh, but it was hot there. Our smoke hung like a dense cloud about two feet about the parapet, while the smoke from the enemy's muskets came down almost to their knees, hiding their bodies.”

Fagan's men broke and retreated to the gap, almost immediately reforming to make a second assault across the plain. Marmaduke's men had rougher ground to fall back to and they took shelter under the bank of Stout's creek at the base of Shepherd Mountain, from which point they continued firing on the fort, until the second assault was made.

This assault was as bravely made and was a braver act for the difficulty was known, but it also stopped at the ditch. Murphy repeated his act of bravado. Gen. Ewing ordered him down, but he had inspired the men and some still remember his daring feat. In this second attack the drawbridge on the north fell, the ropes cut by bullets the Confederates say, and Sergt. Wilkinson barricaded and held it. A third charge, more desperate, brought men into the ditch, from which they were cleared by hand-grenades hastily brought from the magazine, and some bodies were blown up on the parapet. During the third charge Col. Slayback's cavalry reached the north ditch, the horses attached to a gun ran wild and it was Lieut. Murphy who brought them in. A caisson was also rescued by Sergt. Bucher of the 14<sup>th</sup> Iowa. The second gun outside the fort was lost to use by the killing of the horses on an attempt to bring it in from the south side. One of the men serving it was captured.

The incidents during the assault revealed the excellent working of a small and miscellaneous command under very great danger. One gun, commanded by Capt. Purcell, an old army officer, was entirely manned by negroes who had never been under fire. The captain and several of the men were killed. One 32-pounder was dismounted from being overloaded. From the creek and the slopes of the mountain sharpshooters made it difficult to man all the guns; one of these men was dislodged by a cannon shot, and killed in his flight. A hatful of empty shells was afterwards found behind the stump where he had practiced his art.

About nightfall the Confederates had again mounted their cannon in good range of the fort. There was no question of the outcome of a second day's assault; but the seriousness of the resistance had caused Gen. Price to order Shelby to join him. The march of his two divisions had been held back for two days by a mere regiment. His losses in the assault alone were given by his chief of engineers as 1,060 men. Price gave no statement of his aggregate loss, but a very careful estimate made within a month confirmed the estimate made by Gen. Ewing at the time: 1,500 killed and wounded. At least 1,000 more were lost to his columns in those detached to carry back the less seriously wounded to Arkansas, and those who deserted to return home. The Union loss was slight, 29 killed and mortally wounded and 44 wounded not mortally; some fifty were captured and paroled, some of these in the retreat. The force was reduced, however, by small detachments that could not regain the force.

The only question was now that of surrender or attempting a retreat through the Confederate lines which completely enveloped the fort. Though it was night the little valley was brightly lighted up by the burning pile of charcoal on Pilot Knob. A demand for surrender came from Gen. Price accompanied by a note from Col. Alonzo Slayback, a friend of Gen. Ewing, brought in by a Union lady, Mrs. Marion, saying that if the fort was taken by assault Gen. Price could not prevent the entire garrison being put to the sword. The only answer was an acknowledgment. A council of war decided with much misgiving to attempt a retreat. Word came in by a boy that the Potosi road was unguarded and the Confederate Colonel Mackay, afterwards wove a romance accounting for the open road; that Col. Dobbins and his rough, undisciplined troops were led away by a Union lady to a supper and barbecue [sic] on her farm at ten o'clock that night, and that it was her messenger who reported the vacant road. However, that may be, the guns were spiked, a guard left to blow up the fort at day-break, and with wheels of the field guns muffled and the horses hoofs padded and straw laid on the bridges, the command defiled by twos a little after midnight and passed Col. Dobbins's lines by an old wood road, the soldiers seeing the sentries at their campfires.

#### Fort Blown Up.

The entire force was well on the Potosi road when the magazine was blown up with a report that shook the ground under their feet and rattled windows 60 miles away. "It's the fort," said one of the Confederates. "No," said others, "it is an explosion beyond it and to the left." The morning showed the fort deserted with a gaping hole where the bomb-proof had been.

The details of the blowing up of the fort are given in "Pilot Knob," from the narrative of Capt. H.B. Milks of the 3d cavalry, who, by Gen. Ewing's order detailed Lieut. Copp, Sergt. W.H. Moore and twenty men of his company to blow up the magazine and rejoin the garrison on the Potosi road. He remained with them and saw them gather up some sleeping men and prepare the train of powder in the magazine. When Sergt. Moore came out saying there was plenty of fire back there the party put spurs to their horses. "We had only galloped about seventy-five yards," writes Capt.

Milks, "when the explosion took place and the heavens were illuminated with bursting shells." Stones and beams fell around the little party but no one was hurt.

The 14<sup>th</sup> Iowa troops were placed in the van of the retreating garrison, Capt. Hiram A. Rice with twenty men in advance guided by Sergt. J.A. Shields. They met a small party of Confederate cavalry at Caledonia. Taking one prisoner and learning from him that Gen. Shelby was about a mile beyond en route to Pilot Knob, they turned westward and were soon on the road to Webster where they went into camp. Gen. Shelby obligingly halted on receiving the report of the little brush at Caledonia, and drew up in line of battle to give the on-comers a warm reception, never dreaming that Gen. Ewing had escaped from the fort. Civilians allowed to pass through the camp at Webster reported to Gen. Price the location of the garrison and Gen. Marmaduke was soon in pursuit, in command of his and Shelby's divisions.

The garrison had marched thirty-one miles to Webster, had been without food since noon the day before, and was able to get only very scant rations that night for supper. The troops were somewhat reduced by those who had fallen out on the long march, as well as by the detachments for various purposes and by their losses, so that by some of the estimates there remained about 600 men. This number was increased by a crowd of refugees who encumbered their march without adding to their strength. At one o'clock in the morning at the 29<sup>th</sup> camp was broken and the march resumed toward Leasburg, a station on the line of the railway that ran from Rolla on the west to St. Louis. On closing in on the camp at Webster Price's men found the camp deserted.

#### Start in a Storm.

"Gen. Ewing now assigned the 14<sup>th</sup> Iowa to the rear, that being the important position," writes Sergt. Maj. Lewis W. Sutton. "As we started there was sharp lightning and rain and the thunder was very heavy and seemed low and close, as if to awaken the tired, sleepy soldiers and hurry them on their way. The night was so intensely dark that the men could not see one another and the trees beside the road formed almost an arch of black foliage overhead. A little creek (the Courtois) swollen by the rain until it was nearly two feet deep and from fifteen to twenty feet wide, had to be waded six or eight times. The road could only be found by the aid of a lantern carried in front and a few candles, which had been procured at Webster, were cut in short pieces, lighted and placed by the side of the road. When the candles were gone a bugle was sounded in front, but the night was too dark for the column to follow such a leader; and finally a halt was ordered to wait for daylight. As soon as it was light enough to see, the march was resumed, and by ten o'clock we were ten or twelve miles from Webster, Just then the rearguard came galloping in, crying 'The Rebels are coming!'"

The command could now see the purpose of the midnight march from Webster, which coming after three days of strenuous exertion, tried them to the utmost limit of their strength. The halt at Webster had lured Gen. Price into following them but without vigor as he expected to surprise them in camp. Their march along the Courtois had brought them past the road that Shelby would take to head them off and their enemy was

now entirely in their rear, on a narrow mountain road where he could not attack them in flank and his attack could not be made in greater force than they had to repel it. With artillery, cavalry and infantry all used in turn the retreat was made by short spurts, a stop to fight off the pursuers and another advance, until having crossed the Meramec the open country gave opportunity for attack. The Iowa infantry, part of the 47<sup>th</sup> M.S.M. [sic], including infantry and battery H of the artillery formed in line, and gave a hot welcome to Gen. Shelby's men who had now replaced Marmaduke's in the pursuit. His last charge was made about nightfall on the 29<sup>th</sup>, and the entire command entered Leasburg without considerable loss, having retreated from Pilot Knob, 66 miles in 39 hours.

In this last march the singular good luck that had attended the small detachments from the force was again shown. Two lieutenants with a few men were sent forward separately to see whether Leasburg was occupied by the enemy and to await the command if it was not occupied. Finding no confederates [sic] there, they were misled by the terrified reports of the fugitives of the march into believing that Gen. Ewing defeated and the artillery captured. They rode on for twenty-four hours, reaching the post at Hermann in safety.

Gen. Price tells the story of the Confederate pursuit of the small Union force, confirming in every way the clearness of Gen. Ewing's vision in anticipating his movements and his skill in holding his little force intact. His report of the two days' pursuit follows:

"I moved my command twelve miles on the road the enemy had pursued, sending Marmaduke forward in pursuit in command of his own and Shelby's division. Untiring pursuit was made night and day, but it was not until the evening of the following day that he was overtaken, owing to the natural difficulties presented by the country over which the enemy retreated. Maj. Gen. Marmaduke, who was in advance, fought him until an hour before sunset when Shelby was thrown in front and the fight continued until dark."

Leasburg lay at the west end of a railroad cut some ten feet deep and a pile of cordwood stretched along the road, both serving as breastworks in a furious charge made as the troops entered the village. The troops also were placed in a large log stable two hundred yards below, but later were withdrawn to the cut. About this time a freight train came in with army stores, the boxes were piled along the tracks as breastworks, and picks and shovels taken out to throw up earthworks. A liberal supply of hard-tack furnished rations for the hungry command. Once again the little force passed a weary night waiting with much uncertainty what the morrow would bring.

Gen. Price had now given four days with two divisions of his troops to the reduction of a regiment, and his march on St. Louis had been delayed until that city had made ample provisions for defense.

Gen. Ewing and the force from Pilot Knob spent a comfortable day on the 30<sup>th</sup> of September at Leasburg with more or less continuous exchange of shots with the enemy. They finished the earthworks they had begun in the night. At nine o'clock a flag of truce brought in a demand for surrender borne by Capt. Wm. M. Price, aid to Gen.

Marmaduke. He was halted 120 yards from the works. The demand was refused, Gen. Ewing saying, "we'll not surrender behind these breastworks when they did not take us along the road." He ordered the 14<sup>th</sup> Iowa to raise their flag. The flag of truce was a mere ruse to examine the strength of the earthworks.

A party sent to bury the Union dead on the battlefield of the night before was turned back by the Confederates who said they would attend to that matter themselves.

A party of Marmaduke's men rode into the edge of the camp, mistaking their men for friends, but became suspicious at the non-committal answers to their questions and rode away without any firing on either side.

The Union ladies of the neighborhood presented a flag to replace the post flag left flying on the evacuation of the fort.

Two men only were killed at the camp that day, but there was sufficient firing to leave it very uncertain what action would be attempted, and at night Gen. Ewing called for a volunteer to fire two large barns that stood in the open field south of the station beyond which lay the Confederate forces. The barns were close to their lines and to fire them was a very dangerous undertaking, but Corporal Earl J. Lamsom, of Capt. Lucas's Iowa company volunteered and soon the field was lighted up by the blaze. The brave corporal came back in safety.

The morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> of October found no enemy in sight. Gen. Marmaduke and Gen. Shelby thought it would cost too much to attack this new position and rode off to join Gen. Price, who was with Fagan near Jefferson City. At noon a line approaching from the north proved to be the 17<sup>th</sup> Illinois, 600 men, carrying the stars and stripes. The tired, worn, powder-begrimed and dirt stained men in the little camp cheered, clasped one another in their arms, shook hands, and generally acted like crazy men. Capt. Lucas, who described the scene began to sing, "We'll Rally Round The Flag." The refrain was caught up and the welkin rang as they sang with spirit and understanding. No prima donna ever put such feeling into a song as they did on that occasion. From noon, Monday, to noon, Saturday, they had been retreating before or facing the freshest men of two divisions of Price's army. All three divisions of this army had attempted to destroy them and had failed. It is no wonder that the survivors look back with pride upon a service that was unique in the hardship that it imposed; and unique in the skill that deployed their scanty lines as if handling a corps; that detailed lieutenants with squads to do the work of regiments, that blacked assault after assault with a thousand men; that decoyed two divisions to a three days' pursuit of the remnant; and finally marched into Rolla while the forces of the State were joined to attack with unequal success the army they had successfully engaged for five days.



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