

THE BATTLE OF PILOT KNOB, AND THE
RETREAT TO LEASBURG.

BY BREVET BRIGADIER-GENERAL THOS. C. FLETCHER.

If there was an official report of the fight at Pilot Knob and the retreat of the National forces to Leasburg, I have been unable to find it; I am sure I made none. It was an affair so remarkable in many respects, and of such momentous results, that it seems to me proper to write my recollections of it.

The real objective point of Price's march into Missouri was St. Louis. Sherman was finishing the writing of the record of the national title to Atlanta in iron and blood before his march to the sea. Hood was about to dash away northward to Nashville. The department of Missouri had been drawn upon for almost its entire available force to re-inforce Thomas. It seemed to Price an opportune time to return to Missouri. Rosecrans was imploring help; General A. J. Smith was sent to his assistance with a part of his 16th Corps, and came by the only practicable route — by boat. Mower, with his division of Smith's corps, had to come overland. Smith arrived in St. Louis in time to give Rosecrans assurance of ability to hold the line of the Meramec river. Mower fell in

Price's rear, and undertook the pursuit of a cavalry force with an infantry column.

The fight at Pilot Knob delayed Price's entire force for three days, giving Rosecrans time to make such disposition of his forces as to not only make sure of the defense of St. Louis, but to meet him at every important point. With but little data accessible I rely largely for my facts upon my memory and the memory of such of my comrades in that battle as I have been able to confer with. If I shall appear to be able to recount the part I personally bore in the matter better than anything else, I hope it will not be attributed to egotism on my part, but to the fact that my memory of what I saw and did is of necessity more vivid than my memory of what my comrades did.

I had been with the old 1st Division, 15th Army Corps, on the Atlanta campaign. It was the night preceding the battle of Dallas, sometimes called "New Hope Church;" on one of our night marches and bivouacs in the rain, I caught a cold, resulting in such soreness and stiffness of my back that I was unable to mount my horse; by advice of the surgeons I returned to Missouri and sought my home at De Soto for rest and recuperation, but had not fully recovered when General Rosecrans sent for me and told me of the coming of Price's army towards Missouri, and explained in detail his situation and the extent to which his department was depleted of force and the terrible strait to which he was driven, and asked me to gather up and organize some force in southeast Missouri; this was in

August, 1864. I at once sought out some of my friends to assist me, who were older and better soldiers than myself, and whose patriotism outweighed all consideration of rank. Colonel David Murphy, who had won rank in the army and had seen much service, accepted position as my adjutant. Colonel Amos W. Maupin was my lieutenant-colonel. Judge John W. Emerson left the bench of the Circuit Court and belted on his sword as major. Col. John W. Fletcher took off the straps of a lieutenant-colonel, which he had won in the service, and put on those of lieutenant and quartermaster. Judge Owens of the Circuit Court, and many other prominent civil officers and citizens, enrolled with me as privates.

Soon we had companies mustered under good and tried men as captains.

Company A was commanded by Capt. James S. McMurtry, who had pooled his blanket with my overcoat in Libby and other southern prisons.

Company B, commanded by W. J. Buxton, of Jefferson county.

Company C, commanded by Chas. A. Weber, Perry county.

Company D, commanded by John W. Maupin, of Franklin county.

Company E, commanded by Franz Dinger, of Iron county.

Company F, commanded by Wm. P. Adair, of St. Francois county.

Company G, commanded by Morgan Mace, of Iron county.

Company H, commanded by P. L. Powers, of Wayne county.

Company I, commanded by H. M. Bradley, of Madison county.

Company K, commanded by Gustav St. Gem, of St. Genevieve county.

These formed the 47th Missouri Volunteer Infantry.

On the 15th of September, 1864, the regiment was full, and duly mustered. Then there came other companies and, urged by General Rosecrans, I went on to organize another regiment, the 50th Missouri, which was completed after the fight at Pilot Knob, and of which Colonel David Murphy was made colonel.

The companies of the 47th Regiment were stationed in their respective counties, where they were organized. They were never drilled in battalion drill up to the time of the battle of Pilot Knob.

About the 20th day of September, 1864, Price struck Bloomfield. General Rosecrans thought that attack indicated Cape Girardeau as the first objective point, St. Louis being the great object. At his suggestion I hastened to Cape Girardeau, where I reported to Captain Hiram M. Hiller, 2nd Cavalry M. S. M., who was in command of the post, and we at once proceeded to gather in a force and prepare defenses. Captain Weber's company, C, of the 47th Regiment, I brought from Perry county to Cape

Girardeau. A rebel cavalry force skirmished up to White Water, within a short distance of Cape Girardeau, and then swung off to Fredericktown and Ironton. Boarding a steamboat I came up to where I struck the railroad and went thence to Pilot Knob, reaching there about noon on Monday, September 26, on the last train that got through.

In the meanwhile, there had been concentrated at Pilot Knob, companies A, E, F, G, H, and I of the 47th Regiment, and Co. F, 50th Mo., Capt. Robert L. Lindsay's, though not then mustered in.

Arriving at Pilot Knob I reported to General Thomas Ewing, and being next to him in rank was assigned to the command of the infantry force there present, which consisted of six companies of my 47th Regiment, Lindsay's company of the 50th, two small companies of the 14th Iowa Veteran Soldiers, who had seen much service, commanded by Captains Campbell and Lucas, both brave, experienced and intelligent officers, Company H, 1st Regiment, M. S. M., commanded by Captain John Fessler, assigned as artillery to work siege guns. To this we added a company of colored men, collected together and organized Monday afternoon preceding the assault on Tuesday, of which company Captain Lonergan was assigned the command. A total infantry force of 598 men for duty; then we had Battery H, 2d Mo. Light Artillery, Capt. W. C. Montgomery, with four six-pound guns.

There was of cavalry a part of two battalions, 3d M. S. M. Cavalry, and a part of Co. L, 2d M. S. M. Cavalry,

under Captain Amos P. Wright; a portion of Lindsay's, Power's and Mace's companies were also mounted; all the cavalry and mounted men were under command of Major Wilson. This comprised the whole force, numbering of all arms, 886 effective men for duty, to which must be added about 35 citizens, who took arms and fought with us like veterans.

On my arrival at the fort, Ewing said to me at once, "General Rosecrans telegraphs me to evacuate this place and fall back on A. J. Smith at De Soto; I have sent away all Q. M. and commissary stores." I replied, "you cannot fall back now; the enemy has swept around from Farmington towards Potosi, has cut the railroad and is in force now between you and A. J. Smith," and thereupon I undertook to telegraph General Rosecrans but the wires were cut — a proof of my assertion that the only road by which we could fall back on A. J. Smith was in possession of the enemy.

Surgeon Chas. H. Hughes, in charge of the medical and surgical department of troops on the Iron Mountain railroad, was en route the same day to join us with medical supplies, but found the bridge at Big river already burned, and he had to fall back on A. J. Smith.

When we found that we would be compelled to remain and fight, we at once began to dig some ditches extending northward and southward from the fort. For my part I had a high appreciation of a ditch. It had always been my fortune up to that time to be of the assaulting party

with a single exception, and I had longed to have an intrenchment in which to receive an assault, and perhaps get satisfaction for some of the hard times I have seen in assaulting the enemy in his intrenchments. I need not describe the old fort ; it was a small affair of hexagonal shape inclosed by a high redoubt, with a wide dry moat surrounding it, and a drawbridge that would not draw. There were mounted upon the parapets four heavy siege guns, three 24-pound and one 32-pound. We threw up earth so as to elevate two of our field pieces to fire over the parapets.

Among the loyal citizens who came to us and took arms and fought by our side in sight of their homes, and whose names should be preserved on the roll of honor, were, James Lindsay, Richard Trow, F. T. Peck, M. B. Tetwiler, Eli D. Ake, C. R. Peck, W. W. Haywood, W. N. Gregory, Wm. Leper and many others, whose names I regret that I cannot now recall.

There were some ordnance stores there, some very inferior old muskets and plenty of ammunition. I distributed arms to all who would take them and to make the ordnance officer's accounts all right I afterwards receipted to him for them, and the ordnance department at Washington dogged me for fifteen years afterwards for a settlement of my ordnance account. The department has me charged with great numbers of muskets, cartridge boxes, etc. The U. S. owes me a balance on my pay as an officer, which it holds from me till I shall account for those old

muskets, etc. I thought the government got more than their worth in that fight.

Colonel Murphy was an experienced artillery officer and had won distinction in that arm of the service. He was assigned to the command of all the artillery. Captains McMurtry, Mace and Powers with their companies were at the outpost at Patterson, nearly forty miles away, when Price's advance struck them; they skirmished their way back to Pilot Knob with very little loss. Captain Bradley was at Fredericktown and fell back to Ironton, where he effected a junction with Captain Dinger, whose company was then at Ironton.

The gallant Major Wilson was everywhere, and used his cavalry force to the best possible advantage in watching the approaching enemy, and had some very lively skirmishes with them on the 26th, in one of which he received a wound in the head, which he regarded as only a very slight affair, but which I am led to believe affected his mind and which probably caused his capture the next day.

Captain Dinger made a stand at the court house in Ironton on the 26th with his company, and fired upon the advance guard of Price's force as it came into Ironton, but seeing the main body of the enemy filing down into the valley, fell back towards Pilot Knob with a part of his company; another part of his company, under Lieutenant George Tetley, remained at the court house through a misunderstanding of his orders until Wilson, with his cavalry, came up with two pieces of Montgomery's Battery and the

two companies of Iowa Infantry, and Dinger fell in with them as they moved on towards the court-house, where his company was reunited. Wilson drove back and held the enemy in check until night, and in fact only fell back to the fort at daylight on the morning of the 27th, and reported that as far as the eye could see the enemy was moving down into the valley.

The night was one of anxiety and preparation on our part. When it was fairly daylight, Joseph A. Hughes volunteered to go up to the top of Pilot Knob and signal us the movements and numbers of the enemy. His signal so bewildered us as to numbers that we sent Colonel James Lindsay, who was there without a command and who came to us gun in hand, and on his arrival at the peak of the Knob we learned that the valley at Ironton and Arcadia was full of men, horses, wagons and artillery.

Edwards in his book, "Shelby and His Men," says Price had Fagan's division, 4,000 men and four pieces of artillery; Marmaduke's division, 3,000 men and four pieces of artillery; Shelby's division, 3,000 men and four pieces of artillery, besides there were a number of unattached regiments and companies about equal to another division. If we exclude Shelby, who had gone round by way of Farmington and Potosi, there were about 10,000 men and eight pieces of artillery there present. Presently the sun tipped the mountain tops; I looked around me and, in view of what I knew was coming, wondered at the selection of the site of the fort; on every hand the mountains towered away above

us, so near that a good rifle would carry a ball from the summit of either of them into our midst. A dread of the enemy's artillery on the mountains crept over me and I suggested my fear to Murphy, who only replied, "Let them put a gun on one of those mountains and I'll knock—out of it in a minute," and he well-nigh verified this assertion later in the day. The situation was fully understood and appreciated by the men. I encouraged them with assurances of our ability to hold the fort and cheered them with the prediction that Pilot Knob would become historic and forever a monument of our victory.

Wilson went down the valley a short distance with his cavalry, and Captains Lucas and Campbell with their companies of 14th Iowa, deployed as skirmishers along the side of Shepherd mountain and moved forward on Wilson's right. They skirmished with the enemy and slowly fell back to the fort. The day wore on; Price was awaiting the arrival of Marmaduke and his division, as I have since learned. About noon the head of their column came around the point of the mountain in full view and changed direction, forming line of battle across the valley from Shepherd mountain to Pilot Knob and extending far up the sides of both mountains. They sent in a flag of truce and demanded our surrender; General Ewing returned a very polite but emphatic refusal. They then moved their line forward some distance and halted and again demanded our surrender, saying that they would not be responsible for consequences in case of our refusal.

With unanimous concurrence of all the officers, who were consulted, Ewing answered that we would risk the consequences, and informed him that he would fire on any flag of truce thereafter sent forward, saying at the same time, "They shall play no Fort Pillow game on me." They then advanced their skirmishers and Murphy sent a shell from one of our siege guns into their midst and the battle began in earnest. I must not omit here to state that after the first assault had been made, and while they prepared for the second one, another white flag was displayed alongside the projecting high rock near the left of their line; we directed all our guns upon it at once and it disappeared very suddenly.

We had put our infantry into the trenches outside the fort; Maupin taking command of the force on the south side of the fort, and I taking the other and supporting two field-pieces outside the fort. On they came cheering wildly, our artillery pouring upon them shot and shell. Still they came on until within easy range, then we opened upon them with our musketry by volleys; they wavered, halted and laid down, but for only a few moments, when as one man they sprang up and rushed forward, so bravely that it awoke in me a regret that such men should be so slaughtered; but flesh and blood could not endure the fire we poured upon them and again they wavered, fell back and laid down and sought protection in the bed of the little stream and behind whatever they could find as a protection. Just then Ewing, fearing that we could not hold the trenches

against a cavalry force which came around Shepherd mountain dashing towards us from the west, led by Col. Alonzo W. Slayback, ordered us into the fort, and through the moat and sally-port up over the parapets we clambered. When turning our artillery on the cavalry force of Slayback it swung around to the northward along the base of Cedar mountain; meanwhile the assaulting force rose up again and made one more last desperate dash at the fort, broken by our terrific musketry, but still coming on — on up to within twenty yards of the moat, then falling away like the receding wave on the ocean's beach. Meanwhile the enemy had taken a battery of artillery up to Shepherd's mountain, and in two or three shots got the range of the fort, exploding a shell which in turn exploded a caisson killing and badly wounding five of our men. Then it was that the skill of Murphy was put to the test. He trained one of our heavy guns upon the enemy's gun and sighted and worked at it till I was wild with impatience. All the time he was muttering imprecations on all rebels generally and especially those on the mountain. At last he pulled it off. Ewing watched through his field-glasses, and as the shot struck he shouted with joy; it was a center shot and soon their firing ceased from that source and their guns were removed to their right on the shoulder of the mountain, nearer the valley. The whole of our artillery was directed upon them there and they soon disappeared behind the crest of the ridge. My Confederate friends who were there tell me that they were out of artillery ammunition; but certainly

had plenty afterwards on their raid; where they got it I have never been able to learn; certainly, they got none at Pilot Knob except what was fired at them. When the battle began Maj. Wilson, with a small detachment of his cavalry and part of Dinger's company, was out on our left near the furnace of the Pilot Knob iron company; a force of the enemy dashed along the side of the mountain swinging around the base of it, while another force came down the Farmington road cutting off Wilson completely. He, with his men, and Captain Dinger and a part of his company surrendered, and were taken away as prisoners in full view of us; we could not shell the enemy that surrounded him without killing him and his men. Wilson was a loyal, patriotic citizen, a brave and efficient officer; we never saw him again. He, with the other prisoners, was taken away to a point in Franklin county, about ten miles north of Union, where he with five of his men, were turned over to the guerrilla chief, Tim Reeves, and were by him and his gang murdered in cold blood. Capt. Dinger and the other prisoners were paroled and turned away. For this shameful violation of the rules of war, in the case of Wilson and his men, Gen. Rosecrans issued a retaliatory order. Five rebel prisoners were selected and soon after executed at St. Louis in retaliation for the murder of Wilson's men. Eleven Confederate majors in our hands were compelled to draw lots to determine who should be shot in retaliation for the murder of Wilson. The man so selected was in charge, for a time, of Lieut.

Col. Chas. S. Hills of the 10th Kansas, then on staff duty. Col. Hills became interested in him. The night before the morning fixed for his execution Col. Hills appealed to Hon. Henry T. Blow, one of the noble-hearted, patriotic men who deservedly stood near to the great generous-hearted Lincoln. He telegraphed Mr. Lincoln and the answer came to stay the execution, and it remains stayed until this day.

When the last desperate charge had been fully repulsed, the last ray of the setting sun had faded from the mountain top and the evening shadows were beginning to fall in the valley ; the firing ceased, not a shot was heard ; the silence was only broken by the groans of the wounded who lay everywhere on the field ; the enemy lay in the gullys, ravines, and behind logs — in every place of concealment, waiting the coming darkness to cover their retreat. Murphy was still full of fight and feeling glorious over success, mounted the redoubt and proceeded to address the audience in our front as it lay in concealment, daring and defying them to come on, and in a voice so loud that it woke the echoes of the mountains, reflected upon their courage and parentage. Out of admiration of his daring they refused to shoot him, as they could easily have done. Night came on, Surgeon Carpenter organized his corps of assistants, among whom was Dr. James R. McCormack, and proceeded to care as best we could for the wounded, both our own and of the Confederates who were left on the field near the fort ; the dead were left where they fell. The Confederate killed and

wounded as the count was subsequently given to me by persons who made it, numbered 1,468, and long after the battle a number of bodies were found on the mountain sides that had not been included in the count. Our loss in killed and wounded up to that time was twenty-two killed, forty wounded and sixty-seven missing (prisoners).

Then we counseled together what we would do; Ewing, Maupin, Murphy, Emerson, also Col. Hills of Ewing's staff and Maj. Williams of a Kansas regiment (the two latter named officers stood deservedly high in the confidence of Gen. Ewing, they were good soldiers and men of excellent judgment); we knew that the severe loss we had inflicted on the enemy would be avenged if we remained till the next day; we knew that Gen. Mower was somewhere in Price's rear, but we did not know where or when he would reach us, if at all; we knew that A. J. Smith was almost within hearing of our artillery; we felt that if we had one division of his veteran corps then and there to sally out upon the enemy in his demoralized condition we could drive him back to Arkansas, but we also knew that Gen. Rosecrans would not send Smith to our assistance for fear of uncovering St. Louis; here we were completely surrounded by an overwhelming force without hope of reinforcement or succor. It was plain that we could not stay there and very nearly as plain that we could not get away. Our only course was conceded to be that we must make effort to get away and take the chances. All around us everywhere were the camp fires of the enemy; our only

course was to cut our way through the enemy's lines. This we resolved to do. While we were making our preparations for this desperate sally, a woman came to us bearing a message from Col. Alonzo Slayback, a Confederate officer, a kind-hearted and noble man, as many of us knew him afterwards, advising us to make terms and surrender, that we could not withstand the force that would be brought against us in the morning; this he did unofficially and as our friend—he had personal friends among us, Ewing among them; we thanked him through the same messenger, and informed him that we had determined to fight it out.

Our preparations complete, I undertook to lead the way with the infantry force, and selected 100 men who had seen most service, putting Capt. McMurtry in command for the advance. There was a pile of charcoal at the furnace, only a few hundred yards from the fort, as large as the Lindell hotel, said to have been \$80,000 worth, which had become ignited by explosion of shells during the fight and then stood there a vast white coal of fire lighting up the whole valley; this annoyed us greatly. Quietly getting my infantry formed by companies we moved about one o'clock in the morning out at the sally-port into the moat, out by the entrenchment on the north side of the fort, and forming our line in the shadow of the church, tents and straw was laid on the drawbridge to deaden the sound of the artillery passing over it; the artillery followed the infantry, the cavalry bringing up the rear. Montgomery commanding his artillery and Capt. P. L. Powers commanding rear

guard of mounted men. It was a solemn hour; a night attack is always fraught with dangers and horror exaggerated by the imagination because unseen, and to my mind the situation was the more terrible because we did not know if we would strike the enemy where his line was weakest or strongest. In low tones the commands were given and repeated along our line and we went forward in column by twos route step, arms at will, taking the Caledonia road. On we went, every ear intent to catch the word of forward into line, for the charge, still we went on unchallenged. On either side of the road the enemy lay about their camp fires, pickets and sentries stood idly about the fires not twenty rods from the road, mistaking us no doubt for a body of their own force moving into position; they gave no evidence whatever of seeing or hearing us. We had left in the magazine in the fort about twenty tons of powder and a large lot of fixed ammunition. Gen. Ewing detailed Sergt. Danl. Flood of the 3 M. S. M. cavalry to apply a slow match to it. When we had gone about a mile outside the enemy's lines suddenly the heavens were lighted up by a grand column of fire ascending hundreds of feet above the mountain tops and making the whole region to reverberate with a sound as though a mighty thunderbolt had riven Pilot Knob from its base to its peak.

Gen. Price himself told me after the war was over, as did also Col. Wm. Lawson, at whose house in Arcadia Price made his headquarters, that he did not know until 8

o'clock next a. m. that we had evacuated and blown up the fort. His men had spent a great part of the night in making scaling ladders with which to scale the parapets of the fort the next morning, and when our magazine blew up they thought it had been an accident and that those of us who had not been killed would surrender in the morning at once. Shelby was at Potosi; he had been ordered back to Pilot Knob and about 9 o'clock in the morning we met his advance guard near Caledonia. All our mounted force, men and officers, dashed at them and we succeeded in wounding and capturing several of them. Arriving at Caledonia we reasoned thus: Shelby is in our front with four times our number, he will fall back to Pine Hill, a strong position, to wait for us; then it was that we first thought of making our way towards the S. W. Branch R. R. (now St. L. & San Francisco). Turning off at right angles from the Potosi road we marched towards Webster. About 8:30 o'clock that morning, Gen. Price afterwards informed me, that he ordered Gen. Marmaduke to pursue us. Col. Lawson told me that he heard the order given so that when we left that road, Shelby, with 4,000 men, was in our front and Marmaduke with 3,000 in our rear. We reached Webster at night, halted and rested some hours, then resumed the march, dark, raining, and muddy, but on and on we went. Our theory was that Shelby would go back to Potosi and take the Steelville road so as to intercept us where our road crosses that road. This proved to be correct so far that a detachment of his

force did come by that road and reached the point where we crossed it only about a half hour after we had crossed it and gained the ridge road beyond. From Pilot Knob to Webster the roads and the country were perfectly familiar to me and more so to Col. Jno. W. Fletcher, our quartermaster. When we reached Webster we were fortunate in finding Mr. Wingo, a gentleman upon whom we could rely and who acted as our guide during our march on Wednesday night. Our route, after crossing the Steelville road, lay generally along the crest of the ridges between the Courtois and the Huzzah Fork, to the Meremec. The enemy soon came up with us on Thursday morning; we selected our position where he could not easily flank us, made our disposition and waited till he came within easy musket range, deploying the infantry and cavalry on either side of the artillery and then turned loose on them with grape and canister and musketry by volley. Montgomery worked his field-pieces for all that was in them. We drove them back with loss. This occurred again and again during the day. Six distinct charges of that kind we repulsed that day; whenever we drove them back we limbered for the rear and went quick time; we required no rear guard to keep up stragglers. Our cavalry remained in the rear to notify us of their coming. We lost in killed on the retreat four, in wounded eight. The enemy's loss we could never ascertain; it must have been considerable; we emptied many saddles, one riderless horse came over to

us and I mounted and rode him in lieu of my own which was shot just at that time.

It had rained all Wednesday night after we left Webster ; as we approached the Meremec, I had great fears that it would be so swollen that we could not cross, but to our joy we found no difficulty in crossing. After that our road lay for some miles up a narrow valley flanked on either side by hills somewhat rough and stony, but by no means impracticable for moving a cavalry force at will. As we emerged from the valley the country was less broken and grew more level and open as we approached Leasburg ; there was no trouble in handling cavalry at that point. The enemy dashed up on either flank and cut the railroad above and below the station at Leasburg, but not before a train came up to the station, fortunately for us, having on board some much — very much, needed commissaries and some entrenching tools. Murphy had already reached there with a small advance guard and had piled up some cord wood and railroad ties, behind which, and into the railroad cut, we rushed just as darkness fell upon us. The enemy made a vigorous assault upon us making lurid by their fire in the darkness their rushing line. We replied so vigorously that one volley sent them back with the loss of three killed and a number wounded ; we had marched sixty-one miles in two days and nights, fought a half dozen or more pretty severe skirmishes, had been pursued all the way by a force of eight times our number and had neither ate nor slept during the whole time. All that night we worked by large details to

strengthen our position. Friday morning at daylight the enemy marshaled his force along the rising ground in full view and safe distance of us and sent in a flag demanding our surrender; this was declined in a manner showing that it would not be entertained in any shape or form. We had no flag, it was left floating over the fort, and went up to heaven in the explosion of the magazine. Mrs. Lea brought forth from some hidden recess and presented us a fine flag and we hoisted it over our new fort. They then made disposition of their force as if for an assault and skirmished up within a short distance and then fell back and again during the day appeared in view but made no demonstration. Saturday morning we neither saw nor heard them. About noon Col. Beveredge commanding 300 men of an Illinois Regiment of cavalry, came to our relief from towards Rolla. After midnight on Saturday night we marched out towards Rolla and met Col. John S. Phelps with a regiment of cavalry at a point below Cuba, and Gen. Sanborn with other portions of cavalry force at St. James. Thus on Sunday morning we marched up the road and Marmaduke and Shelby marched down the road; we went on to Rolla, when Gen. McNeil and Sanborn with their whole force of nearly 3,000 cavalry at once moved out for Jefferson City, beating Price there whereby the capital was saved. Gen. Ewing and Col. Murphy also left and came in the rear of the rebel force to St. Louis, leaving me in command at Rolla. Ewing had a great ovation on his arrival in St. Louis. We had not been heard of after the fight on the 26th of September

till the 4th of October ; there was great anxiety in the city and elsewhere for our safety. We were thanked in general orders of the department, and afterwards by resolution of the legislature. Gen. Price was severely criticised by the Confederate authorities for the Pilot Knob affair; some of those criticisms were unjust to him.

From a letter written by Thomas C. Reynolds to the Confederate secretary of war I make this extract.

Writing of Price he says:—

“He lost several hundred of his best soldiers in the repulsed attempt to storm the well-ditched fort at Pilot Knob, which the Federal commander abandoned, as the St. Louis papers previously stated he would have to do as soon as our artillery could command it from the neighboring mountain. The garrison, unobserved, evacuated the place by night, carrying off its field artillery, and no less important a personage than Colonel Fletcher, then Lincoln candidate and since chosen for the position of Federal governor of Missouri, well known to be there with his regiment. ‘General Price refused to order immediate pursuit.’ Shelby left for eighteen hours to await orders at Potosi, reached Caledonia only two or three hours after that force had passed through; the brigades tardily sent after it were wisely withheld, when worn out by a forced night march, from attacking it in the entrenched position it had found time to construct, and it thus effected a complete escape.”

In his book, “Shelby and His Men,” Maj. Edwards, who was a gallant Confederate officer, makes some corroborative

statements of what I have written and I append to this paper the following extracts from that author. He says: —

* * * * *

“ At Caledonia the advance of Marmaduke’s division was met in pursuit of Ewing’s forces, which had, by some mistaken generalship, been allowed to escape from Pilot Knob. It seems General Price moved against Ironton on the morning of September 26th, and drove the Federals into the town, but they evacuated Fort Curtis, an unimportant work between Arcadia and Ironton, during the night, and took position in Fort Davidson, at Pilot Knob, one mile from Ironton. This was an ugly angular fort, too, surrounded by a deep, wide ditch partially filled with water, almost impossible to get over at any time, and doubly difficult certainly under the fire of artillery and musketry. General Price’s determination to attack was made suddenly and against the wishes of his subordinates. Marmaduke, far east at Fredericktown, was ordered to march west to this place; upon his arrival were further orders bidding him prepare for the assault upon Pilot Knob.

On the 27th, the skirmishers were driven from Shepherd’s Mountain, and portions of the two divisions of Fagan and Marmaduke charged the fort right gallantly. The assault was repulsed with loss, but the investment and the fire from the assaulting lines continued until dark, and all the day of the 27th. At nightfall Ewing silently

destroyed his magazines and retreated with his whole force toward Rolla very much surprised, no doubt, at finding his road perfectly open and not a sentinel to dispute the passage. Pursuit was not attempted until the night following the next day, when Ewing had passed through Caledonia on his life or death retreat. Had pursuit been at once ordered and Shelby notified of the escape, Ewing could have been crushed like a nutshell between two divisions and the defeat at Pilot Knob fully avenged, but getting no orders at all, nor even hearing of the success or defeat of the army, Shelby returned like a true soldier to where he thought danger the greatest, and arrived too late to meet Ewing before he had turned from the road leading to Potosi. When at last ordered to pursue, Gen. Marmaduke advanced rapidly with Shelby from Caledonia and, after, a short rest, the two divisions pressed on all the long and weary night of the 28th. Ewing's rear was struck about daylight and vigorously attacked, but retreating over a splendidly defensive road — for it ran between two large streams, often flanked by perpendicular cliffs of great height, he could not be reached at all except by charging down upon the rear in column of fours; yet, under the many great disadvantages, Gen. Marmaduke pressed him sorely until nearly night, when Shelby took the lead and made a last grand charge upon the tired Federals. It was too late, however. Darkness came down thick and impenetrable. Ewing reached the Southwest Branch at Leasburg, and threw up heavy fortifications

during the night. Not desiring possibly to attack him the next morning in a splendid position, and behind formidable works, with men who had marched forty-eight hours and fasted twenty-four, Gen. Marmaduke withdrew toward Union, destroying all munitions of war falling into his hands that were not needed in the equipment and supply of his own troops."

"It has been asserted by some of Ewing's officers that, upon the appearance of Gen. Price's forces, a consultation was held to consider the question of surrender, and that the alternative was to be chosen in the event of the investment being made complete. Gen. Price failed in this by leaving open one broad main road—the very road of all others most desirable for Ewing's purposes; he simply marched out and away without the least difficulty. Gen. Ewing fought splendidly, too, after getting well on his retreat. He had great advantage in the formation of the country over which his road ran, yet his pursuers greatly outnumbered his little band, and might have ridden over it a dozen times after it was overtaken. Gen. Marmaduke's failure to do this arose from the fact that he desired Gen. Clark, who was new with the cavalry, to learn something about its management, and, therefore, gave into his hands the entire control of the pursuit. This was unfortunate, and prevented the capture of Fletcher, whose election it was most desirable to prevent. After Shelby moved to the front it was too late to accomplish anything, and Ewing escaped handsomely, as he deserved to do after his exhibitions of such indomitable pluck and endurance."