

The Battle of Pilot Knob Staff Ride and Battlefield Tour Guide

Douglas L. Gifford

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CHAPTER 1. STAFF RIDE OR BATTLEFIELD TOUR?

Before beginning your study of the Battle of Pilot Knob, it will be helpful to understand the difference between a true military staff ride and a battlefield tour. This will allow you to plan an analysis of the battle that will meet the schedule and goals of your particular organization. This is an excellent guide that can be used successfully by military organizations, history groups, scout troops, schools, veterans organizations, and any group or individual with an interest in history.

According to the Center of Military History publication CMH 70-21, *The Staff Ride* by Dr. William G. Robertson, "A staff ride consists of systematic preliminary study of a selected campaign, an extensive visit to the actual sites associated with that campaign, and an opportunity to integrate the lessons derived from each. It envisions maximum student involvement before arrival at the site to guarantee thought, analysis, and discussion. A staff ride thus links a historical event, systematic preliminary study, and actual terrain to produce battle analysis in three dimensions. It consists of three distinct phases: preliminary study, field study, and integration." It is important to remember that without preliminary study there is no staff ride. Both students and instructors should have a working knowledge of the events that took place in Missouri's Arcadia Valley on 26-27 September 1864, before you arrive at the battlefield.

The staff ride instructor will need to read several books or articles pertaining to the battle, and will need to spend several hours at the battlefield becoming familiar with the terrain and setting. In this guide I have included a chapter on the strategic setting, and a chapter which gives you a good overview of the Battle of Pilot Knob. Consult Appendix F for additional sources of information about the Battle of Pilot Knob. For those individuals or groups who are not interested in a military staff ride, this guide will provide you with the information necessary for an enjoyable and rewarding experience exploring the Battle of Pilot Knob.

Prior to the staff ride, all students should also have read at least one account of the battle. The instructor will then schedule at least one training session during which, at the very least, the following topics are discussed: 1. The strategic setting in Missouri during the summer of 1864; 2. The origins and organization of the Price Raid; 3. An overview of the Battle of Pilot Knob. After these topics have been discussed, students should be encouraged to engage in discussion (monitored by the instructor) among themselves.

Another way to increase participation in the staff ride is to assign each student a major personality from the battle to study. Although Pilot Knob was not a large battle in terms of numbers engaged, there are many officers on both sides whose actions directly affected the outcome of the battle and who have interesting personal stories. Appendix D contains biographical information on many of the senior officers engaged at Pilot Knob.

As the leader of a staff ride, you may also want to practice mounted land navigation as you proceed from stand to stand. Although I have included detailed directions to each stand, I have also included the eight-digit military grid coordinate. Topographical maps of the area may be obtained from the Missouri Department of Natural Resources in Rolla, Mo. See Appendix F for address and phone number. Be sure to bring along a compass to assist in locating direction and key terrain features. Consult Appendix F for information on ordering topographical maps and map reading protractors.

When constructing stands for the Battle of Pilot Knob Staff Ride and Battlefield Tour, I have tried to use the nine principles of war as teaching points whenever possible. Appendix A contains a

description of the principles of war. In this staff ride and battlefield tour I have chosen to concentrate primarily on the tactical lessons that can be learned from the Battle of Pilot Knob. But it is still important to understand the historic and strategic circumstances that shaped the tactical decisions made by leaders on both sides.

By requiring advance study of the battle, students will have a better grasp of the events that took place at each site, or stand, on the battlefield. They will be able to engage in serious discussion and derive the maximum benefit from the staff ride. Remember, good preliminary study is the key to a good learning experience.

Although a staff ride is the best way to learn about a battle, some organizations do not have the time or resources to conduct a true staff ride. For those organizations, a battlefield tour is more practical. *The Staff Ride* says, "A historical battlefield tour is a visit to the site of an actual campaign but with little or no preliminary systematic study. If led by an expert, the historical battlefield tour can stimulate thought and encourage student discussion but within limits set by the lack of systematic preparation and involvement. A historical battlefield tour uses both terrain and a historical situation but does not have a preliminary study phase." This lack of student preparation places a greater responsibility on the instructor. Where students in a staff ride will be able to intelligently discuss events that took place on the battlefield, students in a battlefield tour will need to have events explained to them at every stand.

After the completion of the staff ride or battlefield tour, it is important to set aside at least an hour or two to integrate what you learned on the battlefield with what the students learned in the classroom and in private study. This integration can be conducted back at home station, over dinner in a local restaurant, or even while setting in the remains of Ft. Davidson.

For more information on staff rides and battlefield tours, consult CMH Publication 70-21, *The Staff Ride*, by Dr. William G. Robertson, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D. C., 1987. For more information on Ft. Davidson State Historic Site and where to gather resources for a staff ride to the Arcadia Valley, consult Appendix F.

CHAPTER 2. THE STRATEGIC SETTING.

By the summer of 1864 the Confederate cause was dying. Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant had General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia trapped in the trenches around Petersburg, VA. Major General William T. Sherman had pushed General Joseph E. Johnston and his Army of Tennessee out of northern Georgia all the way to Atlanta. In Alabama, Union Major General Edward R. S. Canby was preparing to attack the city of Mobile. Union control of the Mississippi River divided the Confederacy in half. The times called for drastic measures if the Confederacy was to survive.

Most of the veteran Union volunteer infantry that had garrisoned Missouri earlier in the war was now serving east of the Mississippi River in the campaigns in Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama. In the summer of 1864 the state had a garrison that contained regiments of the Missouri State Militia Cavalry, along with a few detachments of volunteer infantry, artillery, and cavalry. For the previous two years their duties had consisted of maintaining local garrisons and in chasing the outlaw bands that plagued much of southern and western Missouri. Since 1862, the citizens of Missouri had endured several raids and a great deal of bushwhacking, but no major battles were fought in the state. The pro-Confederate state government fled Missouri in 1861, establishing a government-in-exile in Texas. Since that time, the new pro-Union provisional government held firm control over the cities and towns in the state while chaos reigned over much of rural Missouri.

Confederate Generals Joseph O. Shelby and John S. Marmaduke led large raiding parties into Missouri in 1863 and 1864. Information gathered on these raids gave Southern leaders the impression that there was widespread support for the Rebel cause in the state. There were also reports from the secret societies (The Order of American Knights, or O.A.K., Knights of the Golden Circle, and The Sons of Liberty) within Missouri that told Southern leaders the only thing necessary to cause a mass uprising in the state was a Confederate presence. All these events convinced the exiled Missouri Confederates that an invasion of the state would result in a general uprising and restore Missouri to the Confederacy.



Major General John S. Marmaduke

Fresh from his victory over the Union Army in the Red River and Camden Campaigns, Confederate commander in the trans-Mississippi, General Edmund Kirby Smith was looking for something to do with his Army. On 19 May 1864, Kirby Smith ordered Major General Sterling Price, a former Governor of Missouri and possibly the most popular man in the state, to prepare for an invasion of Missouri. Price immediately sent Brigadier General Jo Shelby into northeast Arkansas to recruit troops and gather forage for the coming invasion. He also ordered his spies in Missouri to gather intelligence and informed the leaders of the O.A.K. to prepare for a general uprising when he entered the state. To weaken the Union forces in Missouri before the invasion, Price ordered the dreaded guerrilla bands to increase their activities. By mid-July Price was ready.

Sterling Price would have to wait for his invasion of Missouri. Shortly after the Red River Campaign ended, Kirby Smith became involved in a quarrel with Major General Richard Taylor, his most competent subordinate. Then Braxton Bragg, military advisor to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, began pressuring Smith to send his veteran infantry units east of the Mississippi River to assist in the defense of Atlanta and Mobile. Although it proved to be impossible to move troops across the Federal-controlled Mississippi and the Confederate government reassigned Taylor, Smith neglected his plans for a major invasion. It took some lobbying from Missouri's Confederate congressional delegation and a personal visit by Sterling Price himself to persuade Kirby Smith to go ahead with the operation.



Major General Sterling Price

When he first conceived the idea of a Missouri invasion, Kirby Smith had intended to send a combined arms force of infantry, cavalry, and artillery into the state. In the late summer of 1864 he could have fielded an army of between 30,000 and 40,000 men. Instead, the plan that emerged from his meeting with Price called for an all-cavalry force of 12,000 men and only a few pieces of artillery. Without the fire power of infantry and sufficient artillery, Smith changed the nature of the mission. Instead of a true invasion, the Missouri Expedition was now a large cavalry raid. He chose Sterling Price to command the Missouri Expedition, which became known to history as the Price Raid.

In conjunction with the Missouri Expedition, Kirby Smith planned for a major campaign in Arkansas that would drive the Union Army from the state. But Major General John

B. Magruder, commander of the operation, bungled the affair so badly that Smith dropped all plans for an offensive in Arkansas.

From the Confederate point of view there were many positive things to be gained by an invasion into weakly held Missouri: 1. If Price was able to capture St. Louis, one of the largest cities in the country, it might convince European leaders that the Confederacy was indeed a legitimate nation. If a European power such as Great Britain or France granted recognition to the Confederacy, it might force the United States to negotiate a peace settlement favorable to the goals of the Confederacy. 2. Even without European recognition the capture of St. Louis could end the war. The general election in the United States was less than two months away. The loss of St. Louis after more than three years of bloody fighting might have a negative effect on Northern voters. It might create enough anti-war sentiment to throw out the Lincoln administration and elect a President and congress that would end the war peacefully. 3. A sustained Confederate presence in Missouri would draw large numbers of Federal troops from the East, relieving pressure on the Rebel armies in Atlanta and Mobile. 4. Missouri contained a huge amount of arms, ammunition, and other military supplies desperately needed by the Confederacy. 5. The raid offered a chance for Missourians loyal to the South to enlist in the Confederate Army. 6. The exiled Missouri Confederates hoped to install Governor Thomas Reynolds in Jefferson City. They also hoped to control enough of the state to allow for a general election in Missouri and select a new Confederate Governor and Confederate legislators.

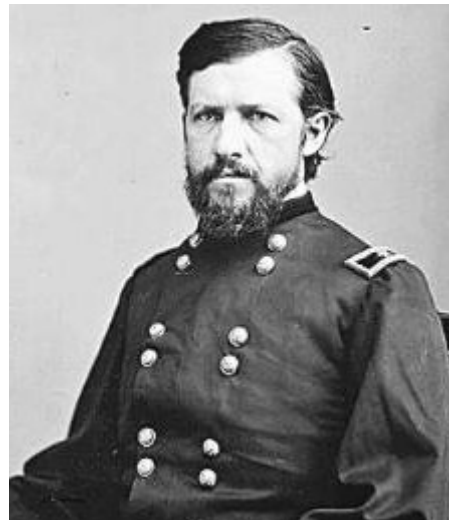
In his operations order to Price (see appendix E), Kirby Smith told the Missouri General to, "... Remember that our great want is men." And to, "Make St. Louis the objective ... which, if rapidly made, will put you in possession of the place, its supplies and stores, and will do more toward rallying Missouri to your standard than the possession of any other point." Smith also told Price that

if forced out of Missouri he should, “make your retreat through Kansas and the Indian Territory [Oklahoma], sweeping the country of its mules, horses, cattle, and military supplies of all kinds.” In short, Kirby Smith’s main objectives for the campaign were recruits and supplies.

Sterling Price and his cavalry departed Camden, Arkansas on 28 August 1864 and linked up with Shelby’s command near Powhatan, Arkansas on 15 September. While at Powhatan, Price officially organized his army into three divisions commanded by Major General John S. Marmaduke, Major General James F. Fagan, and Brigadier General Joseph O. Shelby. Price named his invasion force The Army of Missouri. The expedition entered Missouri on 19 September and headed for St. Louis. Each division moved over a different route, allowing the Army to travel more quickly and to gather forage over a wider area.

By 24 September most of the Confederate Army had reached the city of Fredericktown, Missouri. At that point Price met with a dilemma. He could move directly on St. Louis, now less than a hundred miles away, or he could turn to the west and attack a small Federal garrison at Pilot Knob. Price feared leaving Union troops in his rear and desperately needed the supplies stockpiled at Pilot Knob. He was probably also hoping for an easy victory to boost the morale of his troops and to help spur recruiting. Price made the fateful decision to divert from St. Louis and attack Pilot Knob.

The Union commander in Missouri at the time of the Price Raid was Major General William S. Rosecrans. The Price Raid took Rosecrans and other Union leaders by surprise. With fewer Federal troops in the entire state than Price had in his Army, Rosecrans was unsure about which course of action to follow. If he concentrated his troops in one spot, Price’s mobile cavalry columns might slip around his force and threaten another point in the state. A concentration of Union forces would also leave much of rural Missouri at the mercy of the dreaded guerrillas. On the other hand if Rosecrans did nothing, the Rebel Army was large enough to defeat all the scattered Union garrisons in detail. Clearly he had a problem.



Brigadier General Thomas Ewing

Rosecrans' first objective was to locate the Confederate Army. Next he intended to determine Price's probable destination and how many Rebel troops his scattered detachments faced. From the beginning Rosecrans seems to have believed that central Missouri, probably Jefferson City, would be the objective. Only on 24 September, after Price had been in the state for five days, did he begin to suspect that St. Louis might be the Rebel objective. To find out for certain, Rosecrans dispatched Brigadier General Thomas Ewing Jr. and a detachment of reinforcements that had just arrived in St. Louis to locate Price and try to determine his intentions.

Thomas Ewing was the most hated Union officer in Missouri after issuing General Order #11 only the previous year. That order had depopulated several counties in western Missouri and caused a great deal of suffering among the civilian population. Many of the men serving in Price’s Army had relatives who were effected by Ewing’s order. Now, as the commander of the Federal District of St. Louis, Ewing was to act as General Rosecrans’ eyes and ears in southern Missouri.

In 1864, the town of Pilot Knob, located in Missouri’s beautiful Arcadia Valley, was the terminus of the Iron Mountain Railroad and a major distribution and storage point for Federal military

supplies. The garrison also protected local mines that produced iron ore, an important resource in the Union war effort. At the time of the Price Raid, Pilot Knob was also the headquarters of the Third



Major James Wilson

Sub-district of General Thomas Ewing's Federal District of St. Louis. Major James Wilson, who also commanded a seven-company battalion of the 3rd Missouri State Militia Cavalry, was the commanding officer of the Third Sub-district. Ft. Davidson was the principal fortification in the Arcadia Valley. In his after action review of the Battle of Pilot Knob, General Ewing described Ft. Davidson as,

“ ... a hexagonal work, mounting four 32-pounder siege guns and three 24-pounder howitzers en barbette [meaning that the guns fired over the top of the fort's walls rather than through portals]. It lies about 300 yards from the base of the knob [Pilot Knob mountain] and 1,000 from the gap [Ironton Gap]. From the fort to the remotest summit of these hills is not over 1,200 yards, while all parts of the hillsides toward the fort, except the west end of Shepherd's Mountain, are in musket range. The fort was always conceded to be indefensible against any large army having serviceable artillery.”

When General Ewing learned Price was in southern Missouri, he ordered Major Wilson to call in all his scattered detachments and concentrate his forces at Ft. Davidson. He also ordered Wilson to begin vigorous patrolling in an attempt to locate the invading Confederate Army. Ewing arrived in Pilot Knob about noon on 26 September 1864, along with 134 men of the 14th Iowa Infantry. These troops, combined with Wilson's command and a group of local citizen volunteers, brought the strength of the Federal garrison up to approximately 1450 men. It was the responsibility of this tiny force to locate Sterling Price and his army of 12,000.

CHAPTER 3. THE OPPOSING ARMIES AT PILOT KNOB.

ORGANIZATION

Sterling Price divided The Army of Missouri into three divisions, each division containing 4,000-5,000 men. The divisions each contained several brigades, with each division containing a different number of brigades (See Appendix C). The individual brigades varied in size from as few as 500 men (Slemons) to over 2,000 men (Cabell). Each division also contained a number of separate regiments and battalions, including field artillery.

Some of the troops in The Army of Missouri were reliable veterans: Cabell's Brigade, Clark's Brigade, and Shelby's Iron Brigade. But many men were conscripts and deserters collected by Shelby in northeast Arkansas during the summer of 1864. Although the war was then in its fourth year, Pilot Knob would be the first large battle for many of the soldiers in the Confederate Army.

The Union forces in the Arcadia Valley were a mixture of units, some of them being organized specifically in response to the Confederate activities in Missouri during the summer of 1864. Except for the 14th Iowa, this would be the first major battle for most of the troops involved.

The 14th Iowa was truly a veteran organization, having fought at Ft. Donelson, Shiloh, Corinth, and the Red River Campaign. Despite their small numbers, General Ewing would call on the 14th Iowa repeatedly during the two days of fighting in the Arcadia Valley and the two-day retreat to Leasburg.

The 3rd Missouri State Militia Cavalry had been on active duty in southeast Missouri for two years before the Price Raid. The unit fought in countless skirmishes with bushwhackers and small bands of Confederate troops, but had never fought in a major engagement against a numerically superior foe. The 3rd MSM had the reputation of being somewhat unreliable in combat, and for committing atrocities against Southern sympathizers in the area.

Battery H, 2nd Missouri Light Artillery started as a heavy artillery battery (garrison) in 1863. The battery served at Cape Girardeau and St. Charles for almost a year before the Price Raid. Recently converted to field artillery, the unit had only recently received their new three-inch ordinance rifles. The battery had never been in combat.

The 47th Missouri Infantry entered Federal service only a few days before the battle. The Union Army recruited this regiment as a direct response to the Price Raid. The regimental commander, Colonel Thomas Fletcher, arrived in Pilot Knob on the afternoon of 26 September to officially assume command of the regiment. Many of the men in the 47th Missouri had previously served in the Enrolled Missouri Militia, but few had ever been in combat.

Company L, 2nd MSM Cavalry and Company G, 1st MSM Infantry had been on active duty for two years. Neither unit had combat experience in a large battle. The 50th Missouri Infantry was a brand new unit not yet officially mustered into Federal service.

Besides the organized Union troops defending Ft. Davidson, 100 white civilian volunteers and 50 black civilian volunteers assisted the garrison. Many of these men were too old to be in the regular service, and very few had ever been in combat.

UNIFORMS

Cabell's Brigade of Arkansans were the only Rebel troops to be uniformed in Confederate gray at Pilot Knob. The remainder of the troops in Price's army wore homespun butternut, civilian clothing, or bits and pieces of uniforms. Some Confederates wore captured Union uniforms at their own risk.

Most of the Federal troops at Pilot Knob wore official Union uniforms, sky blue pants and navy blue coats. Some of the troops in the 3rd MSM and Battery H wore short artillery shell jackets trimmed in red, but most Federal troops wore the four-button sack coat. Many of the newer troops did not have winter overcoats and the new 50th Missouri did not have uniforms of any type.

WEAPONS

Confederate troops at Pilot Knob carried a variety of small arms. Many Rebels, including Cabell's Brigade, carried the British-made .58 caliber Enfield rifled musket. The remainder of Price's men used Enfield's, captured Federal Springfield rifled muskets, and a vast assortment of personal weapons including shotguns, hunting rifles, and old .69 caliber smoothbore muskets.

Most Union infantrymen at Pilot Knob carried the .58 caliber Springfield rifled musket, the standard Federal infantry weapon produced during the Civil War. Cavalrymen of the 3rd MSM carried Colt repeating rifles and some Wesson carbines. These weapons were shorter and somewhat lighter than the rifles used by the infantry and were easier to handle on horseback.

Cavalrymen in both armies carried revolvers. Revolvers had less range and were not as accurate as rifles but were easier to use mounted and had the advantage of firing six shots without having to reload. Major James Wilson of the 3rd MSM Cavalry used three revolvers during his stand along Pilot Knob on the afternoon of 27 September.

Sterling Price used only six pieces of artillery at Pilot Knob. The Confederates moved three 12-pounder field guns and one James Rifle onto a spur of Shepherd Mountain and used two 6-pounder guns to fire at Ft. Davidson from the valley floor. The Confederate artillery was not particularly effective at Pilot Knob.

In contrast to the Confederates, the Federals used their artillery with devastating effect at Pilot Knob. The huge siege guns dominated the Rebel artillery in counter-battery fire and demolished the dismounted assaults on the fort. Even Federal light artillery, the 3-inch ordinance rifles of Battery H, 2nd Missouri Light Artillery, was superior to the Confederate 6 and 12-pounder guns.

Civil War artillery fired four basic types of ammunition: shot, shell, case, and canister. Solid shot was simply a metal ball (or bolt if fired from a rifled piece) used against massed troops or to batter fortifications. Common shell consisted of a hollow metal ball filled with gunpowder, sulfur, or some other explosive. A wooden fuse inserted into the ball acted as a timing device. The explosion that fired the projectile would also light the wooden fuse, the length of the fuse determining how long it took to explode. The object was to have the projectile explode while traveling over troops, showering them with pieces of metal. Spherical case (also called shrapnel) was similar to shell except the walls of the projectile were thinner, with metal balls inside the projectile. Gunners could employ shot, shell or case at ranges over 400 yards. When an enemy approached to closer than 400 yards, the

artillery switched to canister. Canister was by far the most deadly type of ordinance used by Civil War artillery. A round of canister consisted of a cylindrical metal can filled with round metal or lead balls (27 balls in a 12-pounder canister round). The metal can disintegrated when the round exploded in the gun tube, turning the cannon into a giant shotgun. By the time of the Civil War, canister had replaced grape shot in most arsenals. Grape was similar to canister except it had fewer (nine) but larger balls, held together with two metal plates and a metal pin. Some of the large Union siege guns fired grape shot during the battle of Pilot Knob.

GUN TYPE	ARMY	# USED AT PILOT KNOB	BORE DIAMETER	TUBE MATERIAL	TUBE LENGTH	POWDER CHARGE	RANGE AT 5 DEGREES ELEV.
6-POUNDER FIELD GUN	CSA	TWO	3.67 INCHES	BRONZE	60 INCHES	1.25 POUNDS	1,523 YARDS
12-POUNDER FIELD GUN	CSA	THREE	4.62 INCHES	BRONZE	66 INCHES	2.5 POUNDS	1,619 YARDS
3-INCH ORDINANCE RIFLE	USA	SIX	3.00 INCHES	IRON	73 INCHES	1 POUNDS	1,835 YARDS
12-POUNDER JAMES RIFLE	CSA	ONE	3.80 INCHES	BRONZE	65 INCHES	.75 POUND	1,700 YARDS
24-POUNDER HOWITZER	USA	THREE	5.82 INCHES	BRONZE	66 INCHES	2 POUNDS	1,322 YARDS
32-POUNDER SIEGE GUN	USA	FOUR	6.4 INCHES	IRON	125 INCHES	8 POUNDS	1,922 YARDS

Table 1. Artillery at Pilot Knob

Along with conventional arms, the Federal powder magazine inside Ft. Davidson contained a quantity of crude hand grenades. The grenades consisted of a metal ball containing gunpowder and a friction detonator, attached to a wood and cardboard fin for stability. The grenades were dangerous and required delicate handling to prevent them from exploding by accident. Pilot Knob was one of the few battles in the Civil War in which troops used hand grenades successfully in combat.

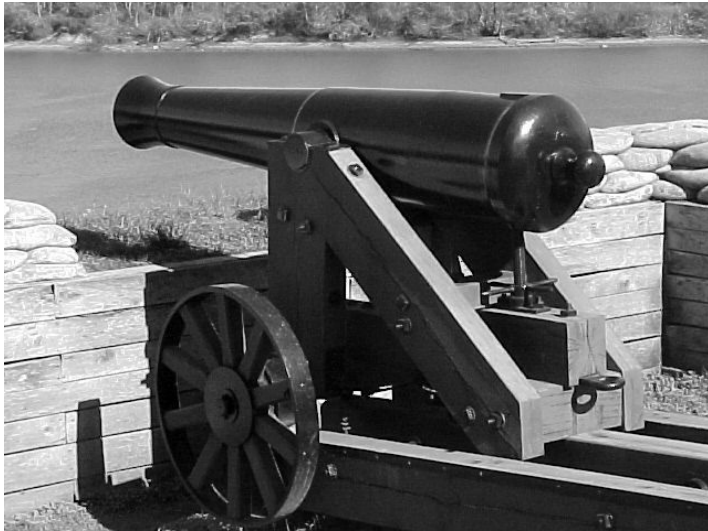
TACTICS

Both Union and Confederate leaders were products of the same military tradition and tended to fight in the same way. Only two officers, Confederate Generals John S. Marmaduke and William L. Cabell, were graduates of the United States Military Academy. All the other officers who fought at Pilot Knob were volunteers and most had no military experience prior to the Civil War.

Until the time of the Civil War, battlefield formations were primarily linear in nature. The opposing sides would literally line up opposite one another and blast away, charging across open ground in tight formations at what the commander felt was the decisive moment in the battle. The goal of most commanders was to get close enough to the enemy to use the bayonet. Although infantrymen carried a smoothbore musket that fired a round projectile, the bayonet was still the most trusted infantry weapon. Artillery served as an offensive weapon because gunners could unlimber as close as 200 yards from enemy infantry and remain almost impervious to their inaccurate musket fire. Most commanders considered field fortifications to be useless. They believed good troops could overcome even the best entrenchments. Cavalry fought mounted using the saber as their primary weapon. A thundering cavalry charge was often decisive and the tactical offensive was the key to victory.

By the time of the Civil War new technological innovations had made the old tactics obsolete. Muskets now had rifled barrels and fired conical projectiles called Minie' balls, increasing their maximum effective range beyond 400 yards. As a result of this increased range, the opposing sides formed their lines farther apart and infantry seldom got the chance to use the bayonet. Battlefield formations also became looser to reduce casualties.

More accurate rifle fire also had an effect on the artillery. As stated earlier, canister was the most effective artillery round when used at distances less than 400 yards. The increased range of the modern rifled musket forced gunners to fire at distances greater than 400 yards. Batteries that tried to move closer than 400 yards suffered staggering casualties in men and battery horses. Rounds suitable



32-pounder siege gun

for use over 400 yards (shot, shell, and case) were less effective than canister. The result was a reduction in the effectiveness of artillery during the Civil War. The effect of rifling was not as dramatic on artillery as it was on small arms. The field artillery was never able to discover an indirect fire system that could take advantage of their increased range and accuracy. The Federal gunners at Pilot Knob tried to use a signalman (forward observer) to direct artillery fire on the morning of 27 September. However the signals from Pilot Knob mountain to the fort were not clear and the attempt at using a forward observer was not successful.

Because of an increased maximum effective range, good field works manned by troops using rifled muskets were almost impervious to assault. Field works also had the advantage of providing confidence to new troops, who otherwise might not have been able to face veterans in combat.

Cavalrymen carried revolvers and repeating rifles and seldom relied on the saber anymore. They used horses for mobility but generally fought dismounted because the battlefield had become too dangerous for a man on horseback.

New technologies resulted in some new battlefield tactics. Heavy skirmish lines preceded an attack in an attempt to meet the enemy with the smallest element possible. Some commanders tried attacking in column along a narrow front to reduce casualties and increase striking power. Unfortunately for the private soldier in the Civil War, most officers did not understand how the new technologies had changed warfare. For most commanders the frontal assault in line formation was the preferred tactic. Few officers realized it at the time, but the new technologies gave the advantage to the tactical defensive on the battlefield, while the offensive had become suicide. The results of these antiquated tactics were casualties not seen in American armies before or after the Civil War.

COMMUNICATIONS

Recent advances in technology had added the telegraph to the old battlefield communications systems of couriers and signaling. At Pilot Knob the Confederates used only couriers, usually a mounted staff officer, to deliver both written and verbal messages.

General Ewing was able to use all three types of communication at Pilot Knob. Before General Shelby cut the telegraph line north of Pilot Knob, Ewing was able to stay in touch with his superiors in DeSoto and St. Louis and to influence events beyond his immediate location. On the morning of 27 September the Union Army used a signal man on top of Pilot Knob to direct artillery fire on the Confederates who were concentrating in the Arcadia Valley south of Ironton Gap. Although not a form of communication by itself, the railroad also aided Federal communications by moving messages with greater speed. The railroad also allowed commanders to talk face to face with more subordinates and to cover more ground in a shorter amount of time.

LOGISTICS

Many of the decisions Price made during the Missouri Expedition resulted from logistical concerns. Logistics was one of the key factors in the Confederate decision to attack Pilot Knob. During the Price Raid the Army of Missouri was operating hundreds of miles from its base of supply in southern Arkansas. Logistics forced the Confederates to haul all their ammunition, food, and forage along with the army as they moved. Price knew he could never bring along enough supplies for the whole campaign. His plan was to live off the countryside when possible and collect food and forage in the rich farm country of central Missouri. He also hoped to augment his meager supply of ammunition by capturing Federal garrisons such as Ft. Davidson. Price's ordinance supplies were so low that the expedition stopped for several days at one point to wait for a supply of smuggled percussion caps to arrive from Memphis, Tennessee.

At one point during the raid Price had a wagon train that consisted of approximately 500 vehicles. Historians have criticized Price for attempting to protect his wagons at the expense of his men. Yet one of Kirby Smith's primary objectives for the campaign was to collect as many supplies as possible. Unfortunately for Price's reputation, by the time of the Battle of Westport many of the wagons in the Confederate train contained plunder stolen from private citizens throughout Missouri.

The Federals had a much easier time supplying their troops in the Arcadia Valley. Proximity to the railhead in Pilot Knob was the deciding factor for the location of Ft. Davidson. In 1864 Pilot Knob was the major distribution point for Federal garrisons in southeast and south central Missouri. The Federal storehouses in Pilot Knob contained ample supplies of food and small arms ammunition for the garrison inside Ft. Davidson. Logistics did not become a problem for the Union Army until General Ewing decided to evacuate the fort on the morning of 28 September.

CHAPTER 4. THE BATTLE OF PILOT KNOB.

The advance brigade of Fagan's Confederate Division (Slemons' Brigade) passed through undefended Shut-Ins Gap three miles east of Ironton about noon on 26 September 1864. Although Shut-Ins Gap was the most defensible piece of terrain in the Arcadia Valley the local commander,



Major General James Fagan

Major James Wilson, did not have an observation post manned at that location. At this time there were also no Union cavalry patrols operating on the Fredericktown Road. Wilson apparently believed that the Confederates would advance on Pilot Knob from the south, rather than from the east. This lack of security allowed the Confederates to come within a mile of Ironton, only 2 miles south of Ft. Davidson, before a Federal outpost observed their advance.

The NCO in charge of the Federal outpost immediately dispatched a messenger to alert the small Union garrison in Ironton. When it soon became apparent that help was not forthcoming, a second messenger started for Ironton. This second runner was able to alert the troops in Ironton and Ft. Davidson. By this time Colonel Slemons had his brigade in line of battle and attempted to out-flank the picket post. The remaining Federals then fled into Ironton.

When word reached Major Wilson of the Confederate presence in the Arcadia Valley, he immediately sent a patrol to investigate. Wilson chose not to alert the remainder of the Pilot Knob garrison. At this time he still did not believe there were large numbers of Rebel troops in the area. On the previous day he had received a similar report that turned out to be a false alarm. Now Wilson would need confirmation before acting.

The patrol dispatched by Major Wilson ran into the Confederates in line of battle along the Fredericktown Road. Colonel Slemons soon attacked the Union patrol as they advanced up the Russellville Road and a brisk fire fight ensued. The two sides charged and counter-charged over the fields between Stouts Creek and the Fredericktown Road. After about an hour of inconclusive skirmishing, the Rebels were able to move around the left flank of the Federal line. The patrol panicked and retreated back through Ironton all the way to Ft. Davidson.

After dispersing the Union patrol, Colonel Slemons sent a detachment of troops into Ironton in an attempt to capture the town before Federal reinforcements could arrive. When the Rebels entered Ironton they received a volley of rifle fire from Company E, 47th Missouri Infantry. After their initial volley, Company E retreated into the Iron County courthouse while the Confederates dismounted and took up a position across the street.

Back at Ft. Davidson, the abrupt return of the routed patrol and the sound of gunfire coming from the direction of Ironton was more than enough evidence to convince Major Wilson and General Ewing (who had just arrived at the fort) that there were indeed Rebels in the area. Wilson quickly collected all the cavalry he could find and went galloping off to save Ironton. General Ewing followed Wilson with 134 men of the 14th Iowa Infantry and a two-gun section from Battery H, 2nd Missouri Light Artillery.

Major Wilson, using a portion of his 3rd MSM Cavalry, was able to drive the Rebels out of Ironton with only token resistance. He then recalled his men and formed a new line of battle near the courthouse. It was a little past 1500 when the Federals moved out of Ironton. For the next two hours

Wilson and his cavalry pushed Slemons' Confederates out of the Arcadia Valley all the way to Shut-Ins Gap. Once inside the gap however, the Rebel position was too strong for Wilson's small force. At 1700 Major Wilson led a wild mounted charge into the gap in a final effort to drive out the Confederates. Wilson tumbled from his horse after being shot in the head but quickly remounted and ordered a retreat. By this time the Confederates inside Shut-Ins Gap had received substantial reinforcements and began to drive the Federals back toward Ironton. For the next hour Wilson's cavalry and the two guns of Battery H fought a delaying action as they slowly retreated in the face of increasing Confederate pressure.

Darkness came at about 1800 and ended the fighting on 26 September. The Federals, pushed back to within a mile of Ironton, took up a defensive position astride the Russellville Road. All night long Confederate troops filed into Arcadia Valley and went into bivouac facing Wilson's small Union task force. Alarmed at the growing number of Confederate troops to his front, Major Wilson secured permission from General Ewing to withdraw his troops from their exposed position. Quietly the Federals moved to a more secure position on a small ridge that extended from the Iron County Courthouse on the Federal right, to Knob Creek on the left. At this point Wilson had approximately 500 men under his command. Despite feeling a certain amount of relief after putting some distance between themselves and the Rebels, it was still a very restless night for Wilson and his men. During the night a cold rain fell, driving some of the Union infantrymen of the 14th Iowa and Company E, 47th Missouri to seek shelter in the courthouse, and making all the troops miserable.



Captain William J. Campbell

After the fighting at Shut-Ins Gap ended, General Ewing returned to Ft. Davidson. Upon his return, Ewing ordered seventy wagons loaded with supplies and sent north, out of harms way. He also had several trains loaded with military supplies and ammunition. At this point Ewing still did not believe that he was facing Price's entire army. Later, when Major Wilson and Captain Campbell of the 14th Iowa reported the vast number of Confederates that were entering Arcadia Valley, Ewing began to change his mind.

General Ewing called a council of war around 0100 on the morning of 27 September. The participants were Ewing, Colonel Thomas Fletcher of the 47th Missouri Infantry (and the Republican candidate for Governor), and Dr. Seymour Carpenter, Medical Director of the Department of Missouri. Ewing asked both officers what they thought of the situation and what course of action the army should pursue. Colonel Fletcher advised retreat, while Dr. Carpenter suggested they stay and find out more about the enemy they were facing. Ewing then dismissed the officers and summoned First Lieutenant David Murphy, currently Adjutant of the 47th Missouri and a highly respected artilleryman. Murphy was vehement in his denunciation of retreat. He was certain that Price's entire army was not present and that he could hold the fort with his artillery if the Rebels attacked. This conversation seems to have restored Ewing's confidence and confirmed his original belief that he was facing only a small portion of Price's Army. Ewing decided to stay and find out more about the Confederates who were pouring into the Arcadia Valley.

Ewing's plan for the next day was simple. First, he would use his cavalry and the veteran 14th Iowa to hold off the Confederates for as long as possible. He then hoped the Confederates would have only enough time to launch one attack on Ft. Davidson before dark. Ewing felt certain that the big guns inside Ft. Davidson could hold off any force that the Confederates were likely to send against it.

He also felt confident that Lieutenant Murphy could keep the Rebels from positioning their artillery on Shepherd Mountain and Pilot Knob. Then, after he had determined the enemy's strength and intentions, he could decide whether to retreat or stay and fight some more.

By midnight all of Fagan's Confederate Division, over 4,000 men, had entered Arcadia Valley. Brigadier General William Cabell's Brigade replaced Slemmons' Brigade facing the Federals. Marmaduke's Division camped along the St. Francis River, still ten miles from Ironton. General Price spent the night with Marmaduke's command.

Dawn on 27 September 1864 brought a renewal of the Confederate assault on the tiny Union task force commanded by Major James Wilson. The Federals put up a stiff fight, but the Confederates soon drove them out of Ironton. Wilson ordered Captain Campbell to take the infantry and retreat to Ironton Gap while he covered their withdrawal with his cavalry. When the infantry was safe, Wilson began to fall back slowly in the direction of Ironton Gap.

By 0900, the 14th Iowa and 3rd MSM had taken up defensive positions inside Ironton Gap. Company E, 47th Missouri and Battery H, 2nd Missouri Light Artillery retreated into Ft. Davidson. As Cabell's Confederate Brigade attempted to enter Ironton Gap, the Federals moved out of harms way. The 14th Iowa moved up onto a spur of Shepherd Mountain, while the 3rd MSM took shelter on the south slope of Pilot Knob. This allowed the big guns inside Ft. Davidson to drive the Rebels back. The Federals were able to hold their position in the gap until around 1000 when the 14th Iowa was out-flanked and forced to retreat into Ft. Davidson. The 3rd MSM was able to hold their position until about noon when Cabell's Brigade was finally able to drive them up and over Pilot Knob.

From 1000-1200 the Confederates probed the defenses of Ft. Davidson, looking for a weakness. Rebel sharpshooters sneaked through the heavy brush at the base of Shepherd Mountain and Pilot Knob to find concealed positions from which to fire at the fort. The Confederates also used hidden cannons to feel out the fort's artillery.

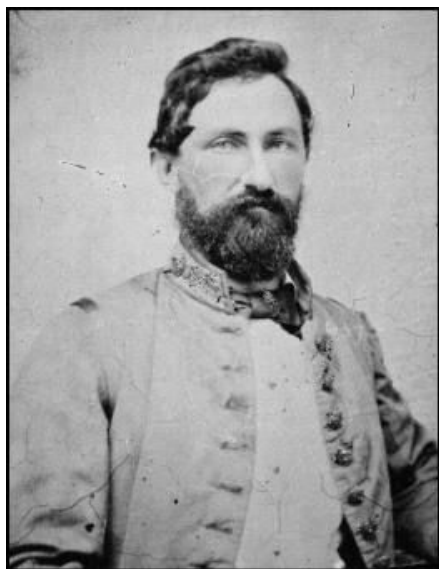
Price finally arrived in Ironton around 1000 to discover the town already occupied by his troops and most of the Union Army driven inside the walls of Ft. Davidson. To gather intelligence on the Union garrison, Price ordered his Chief of Engineers, Captain T. J. Mackey, to climb Shepherd Mountain and make a reconnaissance. Mackey was not able to get a good view of the fort because the Federals kept the hillsides under fire. Nevertheless he did have a recommendation. After the reconnaissance Price convened a council of war to solicit advice from his senior officers. Mackey told the commanding general that he should have his cavalry surround the fort to keep the Federals from escaping. Price should then move 6 to 8 guns onto Shepherd Mountain and blast the fort into submission. Mackey told Price it would take two hours to get the guns into position.

The two division commanders disagreed with Captain Mackey. Both Fagan and Marmaduke argued that time was critical because the Federal Army could arrive at any time and relieve the garrison. This was an unrealistic argument because everyone knew that Shelby had already cut the railroad north of Pilot Knob. Both generals assured Price that a frontal assault could reduce the fort in a short time. Although Mackey had mentioned the presence of a "slight ditch" surrounding Fort Davidson, no one present at the council of war, including Chief of Engineers Mackey, seemed concerned by that obstacle. The faulty reconnaissance of Ft. Davidson had convinced the Confederate leaders that the Federal garrison was an easy target. Price rejected Mackey's advice and ordered a frontal assault on Ft. Davidson.

Price's plan of attack on Ft. Davidson was complex. First, the Confederates would place four cannons on Shepherd Mountain to soften up the Union defenders. Then, beginning at 1400, four

columns would storm Ft. Davidson from four directions. Clark's Brigade of Marmaduke's Division would climb Shepherd Mountain and attack the fort from the south. Cabell's Brigade of Fagan's Division would attack from the southeast through Ironton Gap. Slemmons' and McCray's Brigades of Fagan's Division would climb Pilot Knob and attack Ft. Davidson from the east and northeast. Freeman's Brigade of Marmaduke's Division and Slayback's Regiment of Shelby's Division would ride around Shepherd Mountain and attack from the west. Dobbin's Brigade of Fagan's Division would take up a position north of the fort astride the Caledonia-Potosi Road to block a Federal retreat in that direction. By 1130, the plan was ready and the Confederates stopped their probing actions to prepare for the grand assault. A calm fell over the battlefield as the Confederates disappeared. For the first time in almost twenty-four hours General Ewing lost contact with the enemy.

About noon Cabell's Brigade attacked Major Wilson and the 3rd MSM, forcing them from the south face of Pilot Knob. Wilson retreated north over the crest of the mountain. He then reported to General Ewing inside Ft. Davidson. Ewing still hoped to delay Price's attack for as long as he could. He also wanted to reestablish contact with the Confederate Army. To further these objectives, Ewing



Brigadier General William Cabell

sent Major Wilson back to Pilot Knob. Wilson's new task force consisted of the 3rd MSM, Company E, 47th Missouri Infantry (mounted) and a detachment of men from Company L, 2nd MSM Cavalry. These troops were to take up a position on the north slope of Pilot Knob and watch for a Confederate advance. The general organized another task force for Shepherd Mountain commanded by Captain Hiram Milks. This detachment of 60 men from Company H, 3rd MSM and Company H, 47th Missouri received orders to watch the westward approach to Ft. Davidson along the north slope of Shepherd Mountain. Although Ewing was expecting an attack, he still did not believe he faced the bulk of Price's Army. He told Captain Campbell of the 14th Iowa that they were facing "a strong scouting party" only. Then, despite Campbell's protest, Ewing sent the 14th Iowa back to Shepherd Mountain to delay the Rebel advance from that direction and to guard against a surprise attack.

At 1400, a Confederate cannon on Shepherd Mountain announced the start of the Rebel assault. Lieutenant David Murphy commanding the fort artillery had previously estimated the range of Shepherd Mountain by firing practice rounds. Armed with that information, he quickly disabled two of the Confederate guns and forced the remaining two guns to move to a more secure location farther up the slope of Shepherd Mountain. For the remainder of the battle Rebel artillery inflicted only minor damage on the fort and its defenders.

When Clark's Brigade began their advance over Shepherd Mountain, the Rebels forced the 14th Iowa from their position. The veteran Iowan's were able to escape back into the fort after leaving two men dead on the mountain. Fagan's Division attacked Wilson's task force on Pilot Knob and quickly overwhelmed the small Union force. Some of the Federals were able to make it back to the fort, while others just scattered. Major Wilson and Captain Franz Dinger refused to leave the field. The advancing Rebels soon surrounded the two offices and a number of enlisted men and forced their surrender. Captain Milks and his detachment ambushed Freeman and Slayback as the Confederates moved to attack Ft. Davidson. The Rebels forced Milks up the north side of Shepherd Mountain where the Federals remained cut off until after nightfall.

As the Confederates began their attack on Ft. Davidson, the flaws in Price's plan became evident. Price had intended for all four elements to begin the assault at 1400. However he failed to take into account the varying distances, over rough terrain that each unit would have to cover from their line of departure to their assault positions near Ft. Davidson. Only close coordination between Price and his division commanders could make that coordination happen. But Price remained at his headquarters in Ironton throughout the battle and the two division commanders, Marmaduke and Fagan, were not in position to personally direct their troops. So the responsibility for coordination fell to the brigade commanders, who were too far apart and separated by difficult terrain. As a result, the four assault columns attacked one after the other over the course of about an hour.

Fagan's right wing was the first Confederate element to attack Ft. Davidson. The men of Slemmons' and McCray's Brigades ascended the south slope of Pilot Knob and then moved down the rugged west slope into a large draw, or ravine. They reached the level plain and headed for Ft. Davidson. The fort's gunners shifted their fire from the Rebel artillery on Shepherd Mountain. They were able to concentrate their fire on Slemmons' and McCray's men because no other Rebel troops were present. When the advancing Confederates reached the East Branch of Knob Creek, still 300 yards from Ft. Davidson, they simply lay down in the creek bed. McCray and Slemmons were no longer a factor in the battle.

Clark's Brigade had a difficult time crossing the rough terrain on Shepherd Mountain and did not attack with Slemmons and McCray. The brigade finally crossed the Mountain under artillery fire from the fort and moved into a large hollow that kept the men concealed from the gunners inside Ft. Davidson. The rough terrain on Shepherd Mountain also had the effect of breaking up Clark's battle formation, leaving the brigade disorganized just before the assault on Ft. Davidson. Coming out from behind a spur of Shepherd Mountain, the brigade was only about 500 yards from the fort. After coming out onto the plain that surrounds the fort, the brigade charged. The gunners inside Ft. Davidson shifted their fire from Slemmons and McCray, onto Clark's men. The brigade reached a point only a few yards past the West Branch of Knob Creek when heavy cannon and rifle fire from Ft. Davidson stopped their advance. Still 200 yards from the fort, the Rebels fell back and took shelter in the bed of West Branch. Protected by the creek bank, they kept up a harassing fire on the Federals for the rest of the day. No amount of effort from the Confederate officers could force the men to attack the fort again. Clark's Brigade was out of the fight.



Brigadier General J.B. Clark

While the Federals were decimating the remainder of the Confederate Army, Freeman's Brigade and Slayback's Regiment were approaching Ft. Davidson from the west. The Confederates advanced to within 200 yards of the fort and were preparing for a mounted assault when a detachment of Union troops stormed out of the north rifle pit. This small group, combined with cannon fire from Battery H, 2nd Missouri Light Artillery routed Freeman and Slayback before their attack began. They did not try another assault. Instead, Freeman and Slayback spent the rest of the day to the north of Ft. Davidson near Dobbin's command along the Caledonia-Potosi Road.

Meanwhile General Cabell had not received the order to attack Ft. Davidson at 1400. At 1430 he was still waiting for the Confederate artillery to reduce Ft. Davidson. One of Fagan's staff officers soon appeared and ordered Cabell to assault the fort. Attacking from the southeast, Cabell led his men

in a methodical advance on Ft. Davidson. The brigade crossed East Branch 500 yards from the fort and kept going. The gunners inside Ft. Davidson switched from shell and case to canister, double slotted. The Confederates were taking fearful losses but continued to advance, General Cabell personally directing his brigade.

Inside the beleaguered fortress, Lieutenant Murphy inspired his gunners with acts of heroism and bravado. There were so many Federal infantrymen packed inside the small fort that there was only room enough for one in eight men to fire from the parapet. The other soldiers took empty rifles from the men along the walls and reloaded them. In this manner the infantry kept up a constant fire on the advancing Confederates. When Federal rifle fire began to slacken because of discouragement at the persistent Rebel attacks, Captain Campbell alternately praised and bullied the infantry until their rate of fire increased.

During Cabell's assault a Confederate artillery shell disabled the drawbridge leading into the fort. Unable to raise the bridge, General Ewing ordered Captain Campbell to barricade the entrance to the fort and defend it, to the death if necessary. The Rebels were never able to get close to the opening and concentrated their attack elsewhere.



Lieutenant David Murphy

The Rebels closed to within a few yards of the fort, and then became confused by the depth of the moat and the height of the walls. Some of Cabell's men jumped into the ditch surrounding the fort. The Federal defenders then used crude but deadly hand grenades to blast the attackers out of the ditch. General Cabell had his horse shot out from under him, slamming him to the ground, stunned. At last the Confederates could stand the cannon and rifle fire no more. They streamed away from the fort in defeat, with the victorious Federals firing at them until they were out of range. The Battle of Pilot Knob was over.

For the next two hours the Confederates who were hiding in the branches of Knob Creek sniped away at the fort, making it uncomfortable for the defenders but causing no serious damage. Sunset came to the Arcadia Valley a little after 1800. Under the cover of darkness the Confederates escaped from their hiding places and slipped off to bivouac for the night. None of the Rebel troops who participated in the attack on Ft. Davidson, except for Slayback's tiny regiment, spent the night anywhere near the fort.

Ewing and his command were safe for the time being, but the general feared dawn would find all the Confederate artillery placed on Shepherd Mountain and Pilot Knob, making the fort untenable. A captured Rebel officer told Ewing that the Confederates were already making scaling ladders, a sure indication that Price would attack again on the following day. An inventory of the garrison's ordinance revealed that there was not enough large-caliber cannon ammunition remaining to fight another day.

At 2100 Ewing held a council of war. Sources differ as to Ewing's state of mind at the time. Some say he wanted to stay and fight despite the odds, while others say he wanted to surrender. Regardless of what Ewing was thinking, a majority of the Union officers present voted to take their chances and evacuate the fort. Ewing consented.

At about 0100 the Federal garrison began evacuating Ft. Davidson. They slipped undetected through the Confederate lines north of the town of Pilot Knob and set off toward Mineral Point, Mo.

Ewing detailed Captain Henry Milks of the 3rd MSM to blow up the powder magazine after the garrison was safely away. When the magazine blew up it sent a fireball several hundred feet into the air and rocked the earth for miles around. Remarkably, the Confederates chose not to investigate the explosion, believing it was the result of an accident. The Rebels stayed in their camps around Ironton while the Union Army put precious distance between themselves and the Confederates.

When Price awoke on the morning of 28 September and found the Union Army had escaped, he was furious. He ordered Marmaduke in pursuit of Ewing and sent a message to Shelby to hurry and join in the pursuit. The Confederates caught up with the Union rear guard on the morning of 29 September and a running battle ensued that lasted until sundown when the Federals reached Leasburg, 66 miles from Ft. Davidson. Ewing ordered earthworks constructed at Leasburg, and the Confederates, now fearful of attacking entrenchments, never made a serious assault. On 1 October, Union reinforcements arrived from Rolla, the Pilot Knob garrison was now safe.

The number of casualties suffered by the Confederates at Pilot Knob has always been a source of controversy. Federal reports submitted shortly after the battle universally claim 1,500 Rebel troops killed or wounded. These reports used the number of Price's men who were in the hospital at Pilot Knob after the battle, the number of Confederate graves, and information provided by captured Confederate officers. This estimate is probably too high. Modern estimates, based on partial Confederate reports and some educated deductions, place the number of Confederate casualties at Pilot Knob at slightly over 500. This number is undoubtedly too low. The problem with estimating Rebel casualties is the lack of information. Many senior Confederate officers failed to report their casualties after the battle. In many cases, because of the fluid nature of the campaign, commanders simply did not know the exact number of troops under their command. The point is, we will never know for sure exactly how many of Price's men fell at Pilot Knob. Considering the numbers engaged (probably between 5,000 and 7,000 men, although there is controversy about those numbers also) and the duration of the battle, even the low estimates are staggering.

Thanks to the small size of the Union Army, good Federal record keeping, and extensive research (conducted by Dr. Cyrus Peterson of the Missouri Historical Society), Union casualties are much easier to estimate. Fourteen Union troops died during the battle and fourteen later died of their wounds, making a total of twenty-eight killed. This total does not include the murder of Major James Wilson and six enlisted men of the 3rd MSM by Price's men on 3 October. The Federals also had forty-four troops wounded at Pilot Knob who survived the battle. Besides the killed and wounded, Ewing initially reported almost three hundred soldiers missing, mostly from the 3rd MSM, 47th Missouri, and 2nd MSM Cavalry. Most of these men were eventually able to rejoin their units after the Confederates had departed the area. Considering the intensity of the fighting and the odds against them, Union casualties were surprisingly light.

As often happens in warfare, it was leadership that made the difference at Pilot Knob, making this an interesting and important battle to study. Union leadership at all levels was outstanding, while in the Confederate Army it was almost universally poor. There is a military anecdote that says the god's of war do not forgive those who make mistakes on the battlefield, and at Pilot Knob, the Confederates made far too many mistakes.