

The Woodruff Gun

Annotations to the Margreiter Article

Woodruffs during the Battle of Pilot Knob, Mo.

Official Records of the War of the Rebellion, Series I, Volume 41, Part 1, p. 709.

Operations in Louisiana and the Trans-Mississippi States and Territories, July 1-December 31. 1864.
Reports.

Price's Missouri Expedition –Record of the Price Court of Inquiry: Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry Convened at Shreveport, La., by Virtue of the Following Special Orders: Special Orders No. 58. Examination of Capt. T. J. Mackey, corps of engineers:

At a Confederate Court of Inquiry held at Shreveport, LA, April 24, 1865, into Confederate General Sterling Price and his 1864 campaign into Missouri, Price's chief staff engineer, Capt. T. J. Mackey, testified that Woodruffs were used by the fort's defenders during the Battle of Pilot Knob:

...Several (say five) minutes later Fagan's division, after advancing about 100 yards on the plateau, broke in the most disgraceful manner, and before it had experienced any material loss, with the exception of Cabell's brigade, which was on the extreme left, which moved steadily across the plateau at double-quick and. delivering its fire under the fire of five or six heavy guns, two six-inch Coehorn mortars, and two or three 2-pounder steel skirmish guns which swept the gorge of the work upon which Cabell's right was moving; the enemy attempting to raise the drawbridge, but the ropes breaking the gorge was left open. The enemy's chief attention was directed to Cabell's brigade, which having reached a point in the vicinity of the ditch, and meeting with very heavy loss, fell back in very great disorder up the slope of Pilot Knob Mountain....

Scott House, co-author of a recently revised book on the battle, told the author that he believes that Mackey was not in a position to be an eyewitness of this part of the action and is not convinced that the Woodruffs were actually employed. Cabell's forces were fired on by two 3-inch Ordnance rifles positioned outside the fort. All the Ordnance rifles were taken with them by the Federals when they abandoned the fort, while the Woodruffs were left behind, so House thinks Mackey probably assumed that the guns used against Cabell were the ones he saw in the fort the day after the battle.

Scott House to the author, emails, 25 January 2023.

Bryce A. Suderow and R. Scott House, *The Battle of Pilot Knob: Thunder in Arcadia Valley*. Cape Girardeau, Mo.: Southeast Missouri State University Press, 2014.

chased, was being distributed and recruits being received and organized, one or two companies being formed. Major-General Marmaduke was marching. He, having a longer route to pursue, did not overtake us till the day we left Fredericktown. Six or seven forges were engaged during the halt in shoeing horses and mules and repairing the transportation.

The Judge-Advocate here handed the witness a diagram of Pilot Knob and its approaches, which is hereunto attached and marked Exhibit B,* and asked:

Question. Is that an accurate diagram of the country it purports to represent?

Answer. It is. It was drawn from a sketch made by me on the spot.

Question. You have stated that on the 26th September Major-General Fagan drove in the enemy's outposts. State where that outpost was, and the character of the enemy's works.

Answer. The outpost was Fort Curtis and vicinity, a decimated earth-work, commanding the road from Arcadia to Fredericktown, having a command of about fifty feet above that road.

Question. State in what direction the garrison of Fort Curtis retired.

Answer. North to Pilot Knob, distant a mile and three-quarters.

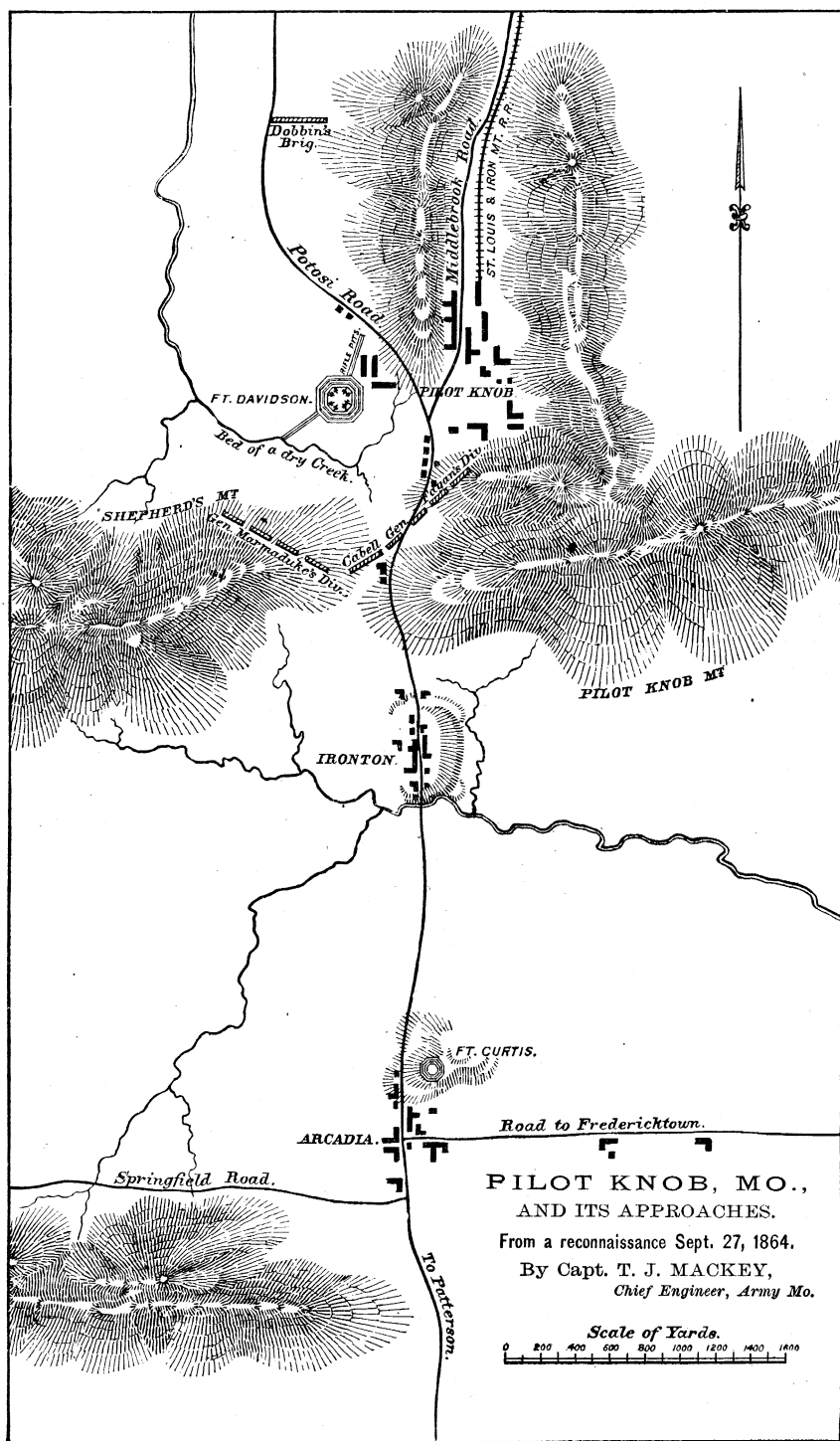
Question. What time on the 27th September were the enemy again encountered? Who commanded? State whether or not any reconnaissance of the enemy's position and strength was made, and if so, by whom made and with what result.

Answer. We arrived in the vicinity of Pilot Knob about 10 a. m. I informed General Price, who commanded in person, that I would make a reconnaissance, and with a guide proceeded to the crest of Shepherd's Mountain to a point about 1,500 yards distant from the work on Pilot Knob. The work was then firing south-east at our sharpshooters, who were showing themselves on Pilot Knob Mountain. I remained in that position but a minute or two, having been driven down by the fire of sharpshooters of the enemy. I observed that the work was situated in an open plateau, the ground between the work and the mountain being free from obstructions, and the road from Pilot Knob to Potosi running almost due north from the work; the armament of the work consisting apparently of eight heavy guns. There appeared to be but a slight ditch around it. The work being enveloped in smoke, I could not see very distinctly. I returned from the mountain and informed General Price of the location of the work; that the ditch was slight, the work appearing to have been embanked from the interior. I stated to General Price that the work was commanded by Shepherd's Mountain, the key to the position, in which opinion he concurred with me, he having consulted a map of the situation made previously by the engineers of General Hardee. I did not then, nor do not now regard the ditch of that work as being a serious obstacle to a successful assault. The work was an irregular octagonal earth-work, called Fort Davidson, the faces being from thirty to thirty-five yards each with a bomb-proof magazine, the garrison apparently being about 1,000 men. It was largely over-garrisoned. There was no bomb or splinter proof shelters for troops. The guns were in barbette. I then suggested the following plan of attack of the position, which was to place six or eight field pieces on the crest of Shepherd's Mountain by hand, stating that the guns could be placed in position in about two hours on a point 1,200 or 1,500 yards from the work and about 300 feet above it; that proper support should be assigned for those pieces; that while that was being done the work should be invested by the remaining troops of the two divisions of Generals Marmaduke and Fagan, with the remaining four pieces of artillery; that I thought the route north in the direction of Potosi would be the natural line of retreat of the enemy if driven from the work. General Price concurred with me.

Question. State what dispositions were made by Major-General Price; what orders were given by him within your hearing for the conduct of the battle, and then state how the battle was fought and with what result.

Answer. General Price ordered an assault to be made; I do not know by whom the dispositions were made. The troops were formed in the following order: Marmaduke

* See p. 708.



duke's division on the north slope of Shepherd's Mountain, about 800 or 900 yards distant from the work; Fagan's division on Marmaduke's right, its left resting on Shepherd's Mountain on a prolongation of Marmaduke's line, its right resting on the west slope of Pilot Knob Mountain, both divisions masked by the timber on the mountain and about equidistant from the work, Fagan a little nearer to it. Dobbin's brigade of about 1,500 or 1,600 men was in position about a mile due north of the work on the road to Potosi. He was in position several hours before the line of attack was formed. Two field pieces were placed in position on Shepherd's Mountain about 1,250 yards from the work. The other guns, eight field pieces, including two or three rifles, were in reserve with a regiment dismounted at Iron-ton, three-fourths of a mile southeast of Pilot Knob. General Price observed to the staff officers of Generals Marmaduke and Fagan that there must be a perfect concert of action in the assault; that the movements of both divisions must be simultaneous; that they must attack together, and enjoined that Generals Marmaduke and Fagan should communicate freely with him and with each other to secure perfect harmony of action. General Price had previously, and three or four hours before the assault was made, dispatched couriers to be mounted on the best horses to Brigadier-General Shelby, then believed to be at Potosi to march immediately for Pilot Knob with the double object of cutting the enemy's line of retreat, and operating against any force that might assist the garrison. These dispositions were complete between 2 and 3 p. m., when a few rounds, five or six in number, were fired from the guns in battery on Shepherd's Mountain. Fagan's division debouched upon the plateau at a point about 500 yards distant from the work, where his whole line came under fire. Marmaduke debouched upon the plateau about 600 yards from the work. Several (say five) minutes later Fagan's division, after advancing about 100 yards on the plateau, broke in the most disgraceful manner, and before it had experienced any material loss, with the exception of Cabell's brigade, which was on the extreme left, which moved steadily across the plateau at double-quick and delivering its fire under the fire of five or six heavy guns, two six-inch Cohorn mortars, and two or three 2-pounder steel skirmish guns which swept the gorge of the work upon which Cabell's right was moving; the enemy attempting to raise the drawbridge, but the ropes breaking the gorge was left open. The enemy's chief attention was directed to Cabell's brigade, which having reached a point in the vicinity of the ditch, and meeting with very heavy loss, fell back in very great disorder up the slope of Pilot Knob Mountain. Marmaduke, while Cabell was moving as described, moved from the southwest and west faces of the work, his command delivering its fire as it advanced. After having passed about 200 yards on the plateau in which the work is situated under fire of several of the guns of the work with but little effect on its line, the entire division halted and laid down on the dry bed of a creek about 250 or 300 yards from the work just before Cabell's line broke. About 4 o'clock in the afternoon the fight concluded, Marmaduke's division continuing to remain in the bed of the creek sheltered from the fire, the other troops retiring in great disorder, General Price using every effort to rally the troops in person.

Question. What was the force under command of Major-General Marmaduke, and what the force under Major-General Fagan, and what were their respective losses in the assault on Fort Davidson?

Answer. Marmaduke's division I estimated at 3,000 or 3,500, Fagan's about 4,000. Fagan's loss in killed and wounded was about 350 officers and men, and Marmaduke's about 75 or 80, perhaps somewhat less. My estimate is based from observation of the field after the fight. This includes the reserves.

Question. How long have you been a soldier?

Answer. With the exception of brief intervals, for nineteen years, and was educated for the profession; and since May, of 1861, in the armies of the Confederacy.

Question. How long in your opinion would it have required the ten guns of General Price's army on the crest of Shepherd's Mountain to have forced the surrender of Fort Davidson?

Answer. Fifteen or twenty minutes, if using shells and the practice good.

Question. How long did it take to move the two guns that were in position on the crest of Shepherd's Mountain to their position?

Answer. About an hour and a half or two hours; perhaps a little longer.

Question. State if the fight was renewed on the following morning (28th September); and if not, why not?

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United States.

Washington : Government Printing Office, 1880-1901.

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