

[The following transcription contains two Civil War accounts in a copy of the Russell Family manuscript at Fort Davidson State Historic Site. The reason for all the underlining is unknown but preserved as in the original. Walter E. Busch, transcriber]

## A Civil War Experience: Preacher Tells of Battle of Pilot Knob.

### A CIVIL WAR EXPERIENCE

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#### Former Pastor of Ironton Presbyterian Church Relates Personal Experiences of Fighting in the Valley.

Pastor Edwards of the Presbyterian Church, has written to many of the former pastors of the Ironton Presbyterian Church and has received some interesting letters among them one from a former pastor, known to all the old timers here, Rev David A. Wilson. Rev. Wilson was pastor of the Presbyterian Church here during the war and writes a letter for publication which we will present to our readers in sections or as a serial. It is very interesting and we think will be very much enjoyed by those who wish to recall the old days scenes and people.

In December 1863, having resigned the Chaplaincy of the 8th Missouri State Militia Cavalry, Col. J.W. McClurg commanding, I took charge of the Presbyterian Church of Ironton, Mo.

Pilot Knob, a mile north from the court house at Ironton, was then the terminus of the Iron Mountain Railway, and naturally became the headquarters of the Quartermaster and Commissary Department of S.E. Mo. and parts of Arkansas adjacent. Ironton, midway between Arcadia and Pilot Knob was the focus for refugees white and black for the lower counties and Arkansas. At one time quite a considerable force was posted at the Knob; but when in the spring of 1864, Steele's Division moved South, only a small body was left to hold Fort Davidson.

Late in September 1864 the report reached Ironton that Price's Army, variously estimated from 15 to 35,000 was marching on Pilot Knob from the South. It was agreed, between the citizens of Ironton and the military at the Fort, that when his troops were nearing Ironton, a gun would be fired at the Fort as a signal for the men of Ironton and vicinity to repair to the Fort, with arms to aid in its defense.

On Sabbath, September 25, I preached at 11 a.m. and the congregation was signing the concluding hymn when the discharge of a cannon at the Fort broke upon our ears. As soon as the stanza was finished, I said, "We all know what that means. I hope every man in the house, as soon as he can get his arms will

resort to the Fort, as I shall myself. The ladies I would advise to return home and remain there if you would preserve your household goods. Your persons, I think, will be safe."

Most, if not all, complied with my request. The alarm, however, proved false. A small body of our cavalry had met the advance guard of Shelby's Division which passed through Farmington, the County seat of St. Francois county, and crossed the Railroad at Mineral Point 27 miles North of Pilot Knob. Of course, this encounter apprised us that Price was near, and he was confidently expected any hour.

About 1 o'clock, p.m., Monday, I was on my way to the P.O. [post office] in the northern part of the town when as I was skirting the town on the East side, I saw the Main street of the town, a company of Cavalry going South. I had not reached the P.O., when I heard pop, pop, pop. Satisfied that skirmishing had begun between our company of Cavalry, and the advance of Price's army, I at once returned home. The encounter took place at a point on the Fredericktown road, where the road leaves it for Arcadia.

My object in returning home was to get a shot gun which I kept as a defense against marauders, and to say good bye to my family. It was my purpose to fall in with a company of home guards, commanded by Capt. Franz Dinger [actually Co. E, 47th MO Infantry Volunteers], camped between my house and the Presbyterian church, in the shade of some stately oaks. As I left my house a short distance from the Main street, on the Fredericktown road, our cavalry was coming back pell-mell, the fastest foremost,. The open space around the saw mill on Stout's creek was crowded [sic] with rebel cavalry, apparently hesitating whether to advance or retreat.

When I left my house the company of home guard had disappeared, and as I knew not whither, I kept on toward the Fort. Before I had reached the church, a ball struck and raised the dust within a yard of me, when I thought it best to get out of range, and turned into a short street running east into open ground. I had scarcely left that street when three rebel horsemen entered it. Supposing they were after me, I made for a tree a hundred yards or more northeast, behind which I meant to defend myself. Instead of following me, however, they kept on straight past for a cavalry camp which our men had left an hour before. They were more eager for plunder than for me, for which, I confess I was not sorry.

Pursuing my way forward I saw a section of artillery going south when I returned and set out for Arcadia, where my niece and son were students in the Academy. Meeting them on their way home, I concluded to see how the families of my Church members, a number of which were strung along the

Fredericktown road, were. Beyond Stout's creek the fence was down on the east side of the road, giving room for the artillery to maneuver. In the open space one of our cavalry lay dead. Going on I found the women and children at home. One of the five Russell brothers, Cyrus, had been taken prisoner. Ordered to march he was slow to comply, and was rapped with a pistol in the presence of his wife. Mrs. Smith, sister to the Russells had been at her sister's, Mrs. Dr. Farrar, obliquely across the road, and seeing rebel soldiers at her house, and going home, found them cutting up he parlor carpet, as they said, for saddle cloths. Remonstrating with them for their unsoldierly conduct, they left doing little damage.

At William Russell's, the furthest of them from town, a squad of them demanded the arms in his house. Leaving them in the road, he was going to the house for [them], but changing his mind he made through the back door of the [house] for the brush. They soon became tired of waiting for him and the arms, and entered the house helped themselves to such things as they wished emptied and mixed the flour, sugar, salt and pepper they did not use.

[Transcriber: Original editor/typist's note follows]

(This is not quite correct, as I know personally, and as William Russell told me his story in 1877) (C.S. Russell)

"I was picking apples in the orchard near the road when I heard some one call over the fence."  
"Obeying the summons I went to see what was wanted. I didn't like the looks of them though several had on "Blue." "Have you got a gun? Was the first question and saying I had, I was ordered to go and get it and hurry back. Nothing loath to leave them I started to get the gun when one called after me, "Have you got a six shooter?" "No," I replied, not felling it necessary to tell them my revolver was a seven shot and proceeded to the house rather leisurely and when inside filled my pockets with all the ammunition I had and picking up gun and revolver dashed from the back door into a patch of sorghum close by. "It was some time later this squad rode to his brother's house and boasted of sending some old Yankee off limping with a shot they fired after him." I had a good reason for limping with about twenty pounds of ammunition in my pockets and most of it in the tail pockets of my coat. I never saw anything that could get in my way like those coat tails."

No shot reached him and running through brushy timber he gave warning to his brother Theodore and hurried on to the Fort. About a mile from home he passed through a Federal camp. He was pretty well

blown and some of the soldiers who had no warning of the invasion called to know why he was running. Telling them the Confederates were in the Valley he was greeted with jeers, but without regarding their laughs, he rushed as fast as he could to the Headquarters near the Fort. He had not gone far till a wagon came rumbling by with the driver laying on the whip. "Let me ride," he called. "Hop in" was the answer, but hurried on out of reach as he tried to keep up with it. Soon another came at break-neck speed. "Let me ride," he called again. "Hop in" was answered without slackening of speed, and profiting by former experience sprang for the wagon when he called. He had no idea any one was in the wagon, "but I didn't know so many men could lie in the bottom of a wagon, it was full of legs and arms and hands clutching till I too was one of that tangle of men." It was after the first skirmish that the wanton destruction in the house of foodstuff, cutting of carpets and placing of live coals in cups in bureau drawers took place.

William Russell was an active "Union Man" and as Enrolling Officer was often in danger both before and after the battle. A squad of men presumably "bushwhackers" tried to get him to leave his house one night during the winter following but talking to them through the closed door he was convinced that they intended to kill him as soon as he should step outside. They did not try to break through the door, evidently knowing the temper of the man. (Story resumed [by Rev Wilson])

When I returned home my brave wife thought I would be safer at the Fort than at home. So about dusk I bade them good bye. With the body of a soldier who had been killed near the Court-house that afternoon as a companion, I rode in an ambulance to the Knob.

With the retreat of the rebel advance guard, the fight for that day ceased. The two forces very unequal in numbers as I learned afterwards, bivouacked face to face at the distance of a few hundred yards. Stout creek separating them, the rebels occupying the fields east of the Fredericktown road. Early next morning fighting was resumed, our men falling back toward Pilot Knob. Soon my house was directly between the hostile forces and of course much exposed. The House being frame and presenting but slight resistance even to musketry, wife surrounded a bed with mattresses and under it she and the children took shelter. Curiosity, however, was stronger than fear and now and then would rush to the window to see how the battle was progressing.

Before 8 o'clock the enemy planted a battery on the road to the Knob north of Ironton, where a stream crossed it, say 300 yards from the Fort.

A few balls from it flew over our heads doing us no damage, but as they passed us I found myself greeting them with a respectful bow.

At the third shot from one of our "32 pounders," having got the range, their battery was silenced and removed. It was taken round the south side of Shepherd Mountain and planted on the north side, a little over the crest, in line with the rifle pit running a little west of south from the Fort. The intention, no doubt, was to rake the rifle pit, but being so much higher, the plunging fire did little damage.

There was some skirmishing between small bodies from the Fort and the enemy, both near the Knob, that is, the pointed elevation over 500 feet high, from which the town is named, and the mountain on the west, separated by a narrow depression. It was on the mountain that the Rev. Mr. Rowland, a Presbyterian minister of Wayne County near Patterson, was wounded slightly in the foot and made prisoner. Marched before a rebel colonel, he was ordered to take off his white shirt, saying that no one should wear a better shirt than himself. Without shirt or coat, a gunny sack was the only covering of his shoulders and chest through the chilly night, lying on the damp ground.

Taken prisoner Tuesday afternoon, he had nothing to eat till Wednesday night, and then only corn filched from the horses. Friday morning at Potosi, Washington County's capitol, he hailed a rebel Colonel and told him how he had fared. Expressing surprise at such treatment, he at once gave orders to take him and other prisoners to the remains of a beef that had been slaughtered, with the glad word "help yourselves." At the Osage river he broke down. Unable to go further, a Major of the Confederate forces gave him a discharge, as if he had been one of them. He found kind treatment in the home of a hospitable German, who entertained him a week or more, till he was able to travel, and withal gave him an overcoat, plain indeed, but a treasure to him at that season of nakedness.

It was nearly three weeks before he got back to Ironton. Making his home for a few days at my house, one day after exploring Shepherd Mountain he reported that he had discovered the bodies of twenty rebel soldiers, unburied. It seemed, he said, as though when passing over the crest they had been met by our forces and shot down before they had time to fire.

Shortly afterwards, I made a personal examination of that part of the mountain, but I discovered no corpse. I will not say it was only the lively imagination of the brother that painted the scene, but the fact is that for some time his mind was a good deal rattled. It was reported - I will not vouch for its truth - that to

one remarking that it was a hard battle he replied: "You may well say it was a hard battle ; I went into it with a brand new rifle, and wore the barrel plumb out." But true or not, he was a good man, a good patriot, and a good preacher, living till he was over ninety years of age.

Dismissing this episode, I resume my narrative of the fight. It was about mid-afternoon when the real battle began. Three Brigades from different points, east, south and south-west advanced simultaneously on the Fort. Only the one from the south almost reached it. The engagement was "short, sharp and decisive," as war correspondents use to say in the war of the 60's. At long range heavy shot was used, but as the enemy got nearer, grape shot and canister with the heavy artillery, with some field pieces, partially mounted under the brave and skilled command of Capt. David Murphy poured in a stream of lead and iron so deadly, that the men, heedless of the urging of their officers, halted, when a retreat was ordered, and rapid firing ceased.

The south side of the Fort was so heavily manned by our men, that I had no opportunity to use my shot gun with effect, and I did not as some do, fire into the air, aiming at the sky. Meeting Gen. Ewing who was chief in command, he said sharply, "Why are you not in the parapet?" The only body of cavalry was some 300 yards distant, making for the Railroad north of town. Holding up my shot gun I said, "Will that reach them?" He had nothing more to say; but I went to the parapet.

Several incidents which occurred during the heat of the battle impressed me deeply and indelibly. At the big gun on the east side, one of the gunners was struck by a cannon ball from the battery on Shepherd's mountain. The roof of his skull was blown off, yet he was not instantly killed. Some moments after, I saw the palpitating brain ere the soul departed. On the north side after the repulse, when loading a "thirty two pounder," the cartridge exploded, instantly one of the men at the cannon's mouth was stripped as naked as when he was born, and the next instant his whole body was crimson. How he did scream! In a little while his head was swollen to a monstrous size, and yet the man survived.

During the fight one of our soldiers, a young cavalry man, was shot in the ankle. It was a painful wound. When I saw him he was in the shelter of the earthworks, pleading for men to take him to the hospital which was some hundred yards distant in the town, and to have taken him thither would have exposed both himself and them to a murderous fire. Yes, yes; it takes more than soldiers clothes to make a soldier. In contrast with this, about the same time was another incident showing how near skin are smiles

and tears. One of my elders, Mr. Delano, in the hottest of the fight with some others, there being no room for them at the parapet facing the enemy, had taken shelter under a caisson. As Gen. Ewing was passing by he saw them, and said harshly, "What are you doing here?" Quick as a wink Delano replied, "We're supporting the artillery."

There was some desultory firing after the repulse. Some rebel sharpshooters lying under the sheltering bank of a stream south-west of the Fort, and some still further away in the open, continued for some time blazing away. A citizen, by the name of Mason, some years after judge of the County Court, was taking deliberate aim with his squirrel rifle, when a ball cut through the rather abundant flesh of the throat, the blood spurted out in a stream apparently as large as the orifice made by the bullet. His chief concern seemed to be to keep his white shirt clean, for he leaned forward more and more, until he was actually on all fours. At the rate the blood was flowing, he must have bled to death in a minute. Seeing his critical case, I went to him, and say, "My man, you must hold up your head." I raised him up and led him behind an earth-work, leaving him there with his head raised. I tied my red silk handkerchief around his neck. As the bleeding was staunched [sic], I saw no more of him until going to the hospital, about 9 o'clock that night, the first man I recognized was him with my handkerchief a round his neck, and waiting on the scores there more seriously hurt than himself.

Soon after nightfall I heard Gen. Ewing say, "there should be a party sent out to gather arms." I at once proposed to several of my parishioners that we do so. I brought in two loads of muskets, 14 in all. The morning had been rainy, afternoon the sun came out, and it grew warm. In charging the men had thrown off their coats and when night came lying on the damp ground they were chilled.

To counteract the cold, the wounded men crawled together in piles like pigs. When on the battle ground, I met Capt. Zwart of the Provost Marshall's office at Ironton, and also the hospital steward, who were busy removing the wounded, whether friends or foes, to the hospital the large hotel at the Knob having been taken for that purpose. Its lower floor was already covered with wounded men laid on the bare floor. Going from one to another I found one man unable to speak. I soon discovered that he had been shot in the face ; that his lower jaw was broken, the end of his tongue cut off, the ball passing out through his left cheek. Finding his mouth filled with clotted blood, I took out a handful, when in guttural tones he cried "Water, water." When I brought it to him he drank greedily, but while it brought relief it again started the

bleeding, requiring the clearing out of his mouth a second time. Others demanding attention I left him, but weeks afterward I met him in Ironton, greeting him I said: "Well I suppose you have had enough of fighting." "No," he replied, "I'd fight 'em again," and it was only then that I found he was not a rebel, but a union man from the country, and like myself and many others a volunteer for then once.

Having lost sleep Monday night, about 12 o'clock I went up stairs in quest of rest. Soon Mr. Delano came to me and said that our troops were about to evacuate the Fort and we could go with them or remain as we might choose. Unhesitatingly I said: "My family is in Ironton and I will stay." Tom, a big colored man that worked for Mr. Delano, and had been taken to the hospital, overheard the conversation. During the battle a 32 pounder which Tom was helping to serve had been dismounted by a rebel shot, and as it fell, it dashed along one of his legs and bruised it badly. Coming to me he said, "Mr. Wilson, what shall I do?"

I said, "Tom, you have been in the Fort taking part in the fight, and if they find you here, it likely will go hard with you, if you are able, you had better go." He thought so too, and his leg mended fast.

Down stairs I went with him to put him on the trail, when just as I stepped out of the hotel two or three paces from the door, the magazine at the Fort exploded, and the debris was falling about us like hail. To escape damage, I ran for shelter some 50 or 60 feet across the street when three steps backward would have put me safe in the hotel. The concussion and its effect was so sudden and unexpected that for the first and only time in the three days, I lost my presence of mind.

The next morning Pilot Knob was occupied by the enemy. A guard was stationed at each store, to prevent looting by the private soldiers, giving those with shoulder straps the first choice.

In an hour or so, a man in a plaid woolen shirt, on a big horse stopped in the street near the hotel hospital. It was Col. MCClean [Lauchlan MacLean], Price's Adjutant General. Wishing to go to my home my thought was to get a pass from him to Ironton. Introducing myself, I told him my home was in Ironton, and that I desired to return. In soldierly fashion he said, "Well go. Wee have come to set you free." Not relishing that kind of talk, I left him without ceremony. Meeting Judge Vail, one of my members, I said, "Judge, I'm going home." "Very well, said he, "I'll go with you," and forth with we started. On the way we met hundreds, if not thousands of rebel soldiers, but none of them said "peas" to us.

At home it was a glad some to find all safe and well, and besides the family, two rebel Colonels and a Captain who had been there since Tuesday noon, Col. Childs for some reason was not on duty.

Col. Buster was sick. At the battle of Pea Ridge, he had been thrust through the body with a bayonet in the hands of a German soldier. Clasp ing him in his arms, he held the soldier fast till one of his own men came up and killed him. Captain Calhoun, for some reason, was also not on duty. About noon Tuesday they had stopped at our house, close to the road, and before dismounting asked Mrs. Wilson if she could give them dinner. She replied that she had but little provisions in the house and begged to be excused. They then asked her where they could be accommodated. To this she replied that she supposed others were like herself.

One of them remarking that his comrade was sick, and needed food and observing that they seemed respectable and respectful men, though not likely to take denial, she concluded with the promptitude of woman it would be better to serve willingly than under compulsion she said, "Well I'll do the best I can for you," and they dismounted. Col. Buster, finding her with only the children, inquired for her husband. She told him that he was at the Fort. He said there was no need for his leaving home, that Gen. Price's orders were strict that no noncombatant should be molested. To this she replied, "My husband was not that kind; he took his gun with him." He had from observing my library inferred that I was a clergyman and no doubt set me down as a "fighting parson." After dinner they were about to leave, when Col. Buster was seized with a violent attack of vomiting, and was unable to proceed, so they stayed till Thursday morning.

They were gentlemen and quite a protection to us. I had a quantity of hay and oats which the rebel cavalry had begun to use freely. When this was reported Col. Buster ordered it stopped. Another effort to protect us was not so successful. Despite the battle my wife had baked light-bread, and had wrapped it in a blanket. As the rebel soldiers, after the battle were falling back, they stopped at our house for a drink of water, and spying the bread eagerly desired some. Mrs. Wilson was cutting off liberal slices and was handing it to them from an open window, when one caught the blanket and all that was on it. The exclamation from my wife, "Oh, you have taken my bread!" brought Col. Buster from the main house. But it was too late, the boys were gone and could not be identified.

As a reward for the kind treatment they had received , Col. Buster had given my son, a lad of just eleven years old, a five dollar bill on a Boston Bank, presumably good ; but I was unwilling that he should keep it. The conduct of these officers was so gentlemanly that all fear of ill treatment had vanished. During Tuesday evening, my niece, a girl of about 13, bantering Capt. Calhoun who was a rabid "fire-eater," said, "Captain wouldn't you like to see the old flag?" He answered evasively. But Lizzie unwilling thus to be put off, went to her room and soon returned with a small silk flag and waving it sang:-

"Oh long may the star spangled banner still wave

O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave."

Col. Buster had great fear of being made a prisoner, and being taken to a Northern prison, and although far from being in condition to travel, he with the others left Thursday afternoon. Wednesday and Thursday forenoon were busily employed by the army in helping themselves to the provisions and clothing in the stores of the three villages of the Valley. There was a liberal shedding of "butternut" and gray jeans for "store clothes" by the soldiers, and for days after they left, unprincipled men could be seen going South with mule loads of dry goods which the soldiers had not taken. The whole beautiful Arcadia Valley had been pretty well cleaned out. Some worn out horses were left, but very few good ones of the people remained. A mule killed in the road at my gate lay there for days before I could get a team to drag it away. Coffee, tea, sugar, all groceries were scarce in the valley until communication by rail was re-established with St. Louis.

For several days we were at the mercy of the guerillas, but they did us little harm. None the less it was a joyful sight when a company of Union Soldiers from Cape Girardeau came in.

Many wounded rebels were taken to the Arcadia Seminary, but as that closed the school, by request I interceded, to the disgust of some of the radicals, with the commander at the Knob, and they were removed to the Court House, where they remained till there was room for them in the large hospital connected with the Ironton hotel, made such instead of a rooming place for Summer boarders.

It was months before those who recovered were removed. While there I visited them repeatedly and occasionally preached to them.

The "raid" was a trying time to the people of the valley. But as Providence "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb" so he braces the mind of men to such emergencies.

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AFTER THE WAR

[by unknown author]

The work of rebuilding fences and replacing the missing stock, harness[es] in fact anything that could be carried away or destroyed required time and money. Even the carriage after slashing the curtains to strips was taken away to carry a wounded officer. The cattle were replaced by better stock, "Devons," "Shorthorns" and later "Jerseys," while the hogs of the razorback type gave place to Chester Whites and Berkshires.

Machinery was necessary to farm profitably because of the growing demand for farm produce. There was still abundant supply of labor although the Iron Manufacture called for a large number of men. Mules were scarce and mule raising was a good line to follow.

The Pilot Knob Iron Co. had its one hundred old mules stolen, an effort to find and recover them was made at once and as they were all branded "P.K.I.Co." identification was simple, not so however the recovery.

Having located them, or at least some of them, the Company employed a lawyer to get legal possession. The mules were in Arkansaw [sic] and going before a court began a replevin suit to which the holders of the mules agreed to have tried by jury. The Missouri lawyer proved the property was taken from somewhere in the State of Missouri and felt sure of his case. The defendants willing to have everything done according to law were represented by one of their own type. The evidence was taken showing they had owned those mules since the close of the war, but an Arkansaw jury was trying this case and the "legal light" addressed them appealing to their sense of justice and fairness, "That Yankee lawyer comes down here and claims those mules pretending they are branded for some company that calls themselves "Pilot Knob company, do you see an "N" for "Nob" on them mules" It is as plain as daylight he never had any right to them, for we all can see that brand stands for Price's Kavalry Co. I." And Arkansaw kept the mules.