

Telegrams Sent From Pilot Knob Just Prior to the Battle

transcribed by Walter E. Busch

When at Pilot Knob, General Ewing sent several telegrams to his superiors advising them of the situation. These were found by Jack Mayes in the Thomas Ewing, Jr., Papers in the Library of Congress and represent several telegrams or attempts to send telegram which either were not recorded in the Official Records (ORs) or had some changes in text from that sent by Ewing. They also include one General Order and several notes passed between Dr. Seymour Carpenter and General Ewing. Every attempt has been made to place them in chronological order, although some of the times are missing. Transcriber's notes are in brackets..

1.

a scouting party to Fredericktown.

A scout of one hundred & thirty men left at midnight last night for Farmington with instructions to go as much farther in the direction of.....

[Majority of letter missing from this copy; however, similar text is in a letter from Ewing to General Rosecrans in the ORs dated 26 Sep 1864. That text reads: "scouting party to Fredericktown. A scouting party of 130 men left at midnight last night for Farmington, with instructions to go as much south in the direction of the enemy as they could." It appears there are minor discrepancies. For the entire text of this rather lengthy telegram, refer to ORs Series I Volume XLI/3 S# 85 pages 383-384.]

2.

Sept 26 *[time cut off paper]*

[addressee's name cut off paper]

Comdg Officer

Mineral Point,

A large column of rebels reported by citizen living near Farmington as passing that town at noon going northwest. Lookout. Unless you have or get other orders, in case the road is cut north of you come here – & if south go to De Soto.

Thomas Ewing, Jr.

Brig. Gen.

3. 3:30 AM

De Soto Sept 26 '64

Gen. Ewing Jr.

I will send you reinforcements early, seven regiments and one battery. I have ample transportation.

A. J. Smith

Maj. Genl.

This was written to scare a supposed rebel opr [operator] on the lines between here & P *[probably Potosi]* so says De *[De Soto]* Brown *[telegraph operator]*

4.

Pilot Knob Sept. 26 '64

Maj. Gen. A. J. Smith
Mineral Point

I can hold the Fort against four or five thousand cavalry & four pieces of artillery I think. I am not informed to my satisfaction that the enemy had more than that at Fredericktown. I am sure he has that much. The force with which we were engaged east of Ironton this afternoon numbered two or three hundred only. They withdrew after an hour's desultory firing. The losses on both sides were light. The exact amount I have not yet ascertained.

I shall send up tonight the extra Qr. Masters & Commissary stores here, which were sent against my remonstrances in large quantities on the first inst. My advance is again attacked in larger force & are being driven in. Evidently a considerable body of the enemy are upon me. You must exercise your judgment as to distribution of troops.

Thomas Ewing, Jr.
Brig. Gen.

[Note: This telegram appears in the Official Records; however, it is a copy sent to General Rosecrans and there are definite, though slight differences which effect the gist of the letter. Example: "I am not informed" is written in the ORs as "I am now informed"]

5.

Maj. Carpenter

There is some ammunition among the Qr. Master stores. It must be left here.

Ewing
BG

6.

Pilot Knob Sept 26
1/4 to 8 P.M.

Maj. Gen. Smith:

A force of rebels are reported as passing Farmington from Fredericktown, going towards Mineral Point or Irondale. Boy says it was a mile & a half long. I think it probable Price is with the rebels. A loyal woman said he was pointed out to her & her description is right good.

The enemy have a strong defensible pass three miles off, from which I can not dislodge them, on the Fredericktown road. I have not troops enough to defend the town, & shall expect merely to hold the Fort in which I have eighteen thousand rations. There is a train of forty wagons which I will possibly have to send off or destroy, if the enemy attack in force. I leave the question of the propriety of sending to me the regiment at Mineral Point to your judgment. They have a train of platform cars and the Potosi engine. Fighting ceased.

Thomas Ewing, Jr.
Brig. Genl.

Send copy to
Maj. Gen. Rosecrans.

7.

Ft. Davidson Sept 26 '64
9 ½ P.M.

Maj. Gen. Smith
Mineral Pt.

I am advised by Maj. Wilson, comdg at front, that the rebels are massing a large force in his front in Arcardia Valley, two miles from here. There is no doubt that it is intended to attack here in large force. I think it advisable for you to send me a full regiment at once, as the Fort is large enough to hold them efficiently in addition to the troops I have. I have artillery enough in the Fort & all inside.

Thomas Ewing, Jr.
Brig. Gen.

[Note: This telegram also appears in the ORs]

8. *[Closely similar telegram found in ORs, missing parts enclosed in brackets, include:
Pilot Knob, September 27, 1864.*

Major-General Smith:

Your dispatch received showing your presence at Mineral Point and that you have ordered additional troops there are all right. I send up to get out of the way 50,000 rations and a large number of quartermaster's stores. Retain what you want. Inform me if there is anything in the way of the train going up in the next hour.]

I think there are more men at Irondale than can be used effectively in the Block house, at South big River bridge, which is a full mile north of Irondale. These are about two hundred at the town & sixty at Bridge. If you want those at Irondale to go to Block house, you might telegraph him to have telegraph office there closed & moved to the Bridge & the surplus men go up on the trains I am about sending from here. I propose to keep the passenger train if you don't need it. All the rest I send. Saving a few platform cars. Advise me of dispositions made.

Thomas Ewing, Jr.
Brig. Genl

(Copy to Gen Rosecrans)

9.

Pilot Knob Sept, 26

11 P.M.

Maj Gen Smith
De Soto

I think the regiment from Mineral Point had better be sent here tonight. The reason is that the enemy are evidently in very strong force, and the Ft. is large enough to hold advantageously the increased garrison. If it be deemed inadvisable to reinforce, then

advise me explicitly whether to fight it out or leave.

I don't believe they can whip me readily the first day, for it will take them long to get their artillery in commanding position, but the delay of a day may result in cutting off my means of exit. I do not understand Gen. Rosecrans order "to evacuate in case the strong probability is that Price is there," as being addressed to me but to you, and therefore I await orders.

If you conclude to reinforce; order train by which I send refugees as far as Irondale, on to Mineral Point to bring the troops unless the freight train with Potosi engine is still there, in-which case advise operator at Irondale of the fact, when the train will return here.

Thomas Ewing, Jr.
Brig. Genl.

[Note: This letter is in the ORs, but with some minor differences.]

10. Have you any def. information of the strength of the force in your front & on the left?
S. *[Seymour Carpenter]*

From Genl. Smith.

[No Date or Time, but followed #8 and seems a direct question to Ewing's request for a decision to be made.]

11. *[ORs record a similar telegram as Sept. 26, 1864]*

To Maj. Gen. Rosecrans
St. Louis &
Maj. Gen. Smith
Mineral Point

[Part of the document missing, a similar one found in the ORs states: It may be advisable to move the regiment at Mineral Point by sending it here, or taking it to De Soto,] as the enemy are certainly in force enough to whip it if not capture it. I have ordered the Col. Comdg. to keep his locomotive supplied with wood & water, & all ready for prompt movement, And if the road is cut north of him to fall back here, & if south to fall back to Desoto. Advise as to further movement of that regiment.

Thomas Ewing, Jr.
Brig. Genl.

12.

Jeff. Barracks 26 Sept. 1.27 AM

Gen. Ewing:

If the force in your front is strong and are moving on your left toward Farmington, evacuate P. Knob and fall back to Mineral Point.

A. J. Smith
Maj. Gen.

This was sent at 127 AM 27 Sept.

(Signed), Thomas Ewing, Jr.
Brig. Gen.

13.

Pilot Knob C [?] 5 A.M.

Gen. Smith, Jeff Barracks.

The enemy opened [one word unintelligible] with 4 pieces of artillery. Our troops have fallen back to the south side of this town. The enemy have not yet appeared.

S. D. Carpenter
Special Aid.

14.

Fort Davidson, Sept 27, '64

G.O.

No. 2 1st Lieut. David Murphy, Adj. 47th Mo. Vols. is assigned to duty on my staff, as acting aide de camp until further orders.

Thomas Ewing, Jr.
Brig. Gen. Comdg.

15.

Gen.

The wire has not worked for the [last?] half hour.

S. D. Carpenter

9.15 o'clock

The last 3 dispatches not sent.

16.

Gen Ewing

The telegraph operator said Gen. Rosecrans forbid the taking of messages from "Waldo."
The dispatcher is held subject to your orders.

S.D.C.

[NOTE: "Waldo" was the pseudonym of a reporter for the Missouri Republican newspaper.
"Waldo" viewed the battle from the side of Pilot Knob Mountain.]

17.

Genl.

I have answered the dispatches saying to Col. Mills that a train would take the troops
to Mineral Point & Capt. Garvens that it was all OK.
I remain at this post.

S.D.C.

I am not afraid.

18.

Genl.

The conductor says he saw wagon train at Iron Mountain [northeast of Pilot Knob],
they having lost their way. Conductor does not know what course they would take but
they will probably move on.

S.D.C.

19.

Genl.

The train is just in from Irondale bringing no troops; met both trains going north at
Iron Mountain Road and telegraph line all OK.

S.D.C.

20.

Genl.,

Would it not be well to send a hand car along the road to see where the wire is down? It is not cut, because every few minutes it works through to St. Louis. The operator thinks it may be partially down between [*unreadable, possibly us*] and Irondale.

S.D.C.

21.

9 P.M.

General,

Would it be detrimental to our interests to send a flag of truce out [*&*] request a detail of surgeons to attend to their wounded?

Dr. Johnston will go with a flag as you think best. I have not the surgeons nor do you wish to spare the men.

S. D. Carpenter
