



**Report of Capt. Samuel T. Cushing, Commissary of Subsistence, U.S. Army, Acting
Chief Signal Officer
APRIL 27-MAY 6, 1863.--The Chancellorsville Campaign
O.R.-- SERIES I--VOLUME XXV/1 [S# 39]**

WASHINGTON, *D.C.*, *May* 23, 1863.

Col. ALBERT J. MYER,
Chief Signal Officer, Washington, D.C.

SIR: In obedience to your instructions, I have the honor to submit the following [report] of the operations of the Signal Corps, Army of the Potomac, during the movements of that army from the 27th of April, 1863, to the 6th of May, 1863:

April 27, 1863.--I received instructions from the chief of staff to extend signal telegraph lines from headquarters camp to Banks' Ford and to Franklin's Crossing. Upon inquiring what rules should govern these lines, I was merely told to have them extended by night. In obedience to which instructions, I directed Capt. F. E. Beardslee to take charge of the line to Banks' Ford, and to have the wire extended. Lieut. F. Wilson was placed in charge of the line to Franklin's Crossing. A line of signal stations was already established, watching the movements of the enemy at the Phillips house, at the Seddon house, at Buckner's Neck, and at the England house. Receiving no instructions, I did not direct the establishment of other lines. As I received no information regarding the movements pending, it was impossible for me to decide as to what points would be advantageous to establish signal stations, but feeling confident that the station at the Phillips house would be one of importance, I directed the officers then upon station there not to move with the corps to which they had been partially assigned. I also directed that the telegraph line should be so placed that, on its way to Franklin's Crossing, it would permit the establishment at any time of an intermediate station at the Phillips house. My instructions were carried out, and the circumstances of the operations, I am proud to say, fully bore out my anticipations. The telegraph line to Franklin's Crossing was erected and ready for operations at 4.30 p.m. The line to Banks' Ford was arrested by our pickets at a point near the England house, and about 2 miles from Banks' Ford. Imagining that a portion of the army would cross at or near Banks' Ford, I directed Capt. B. F. Fisher to be at Banks' Ford at dawn on the morning of April 28, and assume charge of all signal operations with the right wing of the army. He was invested

with plenary power to use all the signal officers with the right wing, and establish such stations, as he might deem necessary.

April 28, 1863. -This morning the telegraph line was extended to Banks' Ford, and I received orders to extend the line to United States Ford. I was obliged to use wire in which I had but little confidence, it having been in constant use for four months upon the line from general headquarters to Belle Plain. I think that justice to the corps demands that I should here state that on the preceding day I had requested permission to abandon this line and bring in the wire for repairs, but was refused. This wire was taken up a distance of 11 miles, was carried forward to Banks' Ford, toward United States Ford, making the aggregate distance marched by the party about 35 miles. This march, considering the duties performed in one day, I consider as being worthy of the highest credit, and great credit is therefore due to Capt. F.E. Beardslee for his untiring energy in carrying out my instructions. This line was put up to within 2 miles of United States Ford, and would have been ready for work at night, but, owing to an accident to one of the instruments, communication was not opened that night. The wire was in bad order, and the instrument was not sufficiently strong to work through the wire with success. A heavy rainstorm during the day, and the scattered condition of our forces, prevented the establishment of communication by flags.

April 29, 1863. -The telegraph line was extended to United States Ford, but the instruments would not work it successfully. It was possible to work, but it did not work well. Captain Beardslee was immediately sent forward to examine and repair. He reported at 9 p.m. that the instruments were repaired and that the lines were in working order. During the day, stations, commenced yesterday but prevented from working by the rain, were completely established at Taylor's Hill and at the Fitzhugh house, making a continuous line of communication from Buckner's Neck to the Phillips house. Lieutenant [Louis R.] Fortescue, at the Fitzhugh house, was in such a position to watch the line of railroad of the enemy at the depot near Hamilton's Crossing, and made, as I am informed, frequent reports. Capt. P. Babcock was directed this morning to assume command of signal duty upon the left wing of the army. During the day I received several reports from officers on duty to watch the movements of the enemy, all of which were promptly forwarded for the information of the general commanding. About 9.30 p.m., I received a dispatch from Lieut. A. B. Jerome, at United States Ford, giving secondary information regarding points upon which he and his informant were uncertain. This dispatch was not sent until after 9 p.m., and was injudiciously dated 5.30 p.m., being the time the wagons and balloon were seen. As it was very uncertain, and I did not desire to forward any information, which would tend to mislead, I telegraphed back to the officer for further information. Before doing so, however, I submitted the dispatch to the assistant

adjutant-general of the army, and informed him of the action I was going to take. The answer to my dispatch reached me about 10.30 p.m., and a statement embodying both the dispatches was immediately sent to the chief of staff, without regard to my impressions of their truth or importance. I was also informed that if these dispatches had reached the chief of staff one-half hour previously, they would have been received in time to have been submitted to the commanding general before he went to bed, and that his repose was worth more than the commissions of a dozen signal officers. In obedience to these instructions, I forwarded thereafter all dispatches without taking copies, and I have no retained messages regarding movements of the enemy to submit with this report since that date. During the morning, Lieutenants [J. Calvin] Wiggins and [N. Henry] Camp, with General Reynolds, opened communication with Captain Kendall, near General Sedgwick's headquarters.

April 30, 1863.--On this day the Morse operators were placed upon the line of telegraph wire previously extended to Banks' Ford. These instruments, being attached to more powerful batteries, were more successful in their working than the magnetic instruments had been, but to what extent I am unable to state, as the management of the line was taken from me, and I could obtain no reports. I was merely held responsible for the wire, subject partially to orders or instructions from the citizen operators. I am of the opinion, however, that with the instruments under my control, after the necessary adjustments had been made, I could have so kept up communication as to relieve the corps from the unfortunate opinion formed of it from the accident of the preceding day. Communication by the signal telegraph was kept up to United States Ford, and Lieutenant Jerome extended the line across the river at United States Ford, and opened a station at the brick house. In obedience to instructions received, I this day telegraphed to Washington for 15 miles more wire. Having so small a party with which to manage it, and having failed so often with that which I then had, it was with great misgivings that I called for more; but I did so, hoping that it might be serviceable, and that additional assistance might be given to me to effectually work the additional material. By my orders, Captain Beardslee remained at Banks' Ford until the new operators were fairly at work, to render such assistance in keeping up the wire as he was able to with the patrols under his control. By direction, the station at Buckner's Neck was at 3 p.m. withdrawn, and the officers ordered to report in person for further assignments. At 8 p.m. I received a telegram from yourself, stating that 8 officers and flagmen and 15 miles of wire had left Washington at 5 p.m. in a special boat, and would report to me. Not anticipating their arrival, or knowing that they had been sent for, I was not aware of their equipment, and immediately made arrangements to have them forwarded and to fully supply them with equipments. My arrangements were so far accomplished that I felt convinced that within an hour after they arrived I could have them fully

supplied and ready for service. I am deeply indebted to Col. Rufus Ingalls, chief quartermaster, Army of the Potomac, for his kindness in completing these arrangements.

May 1, 1863.--At 4 a.m., 6 officers and flagmen reported from Washington. Their equipments were immediately completed, and I additional flagman was assigned to each officer, and the presence of the party was reported to the chief of staff, by whom I was verbally ordered to send every one to the right wing, to report to Captain Fisher. While carrying out these instructions, I received written orders to send but 4 officers to Chancellorsville, and to hold the remainder ready to move forward when ordered to send them. I was also verbally instructed to send all the wire to Banks' Ford, but shortly afterward received written orders to send 5 miles. Having no instrument to use upon the left, I sent 10 miles to Banks' Ford, to be held in readiness for use either at Banks' Ford or United States Ford. At 1.45 p.m., communication by the signal telegraph was opened to General Reynolds' headquarters. During the afternoon the telescope previously situated at the Phillips house was taken to the hill in front of General Sedgwick's headquarters, and a telescope reconnaissance was made by Captain [James S.] Hall, and reported to General Sedgwick. On this day I ceased to get reports from any officers upon the left wing of the army, as all reports were obliged to pass through the Phillips house, and the officers at that station were directed to report direct to the chief of staff. The reserve party having received no instructions, I applied for orders, and desired to send a party to Banks' Ford, where I thought they might be of service. Upon my urgent request, I was allowed to send them there. General Reynolds' corps having been ordered to the right, the signal telegraph line was taken up, and the officers on duty at the Seddon house were ordered to report for duty to Captain Babcock. Lieutenants [Ephraim A.] Briggs and [Isaac S.] Lyon reported this afternoon from Washington. The flagmen intended for these officers had gone to Chancellorsville early in the morning, but new men and equipments were immediately furnished, and they were placed in good condition for instant service. The Morse operators were this morning placed upon the station at United States Ford.

May 2, 1863. -At daylight this morning the large telescope was re-established in its old position at the Phillips house. Lieutenant [Brinkerhoff N.] Miner, with Lieutenants [Martin] Denicke and Lyon, arrived at Banks' Ford this morning, and at 5.30 a.m. had stations of observation and report established, ready to open communication at any time with the troops on the south bank of the Rappahannock, as they approached Banks' Ford. This morning the signal telegraph line was extended from the brick house, proceeding toward Chancellorsville. This line was established satisfactorily, and would have been in good working order, but the enemy having driven in a portion of our forces, in the confusion of the retreat the line was broken, and great trouble was

experienced in [re]establishing it. In the afternoon, signal communication was desired from the Phillips house to General Gibbon's headquarters, just back of Falmouth. Captain [Joseph] Gloskoski and Lieutenant [Frank W.] Marston were ordered to establish this communication. The line was established, but was little used, as at 11 p.m. General Gibbon moved his headquarters to the Lacy house. This afternoon I forwarded to Lieutenant Wilson, who was in charge of the signal telegraph near General Sedgwick, 3 miles of wire, with instructions to cross the river with General Sedgwick and advance his wire, subject to such instructions as he might receive from General Sedgwick. At night I received orders to open communication with General Sedgwick, who had crossed the river. Captains [Charles S.] Kendall and Hall were unceasing in their efforts to establish this communication. The telegraph line from Banks' Ford to headquarters camp was to-day taken up, as the military telegraph had established its own line. Communication was still kept up, however, to United States Ford.

May 3, 1863. -I had found it impossible, during the night previous, to open communication with the officers stationed with General Sedgwick. Imagining for a moment that they were neglecting their duty, I was about to order their arrest, when I received the following dispatch, sent to me by orderly, who explained their failure to open the communication I was ordered to establish the night before:

ON THE MARCH, *May 3, 1863--4 a.m.*

Captain CUSHING:

General S. has received an order from General Butterfield not to use signals, as the enemy can read them. What will we do? Let us know by the next orderly that comes to General Sedgwick from headquarters.

CAPTAIN PIERCE,
Signal Officer.

In answer to which I sent the following by the orderly who brought the dispatch:

MAY 3, 1863--7.15 a.m.

Captain PIERCE:

Use your cipher to send important messages. Tell General Sedgwick that messages may be sent to him, giving him information regarding positions of the enemy, which will not aid the enemy much, and may aid him. I have not seen General Butterfield, but send this from the Phillips house, where your orderly caught me.

SAMUEL T. CUSHING.

As all the important dispatches had heretofore been sent in cipher, and as General Butterfield had been informed by me some days previous that we had a cipher in our possession, I do not understand why this order was sent. Suffice it to say that it had a most disastrous effect upon signal duty during the day. General Sedgwick's confidence was, of course, destroyed, and no representations would be sufficient to induce him to overlook an order. I directed Lieutenant Wilson to push his telegraph line across the river, at the Lacy house, and establish a line to General Sedgwick's headquarters. This line was pushed out to the outskirts of Fredericksburg, and opened communication, but as General Sedgwick was constantly moving during the day, it was not much used. During the morning, Lieutenants [James B.] Brooks and [William H.] Hill was in a fine position in the church tower in the city of Fredericksburg, and reported to General Sedgwick and the Phillips house. In the afternoon they moved forward to the heights. At 5 p.m., all the troops having moved from the vicinity of this station, and it being very much exposed, I directed its discontinuance. Before these officers had time to leave, they were shelled by the rebels, who were rapidly regaining the ground they had lost in the morning. The rapidity of the movement caused a separation of the party, and Lieutenant Hill reported to me at the Phillips house. He there reported the facts of the case to Major [George F.] Barstow, assistant adjutant-general, who had been sent to the Phillips house to ascertain the news. Captain Gloskoski and Lieutenant Marston [each] opened a station this morning upon the heights of Fredericksburg, but they were not used. At 5.30 p.m. Lieutenant Jerome reported that his men had swam the river with their wire, and that he had established a telegraph station on the south bank of the river, near Banks' Ford, with the line of skirmishers. This movement, though bold and daring, was of no immediate importance, and the instruments and wire were brought back in the evening.

May 4, 1863.--The enemy had occupied the hills of Fredericksburg at an early hour this morning, driving Captains Babcock and Gloskoski and Lieutenant] Marston from their stations Lieutenant Marston returned to the Phillips house, and I immediately sent him to the chief of staff to report matters. Captains Babcock and Gloskoski escaped toward General Sedgwick. Communication by the signal telegraph was opened from the Phillips house to headquarters camp, forming an intermediate station. This station was available to communicate observations to headquarters, and to communicate to the Lacy house. The station in Fredericksburg was withdrawn this morning, as there was no one to report to, and I did not wish to leave it there in a useless position. During the morning, General Sedgwick's forces being cut off from General Hooker and from Fredericksburg, it was of immense importance that communication should be established with him. His orders prevented him from using his signal officers for that purpose. I was very much afraid no communication could be opened. It was impossible to send any orders to him countermanding

the orders received two nights before, and it seemed impossible to call attention by signals until Captains Gloskoski and Babcock established a station near the Guest house, and near General Sedgwick's headquarters. These officers had not been informed of the order prohibiting the use of signals, and consequently opened communication. I considered the necessity of keeping communication open so great as to excuse me for ordering, on my own responsibility, that the station should be held as long as possible. The same order was also given by General Sedgwick, and during the day this station was of eminent importance, as Captain Hall and Lieutenant [Peter A.] Taylor at the Phillips house kept General Sedgwick thoroughly informed of the movements of the enemy. These messages passed over the heads of the enemy, and must have been of great assistance. Many important messages were sent by others in the same way. My directions were that all messages should be sent in cipher. This station was kept open until General Sedgwick was forced to retire from his position, and was for a long time exposed very much to the fire of the enemy. During the morning, the officers who had been stationed by me at Banks' Ford on the 1st of May had succeeded in opening communication with the extreme right of General Sedgwick, so the breaking up of communication upon the left did not prevent his communicating, as during the whole day he was in communication, either by Banks' Ford or the Phillips house, with General Hooker. During the night his forces recrossed the river at Banks' Ford and took position on this side, and communication ceased, by signal, near his command.

May 5, 1863. -Captain Babcock having reported for further instructions, I directed him to establish a line of stations of observation, and report upon the bank of the river connecting Banks' Ford with the Phillips house. This was found impracticable, as the enemy were closely picketing the other bank of the river, and no stations could be established which would not be in range of the sharpshooters. The line would not have been of enough importance to counterbalance such peril to the officers, so, upon such representation, I countermanded the order. The bridges near the Lacy house having been taken up during the previous night, and General Gibbon having removed his headquarters to the Phillips house, the telegraph station at the Lacy house was broken up, and but one station, that at the Phillips house, was kept open. Anticipating that the enemy might now attempt to cross at some point near Port Royal, I directed Captain Gloskoski and Lieutenant Marston to report to General Pleasanton, who, with a small force of cavalry, felt able to hold the enemy in check for a time at any crossing he might attempt. One of the most furious storms of the season, commencing at 2 p.m., prevented these stations from being useful until the next morning. It also greatly damaged the telegraph lines, tearing the poles down, and greatly deranging the instruments. On the extreme right, Lieutenant Tuckerman, who was stationed at the brick house on the south side of the river, opening

communication with Lieutenant [John E.] Holland, who was stationed at the chestnut tree near United States Ford, on the north side of the river, rendered efficient service. The right wing of the army was in motion, leaving its intrenchments to recross the river, when the bridges were swept away. No other communication than that by signals was possible. The heavy rains had so swollen the river that it was impossible to ford it. An order was sent by signals at 9 p.m. to suspend the movements until the bridges could be repaired. The movements, by this order, were suspended until 1.20 a.m., May 6, when an order was sent by signal to continue the movements again. Previous to establishing this communication, the anxiety to get the order across the river was so great that Lieutenant Holland had volunteered to swim the river with dispatches.

May 6, 1863. -By daybreak this morning the signal stations, telegraph lines, &c., on the south side of the river had been called in, and communication completely abandoned. Captain Fisher ordered to camp all the officers belonging to the reserve party, and directed the officers assigned to corps to rejoin the corps to which they were attached. In order to keep up the lines of observation upon the banks of the river, I directed Captain Gloskoski and Lieutenant Marston to establish a station at Buckner's Neck, making reconnaissances to Port Conway, Captain Kendall and Lieutenant Fortescue at the Seddon house, and Lieutenants Hill and Brooks were to establish stations at the Fitzhugh house and Taylor's Hill. Thus a complete line was again established, observing the country from Port Royal to Falmouth. Our pickets extended from Falmouth to Banks' Ford and beyond; so a long line of river was well watched.

On the morning of May 7, the party was inspected and re-equipped and supplied, the telegraph wire from Banks' Ford to United States Ford was taken up and at once thoroughly repaired, the instruments were adjusted, and the party was soon ready for further service.

On the morning of May 8, 1863, I received instructions to send back to Washington the party which had reported on the 1st of May.

During the movements of the army I was kept so busily employed upon the left wing of the army and in connection with the telegraph lines that I found it impossible to visit the right wing at all. For a report of the operations upon the right I would refer you to the reports of Capt. B. F. Fisher and other officers who served there. I am sorry to say that I received but very few reports from Captain Fisher during the entire engagement. The country was so densely wooded and so impracticable to signals that but little was done. The failure of reports and the removal of any method of obtaining information prevented me from intelligently

performing my duties, and the meager information given me when I asked for it was very little calculated to aid me in managing the party.

When it is recollected that more than half the party engaged upon telegraph duty were new men, unaccustomed to the management of the lines, and who had joined the party but four days before the movement commenced, and that I was obliged to execute orders given to me hurriedly, by one who was unaccustomed to the special details of the service, and who, I am afraid, was not willing to acknowledge my capacity to perform my own duties, I am confident that the duties performed by the corps will compare favorably with those done by any other branch of the service.

I would respectfully call the attention of the Chief Signal Officer to the accompanying reports of the officers of the corps. Their ability and energy did much toward increasing the well-known good character of the corps. I would, if I thought it consistent, mention the names of individuals, but I do not deem it necessary to here introduce a roster of the corps. Where all behaved so well, it would be unjust to give distinct praises. The casualties were as follows: Private Alexander McCollin, severely wounded in the leg, requiring its amputation, from the effects of which he has since died. Private James B. Duff, severely wounded in the hip. Private G. H. Tousey received a flesh wound from a spent ball, which did not disable him from duty.

I regret to report the loss of one set of star flags, which were captured by the enemy with Lieut. F. W. Marston's private baggage. As these flags were not in use, I do not think that the enemy can properly claim to have captured any of our signal flags. I refer to the report of Lieutenant Marston for the circumstances of the capture.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,
SAMUEL T. CUSHING,
Captain and Commissary of Subsistence.