

## GETTING READY



### Getting Ready

#### Introduction

Historians often struggle to determine the exact dates of the outbreak of wars. The Civil War is no exception. Tensions, conflicts, and local fighting (e.g., fighting over the question of slavery in Kansas and parts of Missouri known as Bleeding Kansas) lasted for years before some key events that directly lead to the formal outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. Abraham Lincoln was elected to the office of President in November 1860. In December 1860, South Carolina became the first state to leave the Union. By February 1, 1861, six more states seceded. On February 8, 1861, the seven rebel states formed the Confederate States of America. In March 1861, Lincoln was sworn in and on April 12, after Lincoln ordered a fleet to resupply the federal-held Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, Confederate artillery fired what historians consider to be the first shots of the Civil War. All these dates mark crucial events in the timeline of the Civil War. They also show that a prospect of civil war existed long before the first shots at Fort Sumter.

One outcome of this long period of tensions was the creation of voluntary armed groups, the members of which planned to prepare in case a war broke out. These organizations provided military-style training, but they attracted ordinary men. Some of the men had military experience but many had little or no military training. When the Civil War officially broke out, many of these groups were sworn into state service. This means that they were no longer self-regulated voluntary organizations but officially joined state military forces and were now under the authority of state military leaders.

In this activity, you will examine a document created by one such voluntary armed group known as the Van Buren Frontier Guards. This organization was formed in the first days of 1861 in Van Buren (Crawford County), Arkansas. It was later incorporated into the 3rd Infantry, Arkansas State Troops.

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CENTER FOR ARKANSAS  
HISTORY AND CULTURE  
UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS AT LITTLE ROCK

Van Buren Ark Jan 3 1861

We the undersigned citizens of the  
County of Crawford + State of Arkansas  
do agree to form ourselves into a Volunteer  
Military Company to be known as  
the Van Buren Frontier Guards  
for the purpose of instructing ourselves in  
the art of war and if necessary for  
our domestic defence; and we  
hereby bind ourselves to submit to the  
laws and regulations of this Company  
as administered by the proper officers, to  
be prompt in our attendance on duty  
and do every thing in our power to  
promote the prosperity of the Company  
and maintain its permanent organization.

Walter S. Beagshaw  
Wm. Doshier  
Patience May  
George Neal  
Geo W Newland  
Jas P King

J. Neal  
J. J. Brooks  
William L. England  
James P. Strait  
G. Mack Keller  
H. Tho. Brown

An excerpt from a Van Buren Frontier Guards record and minute book, January 3, [18]61 (Arkansas Small Manuscripts Collection)

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### Questions:

1. When and where was this document written?
2. What is this document?
3. What organization did the persons who signed this document join?
4. What is the purpose of the organization that this document describes?
5. To what did the individuals who signed this document “bind themselves”?
6. Research when and under what circumstances the Civil War began (see “Introduction” for more information). Was this document written before or after the outbreak of the Civil War?
7. What does this document tell us about the men who fought in the Civil War? Who were they? What kind of military training did they have? How did they first organize?
8. Research the meaning of the term *frontier* in U.S. history. How do you understand the name of the organization that this document describes?