

# “THERE WILL BE A FIGHT” - ARKANSAS AFTER THE CIVIL WAR



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### Introduction

Although the Civil War officially ended in 1865, tensions, conflicts, and fighting were not over for years and even decades afterward. In Arkansas, shortly after the war, Radical Republicans, who advocated voting rights for African American men and restrictions against former Confederates' voting rights, clashed with former Confederates and their sympathizers. The latter group opposed civil rights for African Americans and was determined to protect the racial privileges of white men, especially those who supported the Confederacy.

After the new state constitution of 1868 was ratified and Powell Clayton, a former Democrat but now one of the co-founders of the Republican Party in Arkansas, was elected to serve as Arkansas governor, former Confederates and their sympathizers were furious. Among many provisions, the new constitution declared racial discrimination illegal, and Clayton enjoyed the support of Radical Republicans.

In April 1868, only one month after black Arkansas men voted for the first time, the Ku Klux Klan emerged and became active in Arkansas. Across the state, the Klan terrorized black Arkansans and white Republicans. In July 1868, the state legislature approved the creation of a state guard and reserve armed groups. Governor Clayton ordered several counties to create and prepare armed military-style forces. Their task was to stop the Klan and protect the rights of newly freed African Americans as well as the safety of Republicans and their supporters. In several counties, tensions between those local military forces and the Klan got so severe that Governor Clayton declared martial law in those areas and divided the state into four military districts. Historians refer to the conflicts that erupted across the state in the aftermath of the ratification of the 1868 Constitution as Militia Wars of 1868–1869.

Governor Clayton selected Daniel Phillips Upham from Woodroof County to command the northeast military district. In this activity, you will examine a letter that Upham wrote to his brother Henry between November 6 and November 8, 1868. In it, Upham discusses the ongoing violence against African Americans and white Republicans.

**\*Important vocabulary note:** The document used in this activity, includes the term “negro” to refer to an African American. Today, this term is considered offensive and disrespectful. Until the 1960s, however, it was used as a descriptive (neutral or non-offensive) term that both black and white Americans used to refer to African Americans. Historical documents often include words that we consider offensive and disrespectful today. It is important that we study how language changes and remember that words, just like actions, are often used to harm or belittle individuals or entire groups. History helps us understand why words matter.

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1868

Little Rock Nov. 6. 68

Dear Bro. Henry

I mailed a letter to you today but since then this P.M. 2 colored men have arrived from our county having walked 100 miles since Tuesday night. The Kuklux made a raid on night of 31<sup>st</sup> Oct. 100. Strong, and near Malones our boys fired, on them mortally wounding one man by the name of Bro. McDonald of Jackson County, and very severely wounding 3 others whose names are not known. 10 colored men left on next boat and these boys (one Bledsoe and one of Hortons) say that many others left to come here about the time they did, but they have not yet arrived. An expedition is fitting out to go up and take the County, and all these men will return with it. The State will be divided into 3 Military districts, and I have been today to see if Governor will not commission Joseph Brooks for our district, the Commanders of the 3 districts will be Brig. Generals. Gov. Clayton said he would do so if Brooks would

Daniel Phillips Upham to his brother Henry, November 6, [18]68, p.1 (P. Upham Collection, 1865-1883)



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accept, and I called on B. tonight and think  
he will accept. He is fast recovering from his  
wounds received in Monroe Co. when Mr  
Kendall was killed. Saturday eve 11.30. Nov. 7.  
Col. Specks sent some game for me to come and  
see him this P.M. and I found him improving quite as  
well as could be expected. he was wounded severely in  
the thigh, and a buck shot or ball entered his back  
in the vicinity of the lower ribs and came out front  
7 inches around front from where it entered, so you  
see it must of course make him rather sick to  
specify much. He positively declines the position  
of Brig. General in command of the 1st district  
comprised of 19 Counties for the reason that immediate  
action is required, and he is not able to move out.  
I have received tonight @ Little from Lizzie enclosing two  
letters from you bearing dates 18th and 25th. I was  
glad to hear from you as it had been some time since  
I received @ Little. My health is very good.  
My wounds are pretty much healed. Lizzie writes  
under date of 3<sup>d</sup> and says within less minutes I  
have counted forty rebels pass and they have been  
going for half an hour. she sent me a box which I  
received yesterday containing the harness and many  
other valuable all of which had been buried in  
the ground two nights before I left home.  
Lizzie took in two bales of cotton and drew \$150.00  
from Lem Co. and writes me that all her money, note  
&c are in quinine bottles buried in the ground.  
Malone has had to leave the County, some of the  
negroes have arrived here from White Church &  
Lizzie writes that they hung a negro four  
times last Thursday to make him tell where the  
others were. Grant & Colfax of course are elec-  
ted, beyond possibility of doubt. It is late  
now. I will write more tomorrow. Sunday 10. 8th 6. P.M.  
General order #21 is written out by Gen. Clayton, and  
will go to press tonight, and come out tomorrow. Section  
reads as follows, to wit. District of the N. E.  
will comprise the counties of Fulton, Lawrence, Sharp,  
Randolph, Green, Izard, Independence, Jackson,  
Craighead, Conzett, Mississippi, White, Woodruff,  
Cross, St. Francis, Crittenden, Parain, Monroe,  
Phillips, and that portion of Desha County  
lying north ~~west~~ of White river, commanded  
by Brig. Gen. D. O. Upham. "I can assure you  
there will be a fight. I will send you papers,  
so you can see what is being done. The State

Daniel Phillips Upham to his brother Henry, November 6, [18]68, p. 2 (P. Upham Collection, 1865-1883)

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by the new order which comes out tomorrow  
is divided into three Military Districts.  
You will see by the map that I have control of  
White River. You shall hear from "the District of  
the North East." I shall have regular Army officers  
for Staff, and have U.S. Forces in the District  
at various points. Write me at Augusta, after  
you receive this.

Yours in haste  
D. P. Upham

Daniel Phillips Upham to his brother Henry, November 6, [18]68, p. 3 (P. Upham Collection, 1865-1883)



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### Questions:

1. Before you analyze this document, see “**Important vocabulary note**” in “Introduction” for additional information on the use of the term “negro” in this primary source.
2. Where and when was this letter written? Note that the author’s letter wrote this letter over the course of several days, the dates of which he marks in the letter. Who wrote it and to whom is it addressed?
3. Read the Encyclopedia of Arkansas article about Daniel Phillips Upham: <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/daniel-phillips-upham-1790/>. Who was he?
4. What happened since Upham last wrote to his brother?
5. What happened on the night of October 31?
6. Upham writes that African American men (at least 10) were leaving the site of the Ku Klux Klan raid to join his forces in Little Rock. Why do you think they did that?
7. Upham informs his brother that Arkansas will be divided into three military districts. Upham hopes a man named Col. Brooks becomes one district’s commander but Brooks declines to accept the position. Why does he decline? What does Brooks’ refusal tell us about the South three years after the formal end of the Civil War?
8. What do we learn about Upham’s health from this letter? What does this information tell us about what he experienced recently?
9. Who are the rebels that Upham learns about from Lizzie’s letter? What does Lizzie tell him about them?
10. What does Section 5 of Order No. 1 say?
11. What are Upham’s predictions for the near future?
12. What does this letter tell us about Arkansas three years after the end of the Civil War? What post-war issues and challenges does this letter discuss?
13. How could Upham’s point of view (his beliefs, political views, experience, etc.) shape his understanding of the situation around him? Provide specific examples of his point of view from the letter.