



# The Battle of Arkansas Post

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## Stepping Stone to Vicksburg



Photo by Ed Wood

The Battle of Arkansas Post, also known as the Battle of Fort Hindman, was one of the many battles fought during the Civil War. It was a combined land-river assault by Union forces on the Confederate soldiers stationed there. It began on January 9, 1863 and ended two days later on January 11 with the Confederate forces surrendering. This Union victory did not contribute to the capture of Vicksburg, however, it eliminated one more impediment to Union shipping on the Mississippi River.

# Background

The Confederate army constructed an earthwork fortification near Arkansas Post in 1861 to protect the Arkansas River and to prevent Union Army passage to Little Rock. Fort Hindman, named for General Thomas C. Hindman of Arkansas, was built on a bluff that was nearly 25 feet high and overlooked the Arkansas River. From the fort, the Confederate soldiers could see a full mile up river and down river. This prevented Federal gunboats from advancing to Little Rock unchallenged. The fort was also used as a supply base for Confederate boats that were used to patrol and interrupt the Federal supply lines that used the Mississippi River for shipping. Approximately 4,900 men, primarily Texas Cavalry that had been dismounted and redeployed as infantry, manned the fort. Command of the fort was assumed by Brigadier General Thomas J. Churchill in December of 1862.

By the winter of 1862, the Union army was getting ready to launch an attack against Vicksburg. A victory would ensure Union control of the Mississippi River and restrict Confederate supply routes. Union Major General John A. McClernand gained permission from President Abraham Lincoln to launch a corps-sized offensive against Vicksburg. He was hoping for military glory and, being an ambitious politician, subsequent political gain. While he was organizing the attack on Vicksburg, he decided to deal with the threat of Arkansas Post by attacking Fort Hindman without permission from President Lincoln or his commanding officer General Ulysses S. Grant. The Union troops, approximately 32,000, greatly outnumbered the Confederate troops at Fort Hindman. The victory of the Union made the battle of Arkansas Post a stepping stone to the attack planned on Vicksburg, Mississippi.



# Battle Summary

January 9

On the evening of January 9, Union boats began landing troops 3 miles below Arkansas Post at Notrebe's Plantation. The troops made their way toward Fort Hindman and overran the Confederate trenches. This caused the enemy to retreat to the fort.

January 10

By 11:00 AM on January 10, the remainder of the Union army had gone ashore. Stunned by the overwhelming size of the Union forces, Churchill immediately requested reinforcements from his superior, Theophilus H. Holmes. Churchill was advised by Holmes to "hold out until more help arrived or until all were dead". The Union army continued to move upriver to fully envelop the Confederate garrison. Union gunboats moved against Fort Hindman, while Union foot soldiers moved against the Confederate foot soldiers who were stationed outside the fort at various locations. While this attack was taking place, McClernand sent an army lieutenant up a tree to see if two more of his troops were in place. George W. Morgan's corps were in place, but Major General William T. Sherman's troops were still moving through the muddy swamps to get into position. By the time the troops were in place, it was too dark to begin the attack. Although some skirmishing did take place that evening, the attack would have to wait until the next day.

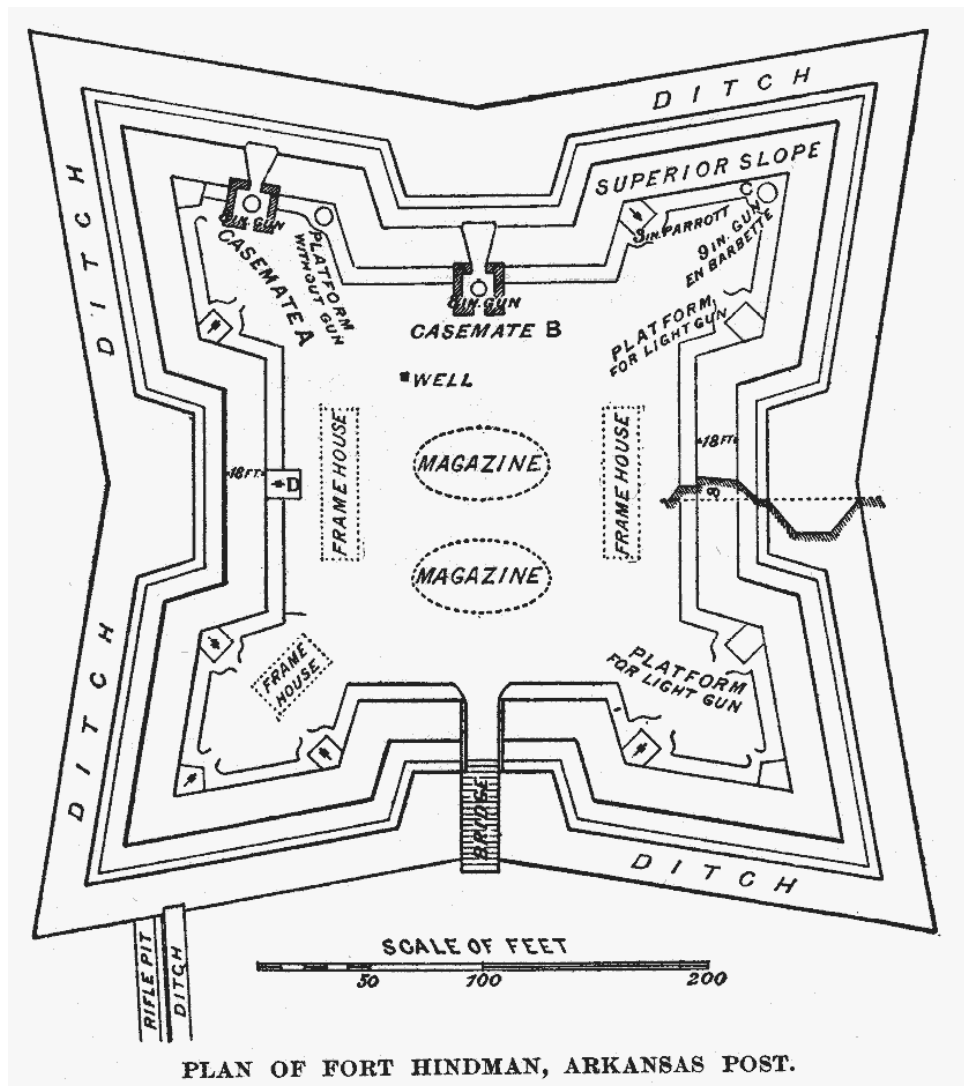
January 11

On the morning of January 11, McClernand and his commanders arranged the Union soldiers of the Army of the Mississippi for an assault against Fort Hindman. At 1:00, the Union gunboats advanced on the fort under the command of Rear Admiral David D. Porter. The gunboats were aided by Union artillery that had been landed on the south side of the river. By 4:00 pm, the guns of Fort Hindman were silent. Around 4:30 pm, McClernand prepared to order a final, massive attack on the fort when white flags began appearing along Confederate lines. Although Churchill denied issuing the orders to surrender, the garrison of Fort Hindman surrendered to McClernand's army. Although McClernand was victorious at the Battle of Arkansas Post, it was short lived. On January 14 he sent a memorandum stating his plans to move up river against Little Rock and other Rebel concentrations in Arkansas. Grant was still furious with McClernand for diverting from his original campaign strategy and ordered McClernand, with his Army of the Mississippi, to rejoin the main Union offensive against Vicksburg. Grant assumed personal command of the Vicksburg campaign.

# Battle Summary *(Continued)*

## Aftermath of the Battle

Many soldiers were wounded or killed during the Battle of Arkansas Post. Union casualties were reported as 134 killed, 898 wounded, and 29 missing. Confederate reports showed 60 killed, 80 wounded and almost 4800 captured. However, Confederate reports are incomplete. The captured soldiers were taken to two different prison camps. The Confederate officers were bound for the prisoner of war camp at Johnson's Island in Lake Erie while the rank-and-file soldiers went to the more harsh prison at Camp Douglas outside of Chicago.



# Teaching / Learning Sequence

Procedure: Day 1

Materials needed:

Journals or writing paper

Introduce the lesson with a guided student analysis of the sketch of the Battle of Arkansas Post. Tell the students they will examine the sketch and write a journal entry about it. Display or project the image of the sketch on page 10 (or give each student an individual copy) and ask students to:

- Share their first impressions
- Look closely at the sketch and describe what they think is happening
- Identify the objects they see
- Tell what they like/dislike about the image
- Write a journal entry about what is happening in the scene, including details from the sketch.

Next, read the background information, including the battle and the aftermath of the battle, to the students. Tell them they will use the internet to research more detailed information about the Battle of Arkansas Post. While they are researching the battle, they should pay close attention to the prominent figures involved in the battle, especially the generals. They will be choosing two of the important figures they read about to discuss in class. They will compare and contrast those figures by listing character traits for each and creating a Venn diagram to display their findings during day 2 of the lesson.

**Intended Grade/Range: 5**

**Number of Days: 3-5**

**Student Objectives:**

- Identify two prominent figures who were involved with the Battle at Arkansas Post
- List the roles that the two figures played in the Battle of Arkansas Post
- List character traits of the two chosen figures and compare/contrast them using a Venn diagram
- Apply steps for using gathered research about the prominent figures and presenting an individual and/or group project
- Summarize information from a variety of sources on the Battle of Arkansas Post by completing a major project and presenting it orally to the class.

# Teaching / Learning Sequence *(Continued)*

## Procedure Day 2

Materials needed:

Journals or writing paper

Highlighters

Individual copies of the Venn diagram provided in this lesson on page 11

Procedure:

Ask students: If someone has good character, what does that mean?

Definition: A person with good character is a strong person. A strong person possesses and practices values that make him or her stand out from the crowd. People with good character. . . (Have the students help create a list of traits, good and bad)

- Trustworthy/Untrustworthy
- Fair/Unfair
- Responsible/Irresponsible
- Respectful (treat everyone fairly and with dignity)/ Disrespectful
- Care for other people/ Don't care about others
- Make good decisions/Make bad decisions
- Think of others first/Think of only themselves
- Work hard/Lazy
- Strong of heart/Weak of heart
- Honest (they don't lie or cheat)/Dishonest
- Keep their promises/Break their promises
- Loyal to family and friends/ Not loyal to family and friends
- Don't let others influence them/ Allow others to influence them(to do or say bad things)
- Stand up for their beliefs/Do not stand up for their beliefs
- Show courage/Afraid of everything
- Work for everybody's good/Work for their good and no one else's
- Generous (with their possessions, heart, time, and so on)/Selfish
- Helpful/Unwilling to help others

Ask students if they think THEY fit the bill for a person with good character. What about their friends? What about themselves would they change if they had the chance? Have students to write their responses in a journal or in a writing using journal format.

# Teaching / Learning Sequence *(Continued)*

Begin by breaking the students into several small groups. Give each group a different person to research and discuss (i.e. General Sherman, General McClernand, General Churchill, General Hindman, General Holmes etc.) Allow the students to search the internet for a biography of their assigned person (15 minutes) and print it. Have the students identify and write down the character traits that person possesses (15 minutes). Have the students highlight the text where they found the evidence to support each trait they have identified. During group discussion, the teacher will list the traits of each person discussed on the board or on chart paper. Finally, the students will create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the character traits of two of the figures involved in the Battle of Arkansas Post.

Optional activity: Ask students to write a 1-2 page paper for homework that answers the following questions: Why should we learn about good character? Do you think it is important to be a role model to others? What are some ways you can be a role model?

## **Procedure Day 3**

The students will begin working on their main project. Students will continue researching the major details of the Battle of Arkansas Post. They will present their findings to the class orally using one of the following methods:

- Written report (will be presented orally and turned in to the teacher after presentation)
- Poster depicting major aspect of the battle or people involved in the battle (student will present to the class and poster will also be graded on content and display)
- Build a replica or draw a picture of a Union gunboat and explain its significance in the Battle of Arkansas Post
- Make a replica or draw a picture of Fort Hindman and explain the strengths and weaknesses of the fort
- Allow the students ample time to complete their projects (1 to 2 weeks depending on the amount of time they will be permitted to work on it during class time)

## **Site Visit:**

Have you ever stood on the spot where some historical event occurred and felt a sense of awe and wonder? This is the power of place you can experience when you visit a national Park. These historic places provide us with opportunities to connect with the lives of the generations before us. As historian David McCullough states, “When you stand there, in

# Teaching / Learning Sequence *(Continued)*

that very real, authentic place, you feel the presence of that other time, that history in a way that would be impossible did it not exist.”

Visit Arkansas Post National Memorial to see where the Battle of Arkansas Post took place. View the Fort Hindman exhibit and the artifacts that have been discovered here. Students can imagine what it would have been like to be a Confederate or Union soldier during the Civil War. Experiencing places firsthand can help the ideas in this lesson come alive. On your visit, encourage your students to think about why people take risks for greater causes. What were their motivations for fighting? Why is it important to learn about all the different groups of people involved in our history? How do these little-known stories affect our understanding of American history and culture?

## Plan Your Field Trip

Students can learn more about the lives and motivations of Confederate and Union soldiers who fought at the Battle of Arkansas Post by participating in the Park’s curriculum-based education program. The program features a battlefield talk by a park ranger, a hike to the battlefield site where the rifle pits once were, a self-tour through the museum, a twenty-two minute film that tells a brief history of Arkansas Post, and a walk outdoors to tour the former town site and where Fort Hindman was located if weather permits. A uniformed musket demonstration may be available upon request. Through discussion and hands-on examination of items that were used during the Civil War era, students will learn about the lives of the people who lived during that time, discovering similarities to their own lives and feelings. These activities and experiences in the real, authentic place can help students appreciate the significance of the Battle of Arkansas Post and those who fought there. Students may also bring a sack lunch and enjoy our scenic picnic area that overlooks the Post Bayou. The program is free, but reservations are required. Contact park staff for reservations and more information at (870) 548-2207 or email [arpo\\_historian@nps.gov](mailto:arpo_historian@nps.gov)



# Connections to the Arkansas Curriculum Framework Standards

## Social Sciences:

G.3.5.6 Identify ways people have modified the physical environment

H.6.5.21 Identify and locate significant Civil War sites of the Union and Confederacy

H.6.5.32 Identify the role of the following Arkansans in the Civil War:

- Isaac Murphy
- David O. Dodd
- Albert Pike
- Earl Van Dorn
- **Thomas Hindman**
- James Blunt
- Harris Flanagan

H.6.5.33 Identify Arkansas Post as the first European settlement in Arkansas and explain its geographic significance

## Literacy/Reading:

RL.5.3 Compare and contrast two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., how characters interact).

RI.5.9 Integrate information from several texts on the same topic in order to write or speak about the subject knowledgeably.

## Literacy/Writing:

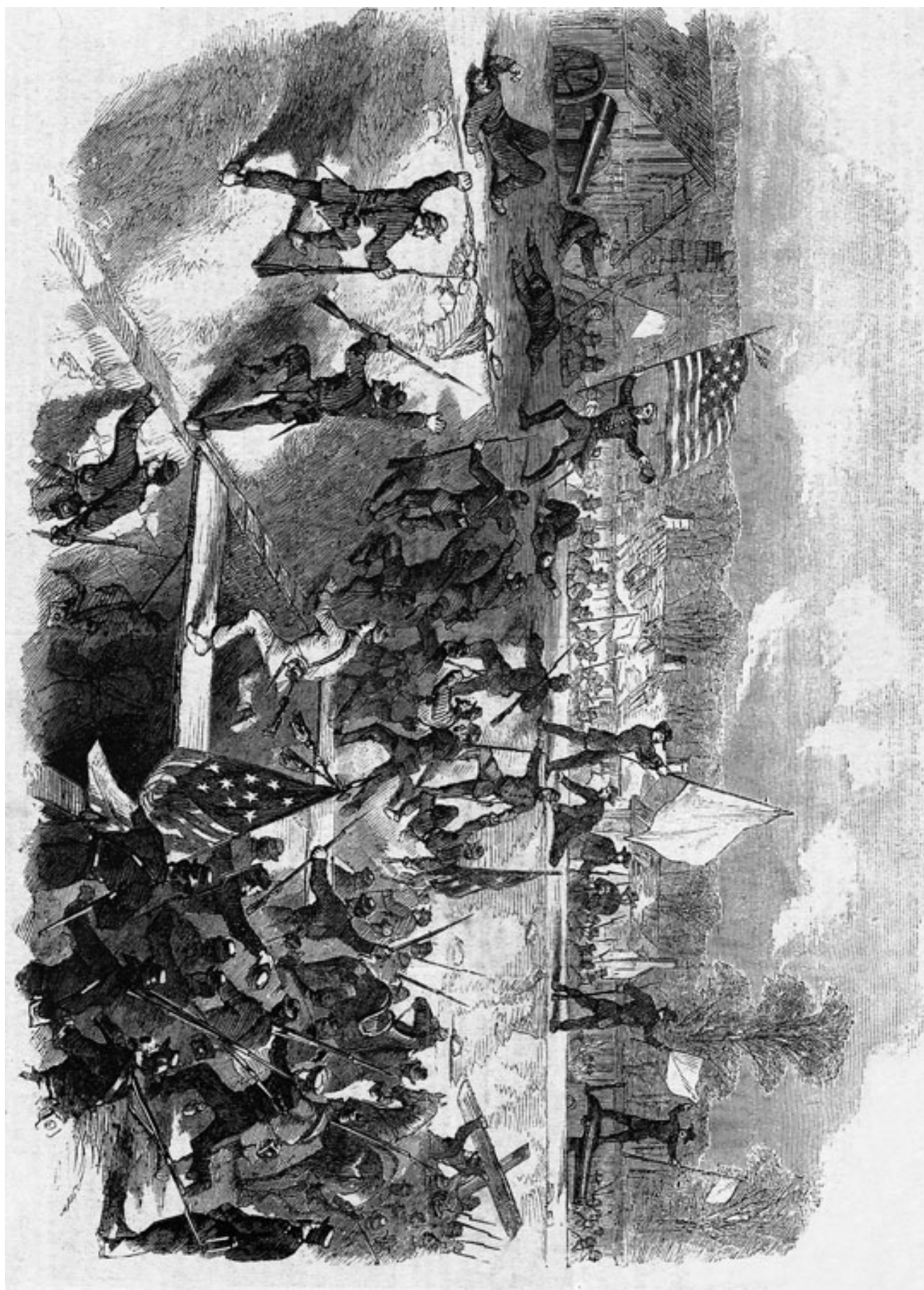
W.5.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

W.5.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

## Literacy/Speaking and Listening:

SL.5.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

SL.5.4 Report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes; speak clearly at an understandable pace.



# Venn Diagram

