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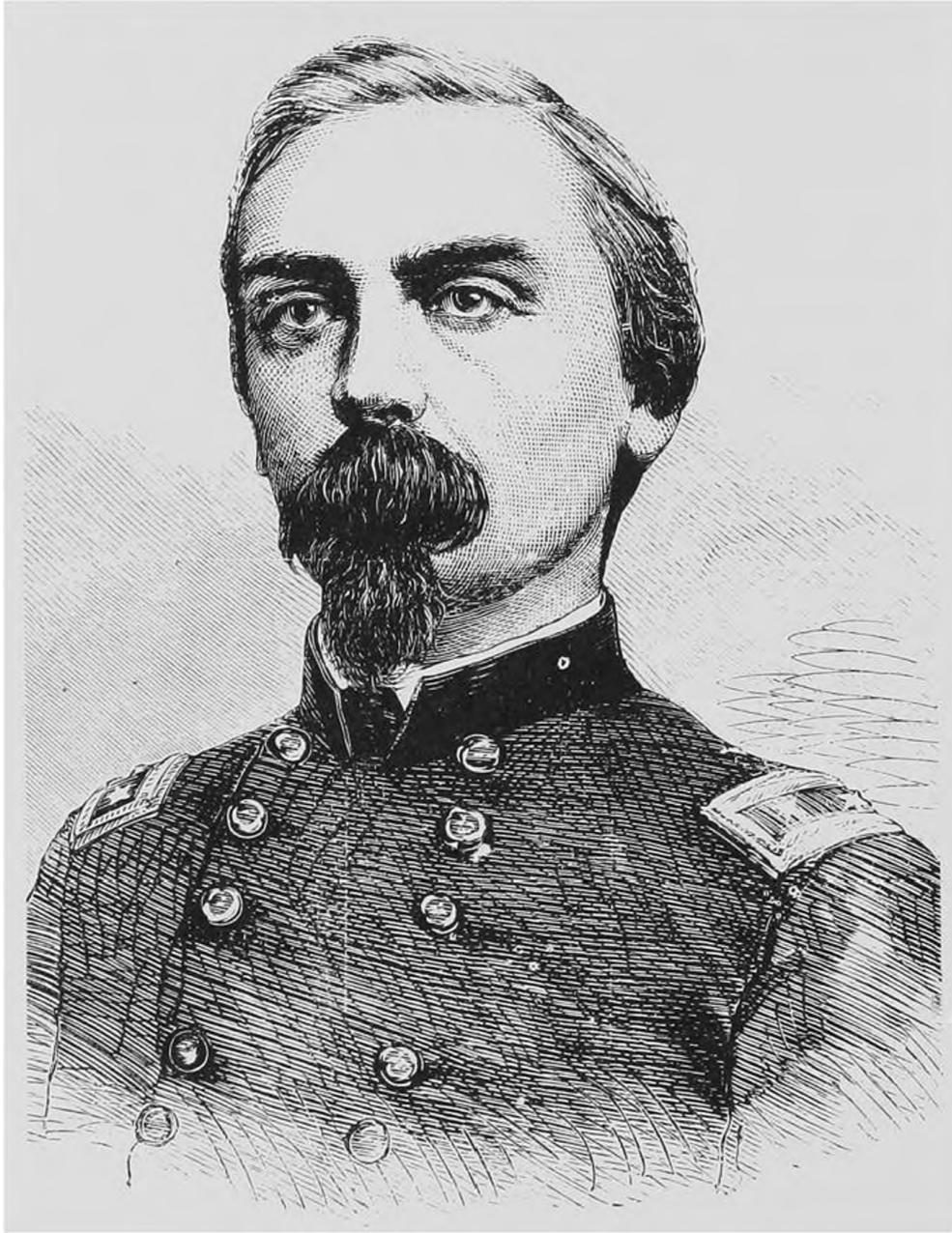


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General Adelbert Ames, United States Senator Elect From Mississippi

STUART B. LORD

Adelbert Ames Soldier & Politician A Reevaluation

Adelbert Ames was born in Rockland, Maine on October 31, 1835, the son of Jesse and Martha Bradbury Tolman Ames. Since his father was a master mariner, and given the shipbuilding atmosphere of Rockland, it is not surprising that young Ames served as a sailor and later as mate on a clipper ship.¹

In 1856, when he was twenty years old, Ames was appointed to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Here he probably took such courses as mathematics, languages, tactics, chemistry, engineering, ethics and law, and ordnance. He mastered these quite well apparently, for when he graduated in May of 1861, he stood fifth in a class of forty-five.² He was assigned as a Second Lieutenant to the Second Artillery Regiment, but due to the Civil War and the need for trained officers, he was made a First Lieutenant in the Fifth Artillery eight days later.³

Within a month of his commission, Ames was moving South with the Union Army. The army met the Confederates at Bull Run Creek near Manassas Junction in Virginia, and Ames and his battery were placed on Henry Hill. The Confederate General, Beauregard, had this hill as one of his objectives, and both sides fought fiercely

for it. The Union forces finally evacuated, as Beauregard said: "Leaving in our possession the Robinson and Henry houses, with most of J. M. Ricketts' and Griffin's batteries [*Ames' unit*] the men of which were mostly shot down where they bravely stood by their guns."⁴

Among those "shot down" but evacuated before Beauregard arrived, was Lieutenant Ames. He had done so well in his first fight that he later received the Medal of Honor. In describing the part Ames played in this battle, his citation stated that he:

remained upon the field in command of a section of Griffin's Battery, directing its fire after being severely wounded and refusing to leave the field until too weak to sit upon the caisson where he had been placed by men of his command.⁵

For his gallantry at Bull Run, Ames was awarded the brevet rank of Major, and after recovering from his wound was made commanding officer of Battery A, Fifth Artillery, in October, 1861. He was now in a command position with several channels open to promotion; he had acquired a fine reputation in the Army for his work at Bull Run; and most of all, he seemed to relish soldiering and action. In a letter to his parents in December, 1861, he observed: "Shooting at birds is not so exciting as shooting at secessionists."⁶

Ames would have plenty of chances to shoot secessionists when he moved out with McClellan in the Peninsular Campaign and fought in the Battle of Malvern Hill (Virginia). For his part in this action, he received the brevet rank of Lieutenant Colonel. Ames then left the scene of action and returned to Maine to take command of the newly formed Twentieth Regiment Infantry, Maine Volunteers.⁷

In August, 1862, Colonel Ames arrived at Camp Mason in Augusta, to take command. His regiment, destined for later fame, must have appalled the young West Pointer. It seemed to be nothing more than a band of civilians. "This is a hell of a Regiment!" Ames barked, and set to the task of whipping the men into some semblance of a United States Army unit. To be sure, this was an arduous task and the Colonel's patience wore thin. One slouching man, obviously unfamiliar with the finer points of soldierly bearing, drew the Colonel's wrath: "For God's sake," said Ames, "draw up your bowels!"⁸

In September of 1862, the Twentieth Maine left for the South, traveling by rail to Boston and completing the journey to Alexandria, Virginia, by steamer. The regiment then went to Washington for encampment at Arlington Heights. The march from the city to the camp ground was described years later by one of the Twentieth Maine's veterans:

It was a most ludicrous march. An untrained drum corps furnished us with music; each musician kept different time, and each man in the regiment took a different step. Old soldiers sneered; the people laughed and cheered; we marched, ran, walked, galloped, and stood still, in our vain endeavors to keep in step.⁹

Colonel Ames was not impressed. He told his men: "If you can't do better than you have tonight, you better all desert and go home."¹⁰

This kind of advice, plus the rigid training required by Ames, did not endear him to his men. One of them wrote home: "Col. A. will take the men out to drill & he will d'm them up hill and down." The same soldier also remarked: "I swear they will shoot him the first battle we are in."¹¹ Ames knew, however, the necessity

for training and discipline. He had seen what happened with unprepared troops in battle. It is largely due to Ames' stern demands and high standards that the Twentieth Maine became one of the finest regiments in the Federal service.

However, Ames had little time to work with his men before the commander of the Army of the Potomac, General Ambrose Burnside (more famous for his whiskers than for his military brilliance) decided to take the Confederate lines at Fredericksburg by direct assault. After performing well in the battle and completing an exceptionally hazardous withdrawal, Ames told the men that they had done well. With this battle, Ames felt that the Twentieth Maine men: "were beginning to see the advantages of good discipline while under fire."¹²

There is little doubt about the fact that Ames was a good soldier. There can also be little doubt about the fact that he was ambitious. Anxious for promotion, he had contact with many officers and civilians in powerful positions. Letters were written on his behalf by General Hiram Berry (a fellow Rocklander, later killed at Chancellorsville), General Charles Griffin (his former battery commander at Bull Run), General O. O. Howard (another fellow State of Mainer) and General Joseph Hooker. Howard wrote to Hooker stating that General Griffin believed Ames to be his best officer. Hooker, then a corps commander, wrote to Vice President Hannibal Hamlin of Maine on November 16, 1862, urging the promotion of Ames to Brigadier General. Hooker stated that Ames: "had gained my esteem and confidence by his intelligence, zeal and devotion to his duties. It would give me great satisfaction to have him advanced and *to exercise that rank in my command.*" Hooker concluded: "I know of no officer of more promise."¹³

Soon after writing this letter, Hooker became the commander of the Army of the Potomac. He prepared to meet the Confederate forces, and Ames was probably aware that if he made a good showing here, he would receive his promotion.

The desire to prove himself was frustrated by a small-pox quarantine which temporarily removed his regiment from active service. Ames circumvented this problem by volunteering to serve at Chancellorsville on the staff of General Meade. Finally, on May 20, 1863, Adelbert Ames was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General of Volunteers. In two years, he had advanced from an untried Second Lieutenant to Brigadier General, becoming the first "Boy General" of the Civil War.¹⁴

The new Brigadier General was in action by June 9, 1863. At Brandy Station, Virginia, he commanded an infantry detachment that was supporting General Pleasanton's cavalry in its fight against the forces of J. E. B. Stuart. Although largely a cavalry engagement, Ames and his infantry received high praise from Pleasanton. The Cavalryman wrote: "The marked manner in which General Ames held and managed his troops under a galling fire of the enemy for several hours, is entitled to higher commendation than I can bestow."¹⁵ Later, at Gettysburg, Ames, commanding his brigade, assumed command of the First Division, Eleventh Corps when its commander, General Barlow was wounded.¹⁶ Here he met the Twentieth Maine again. The regiment had just completed a valiant defense of Little Round Top on the far left of the Union line. This defense had made them famous, and the young general was probably pleased to write home that as he rode by them: "They gave me three times three. They will do anything for me." A soldier of the Twentieth Maine, writing of the en-

counter, remarked that Ames: “said he was proud of the 20th.” Old frictions seemed to have disappeared. Ames knew the regiment had helped him get his star and the regiment knew that the general had made them into the type of unit they were. Later the men presented Ames with a gift sword, sash, and belt. Ames replied that he had: “The most profound sentiments of pride and affection” for them. When the Twentieth Maine received a new flag from home to replace the one that was torn, worn, stained, and honored; they felt that the old flag should be given to someone who would understand all that it represented. The flag was sent to Adelbert Ames.¹⁷

After Gettysburg, Ames served with Benjamin Butler’s Army of the James. He and his troops later returned to the Army of the Potomac to serve in the bloody engagement at Cold Harbor. They were in the lines at Petersburg when the Great Mine exploded in July, 1864. General Ames appeared as a witness before the Court of Inquiry which investigated the explosion that opened up part of the Confederate lines only to become a death hole for the leaderless Union troops that charged the opening. When asked by the Court his opinion for the failure of the assault, Ames replied: “ . . . a clear head, where it could see what was going on, . . . might have corrected a great many of the faults that then existed. I think the trouble was [that] no one person at the front . . . was responsible, in consequence of which there was no unity of action.” The Court, headed by General Winfield Scott Hancock, concurred with Ames’ assessment.

Ames’ greatest contribution to the Federal war effort was probably his part in the Fort Fisher Campaign in January of 1865. Fort Fisher in North Carolina was the post guarding Wilmington, the last open seaport of the

Confederacy. General Lee had sent word to Colonel Lamb, commander of the Fort, that: "Fort Fisher must be held or he could not subsist his army."¹⁰ At this time Ames commanded the Second Division in General A. Terry's Tenth Corps. This Division led in the assault. After hard fighting the Fort was taken, but when General Terry sent his report to the War Department, he did not mention Ames' part in the battle and strongly suggested that he (Terry) had supervised the action. Later, Terry tried to atone for this slight (intentional or accidental) by recommending that Ames be made a brevet Brigadier General in the Regular Army, commenting that: "On reflection I feel that I have not done full justice to General Ames' merits."²⁰

By the spring of 1865, the war was finally drawing to a close. On April 9, 1865, General Lee surrendered at Appomattox, and for all practical purposes, the war was indeed over. Adelbert Ames had played a prominent part in it and was awarded the brevets of Major General of Volunteers and Brigadier and Major General, United States Army. "His contribution to the Federal war effort was second to none for his age and experience . . ."²¹

On May 12, 1865, General Ames succeeded General Terry to the command of the Tenth Corps. This command included all troops in North Carolina that did not belong to Sherman's Army. Later, in September, 1865, Ames was placed in command of the District of Western South Carolina, a post which he held until mustered out of the volunteer service in April, 1866. He was one of the last volunteer officers to be discharged. Ames was not happy with this job of "Rebel-Watching." In February, 1866, he had written his mother: "Fire still burns in the hearts of the people here; and our star-spangled banner or our country's uniform are only needed to fan the flame

into wrath." Upon his discharge, Ames was appointed a Lieutenant Colonel in the Twenty-Fourth U.S. Infantry. He took a leave of absence, however, to go to Europe, and it was not until August, 1867 that he reported for duty with his regiment in Mississippi.²²

While Adelbert Ames had been in Europe, Congress decided to "reconstruct" the former Confederate States. This reconstruction was to be administered by the military through Congressional guidance. Serving only briefly with his regiment, Adelbert Ames became thoroughly enmeshed in reconstruction policy upon his appointment as Military Governor of Mississippi in June, 1868. A few months later, he was put in charge of the Fourth Military District, which included, in addition to Mississippi, the State of Arkansas. Although he had served well as a soldier, he was now expected to perform in the arena of politics and administration. Like most Americans, his only civilian political experience consisted of voicing an interest in various political candidates.²³

While serving as District Commander, Ames sought to enforce the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. In promoting civil rights in his District, Ames "authorized all persons, without respect to race, color, or previous condition of servitude, who possess the qualifications prescribed by the laws . . . to act as jurors."²⁴ This action helped the black man to maintain his lawful freedom, but enraged many whites who depended on the laws and the political arena as a last means of defense against former slaves.

Under the Congressional Reconstruction Acts, local elections were held. This gave rise to the Carpetbaggers, those men, Northern and Southern alike, who sought to acquire political office and gain tremendous power. Not

all were out for booty, however, and one of these exceptions was Adelbert Ames. Ames has often been used by historians as an example of corrupt reconstruction politics in the South. However, the evidence tends to show that he was not the rogue pictured by Claude Bowers and others, but instead, he was probably an honest man caught in events quite beyond his control.

The Mississippi Legislature chose him for the United States Senate in 1869. But even before Ames could take his seat, complications arose. It was felt by some that Ames was not a resident of the state from which he had been elected. Senator Roscoe Conkling of New York led the group trying to keep Ames out of the Senate, and when the residency attack started to fail, Conkling took up the matter of credentials. As the Provisional Governor of Mississippi, Adelbert Ames had certified that Adelbert Ames was elected a United States Senator. The Senate finally agreed that while this was unorthodox, it was certainly not illegal nor incorrect in procedure, and Ames was finally allowed to take his seat.²⁵

Except for one brief moment, Ames' term in the Senate was consistent but unremarkable. A clash with Senator Frank Blair of Missouri came during a debate over the Fourteenth Amendment. Ames felt that some Senators, particularly Senator Blair, were not doing all they could to help the blacks. Ames blamed Blair's "vituperative powers" for creating trouble inside the South by supporting Southern Conservatives. This remark brought a rebuke from the President of the Senate — and from Senator Blair as well, naturally. Ames remained unimpressed and wrote: "He [Blair] certainly does not soar very high in his flights, hardly beyond the fumes of the barroom."²⁶ Shortly before the Blair episode, Ames had married Blanche Butler, daughter of the famous (or in-

famous) Benjamin F. Butler, one of the country's most radical Republicans.

After three years in the Senate, and when opportunity arose, he sought the Republican nomination for the governorship of Mississippi in 1873. At the Jackson Convention, with "the colored element preponderating" Ames was nominated on the first ballot, receiving 187 votes to 40 for the incumbent, Powers. With his black nominee for Lieutenant Governor, A. K. Davis, Ames was easily elected over J. L. Alcorn, a renegade Republican wanting the black vote, but not equality, who was the candidate of Conservative Republicans and Democrats. Ames was elected not only for his statewide reputation and his Lieutenant Governor, but because he was also a Northerner and the blacks felt that Northerners were friendly and did not show the prejudice of the Southerners.²⁷

While it is not documented, one of the reasons why Ames left his Senate seat for the governorship was probably to consolidate his party. He was ambitious, and with a consolidated party behind him he could later return to the Senate with solid support, becoming a power there, or moving to even higher political offices.

Whatever his reasons for returning to Mississippi, it was all for nothing. Ames had the misfortune to be governor just at the time when Southern whites were re-establishing their power. For all his ambition, Ames was not willing to bend to them, and his actions and speeches only served as an irritant. For example, in his Inaugural Address of 1874 he:

made an earnest plea for kindly feelings between the whites and the blacks, politically, saying that they are now in all other things as closely united as are people of the same surroundings

elsewhere. He advocated early preparation for educating the ignorant, advised that more attention be paid to manufacturing, and strongly urged that more breadstuffs be raised. To this end he recommended that the large plantations be cut up into small farms and sold to the men who till them.²⁸

These remarks were sufficient to anger many white Southerners, and their anger was certainly not lessened by Ames when he continued: "I shall strive to secure to every citizen, however humble and poor, his rights, and see that none, however rich and powerful, override the laws." He concluded with an appeal for all citizens to join in an "economical, impartial, and liberal administration of the laws."

Two months later (March, 1874) he restated his position in even stronger terms and said that he was determined to be: "Governor of the whole people, dealing out impartial justice to all."³⁰ A Governor of the whole people was certainly not what Southern whites wanted. They were determined to get back into power and deal with both blacks and carpetbaggers. The Ku Klux Klan and similar units were formed and white "guards" were stationed at polling places. When warnings and threats did not succeed, Southern whites resorted to terrorism. Governor Ames had considered calling out the State forces to deal with the situation, but did not take this action when it was pointed out that only blacks would answer the call. Ames did not want to start a racial Civil War.

Ames then appealed to President Grant for Federal troops. In his appeal, Ames told of the creation of white infantry and cavalry units, which were armed "in violation of the law" and emphasized that: "This is a political controversy, between White Democrats and the Re-

publicans consisting mainly of blacks.” Ames felt that Federal troops would do great good: “It may save many lives.”

Ames’ plea brought the following reply, signed by W. W. Belknap, the Secretary of War: “The contents of your dispatch have been submitted to the President. He declines to move the troops, except under a call made strictly in accordance with the terms of the Constitution.”³¹

This reply, and a letter from the Attorney General, remarking that: “The whole public are tired of these annual autumnal outbreaks in the South” was not lost on the white Mississippians. They resorted to open and flagrant violations of the black man’s rights, especially in Vicksburg. On December 9, 1874, Governor Ames issued a proclamation saying that the riots were “exclusively against colored officials,” and that “the object of said riotous and disorderly action is to deprive colored men of their civil and political rights . . .”³²

White opposition to Ames continued to grow until finally, on February 25, 1876, the Mississippi House of Representatives passed a resolution by a vote of 86 to 14, impeaching Ames for “high crimes and misdemeanors in office.” Lieutenant-Governor Davis was also to be tried.

The charges were either constructed of half-truths or were fabricated. Ames was charged with inciting the Vicksburg riots, marching the black militia, appointing incompetents to positions for corrupt motives, and granting unnecessary prison pardons. One of the charges was dependent upon a meeting between Ames and another man when the time element made such a meeting impossible.³³

A month after impeachment proceedings had begun, the process was terminated when a bargain was struck. If Ames would resign, there would be no impeachment. Ames saved face as best he could. "Guilt" was a foregone conclusion since the Legislature's cloak of legitimacy was sure to cover the whole affair. Advised by Ames that he intended to resign from the governorship, the Mississippi Legislature dropped impeachment proceedings. Adelbert Ames was the last Reconstruction Governor of a former Confederate State.³⁴

Ames was probably pleased to leave the South and all of its problems, yet at the same time, he felt that he had failed in his objectives. Years later he wrote of what he wanted to accomplish: "My explanation may seem ludicrous now, but then, it seemed to me that I had a mission with a large "M" to help the blacks."³⁵ In an interview with the *New York Times* in May, 1876, Ames spoke of "fraud, violence, and murder" being used to "such an extent and degree that the Northern mind seems incapable of comprehending it . . . It is not safe for any Northern man . . . to live there, if his convictions incline him to the cause of humanity and if he attempts any active measures, especially political efforts in behalf of the colored people of the state."³⁶

After leaving Mississippi, Ames involved himself in business. During the war and afterward he had steadily invested his money in his family's flour milling enterprises and was thus able to live comfortably. He secured patents on several inventions: flour mill machinery, extension ladders for fire engines, and work on a pencil sharpener. None was financially successful. Occasionally he corresponded with historians on his administration in Mississippi, usually at their request, or to correct a flagrant error in their writings.

It was during this period that Ames happened to be in Northfield, Minnesota when the Jesse James Cole Younger gang tried to rob the local bank. In a letter to his wife, Ames described the shooting, the blood, the dead in the street. He concluded: "The time yesterday reminded me of Mississippi." The next day he wrote, "Is it not strange that Mississippi should come up here to visit me. The killing of Republicans by a set of Mississippi K.K. produces a similar state of sensation as the murdering of a number of men by Missouri cut-throats who are after plunder."³⁷

When war was declared with Spain in 1898, Ames went back into the Army as Brigadier General of Volunteers. After going to Cuba and participating in the Santiago Campaign, he was given stateside duty before being mustered out in 1899. He spent many of his retirement days in Ormond, Florida where he frequently played golf with John D. Rockefeller, Senior. It was there that he died on April 13, 1933. The ninety-seven year old man was the last surviving full rank general officer of the Civil War.

In a letter to the *New York Times* for April 26, 1933, J. R. Lewis wrote: "He was the last leaf on the tree and he must have been the last prominent figure of one of the most stirring periods in our history. Possibly the rush of modern times makes the figures of a past age of increasingly less concern to us."

— NOTES —

¹ Ezra J. Warner: *Generals in Blue* (Louisiana State University, 1964), p. 5; Blanche Butler Ames: *Chronicles from the Nineteenth Century* (Clinton, Mass., 1957), I, xi.

² Letter from Stanley P. Tozeski, Chief of the U. S. Military Academy Archives, to Stuart B. Lord, March 23, 1971; Letter from War Department to Charles E. Wingate, March 8, 1874.

³ B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, I, 1.

⁴ William C. Storrick: "Adelbert Ames," *Annual Report of the Association of Graduates, United States Military Academy* (June 11, 1934), p. 29.

⁵ Department of the Army: *The Medal of Honor of the United States Army* (Washington, 1948), p. 105. Many of the awards for the Medal of Honor (often erroneously called the Congressional Medal of Honor) that were for Civil War actions were not made until long after the war was over. Ames was one of those who received the medal long after the event. His award was made in 1894.

⁶ B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, I, 1, 3; Warner: *Generals*, p. 6; Storrick: *Annual Report*, p. 29.

⁷ Warner: *Generals*, p. 6. Officers were rewarded for a brave or meritorious action by being given a brevet promotion to a higher rank, even though these brevet ranks could not be used for a command position. It gets especially confusing, when, during the Civil War, both the Regular Forces and the Volunteers each had a brevet system. Ames, for example, held four ranks. He was a First Lieutenant and a Brevet Major General in the Regular Army and a Brigadier General and Brevet Major General in the Volunteers.

⁸ John J. Pullen: *The Twentieth Maine* (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 1, 2.

⁹ Rev. Theodore Gerrish: *Army Life: a Private's Reminiscences of the Civil War* (Portland, 1882), p. 11, 17, 19.

¹⁰ Pullen: *Twentieth*, p. 18.

¹¹ Pullen: *Twentieth*, p. 36.

¹² B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, I, 16; Pullen: *Twentieth*, p. 56.

¹³ B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, I, 15, 16, 17, 19. The emphasis is Hooker's.

- ¹⁴ Pullen: *Twentieth*, p. 75; Warner: *Generals*, p. 5.
- ¹⁵ Storricks: *Annual Report*, p. 30; B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, I, 19.
- ¹⁶ Thomas Yoseloff: *Campaigns of the Civil War* (New York, 1963), III, 217-8.
- ¹⁷ Pullen: *Twentieth*, p. 131, 170; B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, I, 21.
- ¹⁸ Blanche Ames Ames: *Adelbert Ames, 1835-1933* (New York, 1964), p. 175-6; Storricks: *Annual Report*, p. 31; B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, I, 23-4.
- ¹⁹ Storricks: *Annual Report*, p. 31-2.
- ²⁰ B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, I, 25; Yoseloff: *Campaigns*, p. 248; B. A. Ames: *Adelbert*, p. 199.
- ²¹ Warner: *Generals*, p. 5.
- ²² Francis A. Lord: *They Fought for the Union* (Harrisburg, 1960), p. 347; B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, I, 30, 34, 36.
- ²³ *New York Times*, June 18, 1868, p. 5; B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, I, 14, 25, 36.
- ²⁴ B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, I, 38.
- ²⁵ B. A. Ames: *Adelbert*, p. 303-312.
- ²⁶ B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, I, 246-59, 280.
- ²⁷ J. C. Randall and David Donald: *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston, 1961), p. 629; B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, I, 540; *New York Times*, August 28, 1873, p. 1.
- ²⁸ *New York Times*, January 29, 1874, p. 1.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ *New York Times*, March 23, 1874, p. 4.
- ³¹ *New York Times*, August 1, 1874, p. 4.
- ³² Samuel Eliot Morison: *The Oxford History of the American People* (New York, 1965), p. 724; Vernon Lane Wharton: *The Negro in Mississippi: 1865-1890* (New York, 1947), p. 194; *New York Times*, December 10, 1874, p. 5.
- ³³ William E. B. DuBois: *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York, 1935), p. 447; *New York Times*, February 26, 1876, p. 1; B. A. Ames: *Adelbert*, p. 466-8.
- ³⁴ *New York Times*, March 30, 1876, p. 1; April 14, 1933, p. 19.
- ³⁵ Wharton: *The Negro*, p. 158.

³⁶ *New York Times*, May 2, 1876, p. 1; Wharton: *The Negro*, p. 197-8.

³⁷ B. A. Ames: *Adelbert*, p. 495, 500; B. B. Ames: *Chronicles*, II, 405-6.

*Woodcut of Adelbert Ames from Harpers Weekly —
Volume 14, 1870.*

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