

# Fort Sumter

Official Park Guide

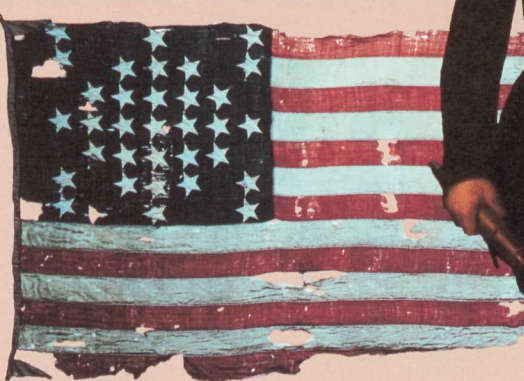
Fort Sumter National Monument  
South Carolina

National Park Service  
Department of the Interior



Fort Sumter, shown above as it appeared to artist Seth Eastman on the eve of the Civil War, was one of a series of coastal fortifications built by the United States after the War of 1812. Begun in 1829 and named for South Carolina Revolutionary War patriot Thomas Sumter, the fort was still unfinished when Maj. Robert Anderson (right) moved his 85-man garrison into it the day after Christmas, 1860.

The flag is the same one that flew over the fort during the Confederate bombardment of April 12-13, 1861. The unusual arrangement of the stars is accounted for by the fact that, until flag design was standardized in 1912, such things as placement of stars and relative proportions were left to the discretion of the flagmaker.



Art Commission of the City of New York

Cover illustration courtesy Architect of the U.S. Capitol.

Brig. Gen. Pierre G. T. Beauregard (right) commanded Confederate forces at Charleston, S.C., in March and April 1861 and again from August 1862 to May 1864. At West Point in 1837, he had been one of Anderson's artillery students and, while determined to evict the Federal troops from Fort Sumter, he did not welcome the prospect of firing on his old friend and former instructor. The 6-foot by 9-foot South Carolina Palmetto flag raised over Sumter after Anderson surrendered the fort on April 14, 1861.



Collection of City Hall, Charleston, S.C.

## Symbol of Union, 1861

On December 20, 1860, after decades of sectional conflict, the people of South Carolina responded to the election of the first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln, by voting unanimously in convention to secede from the Union. Within six weeks five other States—Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana—followed South Carolina's example. Early in February 1861 they met in Montgomery, Ala., adopted a constitution, set up a provisional government—the Confederate States of America—and elected Jefferson Davis their president. By March 2, when Texas officially joined the Confederacy, nearly all of the Federal forts and navy yards in the seven States had been seized by the new government. Fort Sumter was one of the few that remained in Federal hands.

When South Carolina seceded, there were four Federal installations around Charleston Harbor: Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island, Castle Pinckney on Shute's Folly Island near the city, Fort Johnson on James Island across from Moultrie, and Fort Sumter at the harbor entrance. The only post garrisoned by more than a nominal number of soldiers was Fort Moultrie, where Maj. Robert Anderson commanded two companies, 85 men, of the First U.S. Artillery. Six days after the secession ordinance, Anderson concluded that Moultrie and the other works were indefensible and secretly transferred the Federal troops to Fort Sumter, a mile away. Charlestonians were angered by Anderson's action. On December 27 South Carolina volunteers occupied Forts Moultrie and Johnson and Castle Pinckney, and began erecting batteries elsewhere around the harbor. The State regarded Anderson's move as a breach of faith and demanded that the U.S. Government evacuate Charleston Harbor. President James Buchanan refused.

*"In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. . . . You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors."*

—Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, 1861.

In January Buchanan attempted a relief expedition, but South Carolina shore batteries turned back the unarmed merchant vessel, *Star of the West*, carrying 200 men and several months' provisions, as it tried to enter the harbor. Early in March, Brig. Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard took command of the Confederate troops at Charleston and pushed work on fortifying the harbor. As the weeks passed, Fort Sumter gradually became the focal point of tensions between North and South. When Abraham Lincoln assumed office as President of the United States on March 4, 1861, he made it clear in a firm but conciliatory address that he would uphold the national authority. The Government, he said, would not assail anyone, but neither would it consent to a division of the Union. "The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the Government." Lincoln plainly meant to hold Fort Sumter. Unfortunately circumstances were such that this could not be done without an overt act on his part.

By April 4 Lincoln believed that a relief expedition was feasible and ordered merchant steamers, protected by ships of war, to carry "subsistence and other supplies" to Anderson. He also notified Governor Francis W. Pickens of South Carolina that an attempt would be made to resupply the fort. After debate—and some disagreement—the Confederate cabinet telegraphed Beauregard on April 10 to fire on Sumter if absolutely necessary to prevent reinforcement.

On April 11 Beauregard demanded that Anderson surrender Sumter. Anderson refused, but said he would be starved out in a few days anyway. Beauregard then asked the major precisely when he would be forced to evacuate the fort. In a carefully worded reply, Anderson said that he would leave Sumter by noon, April 15, unless before that time he should receive either instructions from Washington or additional supplies.

The Confederates rejected his answer. At 3:20 a.m., April 12, they informed Anderson that their batteries would open fire in one hour. At ten minutes past the allotted hour, Capt. George S. James, commanding Fort Johnson's east mortar battery, ordered the firing of a signal shell. Within moments Edmund Ruffin of Virginia, firebrand and hero of the secessionist movement, touched off a gun in the ironclad battery at Cummings Point. By daybreak batteries at Forts Johnson and Moultrie, Cummings Point, and elsewhere were assailing Sumter.

Major Anderson withheld his fire until 7 o'clock. Though some 60 guns stood ready for action, most never got into the fight. Nine or ten casemate guns returned fire, but by noon only six remained in action. At no time

*"Remember that the danger is not yet over. We, perhaps, . . . have just commenced the opening of events that may not end in our day and generation."*

—Gov. Francis Pickens after Fort Sumter's surrender.

during the battle did the guns of Fort Sumter greatly damage Confederate positions. And, sheltered in Sumter's brick caverns, only five Federal soldiers suffered injuries.

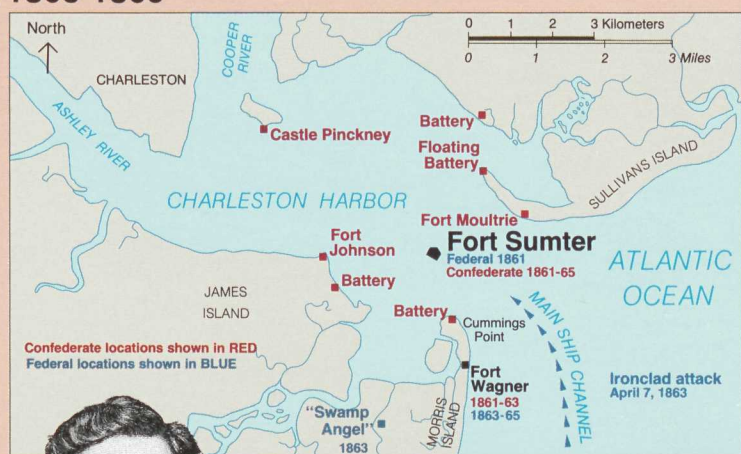
The cannonade continued throughout the night. The next morning a hot shot from Fort Moultrie set fire to the officers' quarters. In early afternoon the flagstaff was shot away. About 2 p.m., Anderson agreed to a truce. That evening he surrendered his garrison. Miraculously, no one on either side had been killed during the engagement.

On Sunday, April 14, Major Anderson and his garrison marched out of the fort and boarded ship for transport to New York. They had defended Sumter for 34 hours, until "the quarters were entirely burned, the main gates destroyed by fire, the gorge walls seriously injured, the magazines surrounded by flames." Civil war, so long dreaded, had begun.

## Confederate Stronghold, 1863-1865

With Fort Sumter in Confederate hands, the port of Charleston became an irritating loophole in the Federal naval blockade of the Atlantic coast. In two months of 1863, 21 Confederate vessels cleared Charleston Harbor and 15 entered. Into Charleston came needed war supplies; out went cotton in payment. To close the port—and also capture the city—it was necessary first to seize Fort Sumter, now repaired and armed with some 95 guns. After an earlier Army attempt had failed on James Island, the job fell to the U.S. Navy, and Rear Adm. Samuel F. Du Pont was ordered to take the fort.

On the afternoon of April 7, 1863, nine armored vessels steamed slowly into the harbor and headed for Fort Sumter. For 2½ hours the ironclads duelled with Confederate batteries in the forts and around the harbor. The attack only scared and battered Sumter's walls, but the far more intense and accurate Confederate fire disabled five Federal ships, one of which, the *Keokuk*, sank the next morning.



Fort Sumter withstood all Federal efforts to batter it into submission, thanks largely to chief engineer John A. Johnson (left) and the 300-450 workmen under his command.

At the end, buttressed with sand and cotton as well as its own fallen masonry, the fort had become a symbol of resistance and courage for the entire South.

When the ironclads failed, Federal strategy changed. Du Pont was removed from command and replaced by Rear Adm. John A. Dahlgren, who planned to combine land and sea operations to seize nearby Morris Island and from there to demolish Fort Sumter. At a position secured by U.S. forces on Morris Island, Union troops under Brig. Gen. Quincy A. Gillmore began to place rifled cannon powerful enough to breach Sumter's walls.

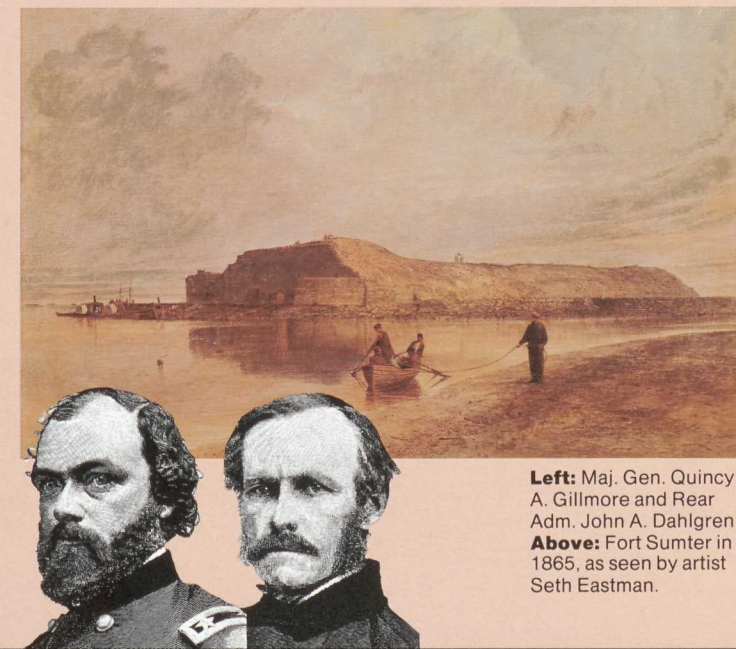
Meanwhile, Confederate laborers and slaves inside Fort Sumter worked day and night with bales of cotton and sand to buttress the walls facing the Federal guns. The fort's garrison at this time consisted of five companies of the First South Carolina Artillery under Col. Alfred Rhett.

Federal troops fired a few experimental rounds at the fort in late July and early August. The bombardment began in earnest on August 17, with almost 1,000 shells being fired the first day alone. Within a week, the fort's brick walls

were shattered and reduced to ruins, but the garrison refused to surrender and continued to repair and strengthen the defenses.

Confederate guns at Fort Moultrie and other points now took up the defense of Sumter. Another Federal assault on September 9 fell short; this time the attackers lost five boats and 124 men trying to take the fort from Maj. Stephen Elliott and fresh Confederate troops under his command. Except for one ten-day period of heavy firing, the bombardment continued intermittently until the end of December. By then, Sumter's cannons were severely damaged and dismantled and its defenders could respond with only "harmless musketry."

In the summer of 1864, after Maj. Gen. John G. Foster replaced Gillmore as commander of land operations, the Federals made one last attempt to take Sumter. Foster, a member of Anderson's 1861 garrison, believed that "with proper arrangements" the fort could be taken "at any time." A sustained two-



Architect of the U.S. Capitol

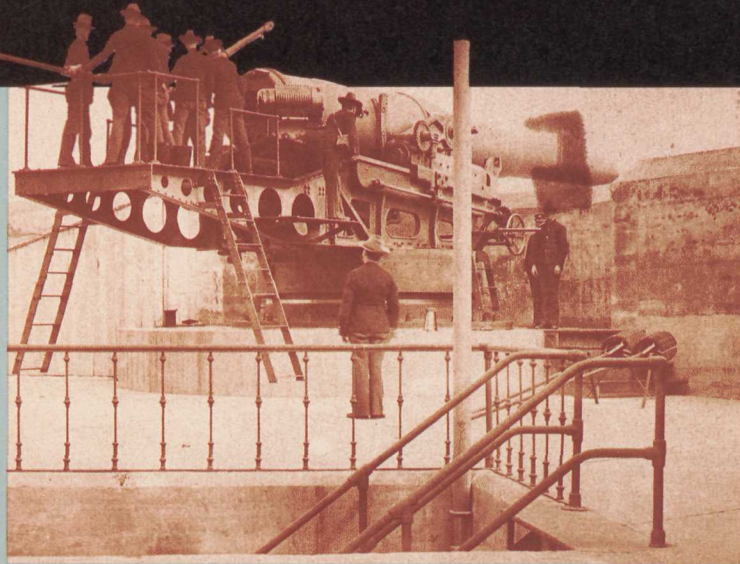
Left: Maj. Gen. Quincy A. Gillmore and Rear Adm. John A. Dahlgren. Above: Fort Sumter in 1865, as seen by artist Seth Eastman.

month Union bombardment, however, failed to dislodge the 300-man Confederate garrison and Foster was ordered to send most of his remaining ammunition and several regiments of troops north to aid Grant's campaign against Richmond.

Desultory fire against the fort continued through January 1865. For 22 months Fort Sumter had withstood Federal siege and bombardment, and it no longer resembled a fort at all. But defensively it was stronger than ever. Big Federal guns had hurled seven million pounds of metal at it, yet the Confederate losses during this period had been only 52 killed and 267 wounded.

Gen. William T. Sherman's troops advancing north from Savannah, however, caused the Confederate troops to be withdrawn, and Fort Sumter was evacuated on February 17, 1865.

# Fort Sumter



The massive concrete Spanish-American War structure known as Battery Isaac Huger has dominated the entire central section of Fort Sumter since 1899, when the battery was completed. Like the fort in which it stands, it was named for a South Carolina hero of the Revolutionary War. The photo at left, taken in 1901, shows one of the two long-range 12-inch rifles that made up the battery's armament. Its companion gun, located where the Museum stands today was called a "disappearing rifle," which meant that it was visible over the parapet when firing, with the recoil causing it to "disappear" into a recessed area behind the parapet for reloading. Both guns had a maximum range of 9½ miles.



**For Your Safety**  
While every effort has been made to make your visit safe and enjoyable, you must remain alert and cautious in all areas of the fort. Please be especially careful on uneven surfaces and stairways. Do

not go beyond chain or rail barriers. To help preserve the fort, we ask that you do not climb or sit on cannons or brickwork. Do not disturb or remove artifacts.

This photograph of Fort Sumter was made in the early 1870s, after the U.S. Army had begun to clear away the rubble from the Civil War years in an attempt to make the fort once again serviceable as a coastal defense. It shows Sumter's right flank and the remains of the lower-tier casemates, just starting to emerge from the ruins. The lighthouse was built in 1865 at the right shoulder angle where the fort's right face and right flank meet. Its appearance changed over the years as it was moved to facilitate reconstruction work. The lighthouse was finally demolished in 1948.

## From Wartime Ruin to National Monument

When the Civil War ended, Fort Sumter presented a very desolate appearance. Only on the left flank, left face, and right face could any of the original scarp wall be seen. The right flank wall and the gorge wall, which had taken the brunt of the Federal bombardments, were now irregular mounds of earth, sand, and debris forming steep slopes down to the water's edge. The fort bore little resemblance to the impressive work that had stood there at the time of the Confederate bombardment in 1861.

During the decade following the war, the Army attempted to put Fort Sumter back into shape as a military installation. The horizontal irregularity of the damaged or destroyed walls was given some semblance of

uniformity by levelling jagged portions and rebuilding others. A new sally port was cut through the left flank; storage magazines and cisterns were constructed; and gun emplacements were located. Eleven of the original first tier gunrooms at the salient and along the right face were reclaimed and armed with 100-pounder Parrott guns.

From 1876 to 1897 Fort Sumter was not garrisoned and served mainly as a lighthouse station. During this period maintenance of the area was so poor that the gun platforms were allowed to rot, the guns to rust, and the area to erode. The impending Spanish-American War, however, prompted renewed activity that resulted in the construction of Battery Huger in 1898

and the installation of two long-range 12-inch rifles the following year. Fortunately, the war ended quickly and the guns were never fired in anger.

During World War I, a small garrison manned the rifles at Battery Huger. For the next 20 years, however, although maintained by the Army, the fort was not used as a military establishment. But it did become a destination for tourists until World War II brought about the fort's reactivation. The Battery Huger rifles were removed about 1943 and two 90-mm anti-aircraft guns were located along the fort's right flank. Fort Sumter became a national monument in 1948.

## A Walking Tour of Fort Sumter

For those who wish to inspect the fort at their own pace, this text, keyed to the diagram at right, describes a short tour of both ruins and exhibits. By comparing the diagram and the painting of the fort as it appeared on the eve of the Civil War, you will gain a better understanding of how the Fort Sumter you see today compares to the Fort Sumter of 1861.

**1 Sally port.** The left-flank wall here is less than half its original height. This entryway was built in the 1870s and replaced a gun embrasure. A plaque erected in 1929 in memory of Sumter's Confederate defenders is located on the left exterior wall of the Sally port.

**2 Left-flank casemates.** The first tier of casemates (gunrooms) was surmounted by a second tier similar in appearance but considerably taller. This pattern was followed on all walls except the gorge.

**3 Enlisted men's barracks ruins.** Paralleling the left-flank casemates, this three-story building had a mess hall on the first floor and sleeping quarters on the upper floors. There was another barracks for enlisted men on the right flank.

**4 Officers' quarters ruins.** Three stories high, this building extended the entire length of the gorge. In it were lodgings for officers, administrative offices, storerooms, a guardhouse, and powder magazines. For an unknown reason, the small arms magazine in this corner of the barracks exploded on December 11, 1863, killing 11 and wounding 41 Confederates. The explosion also tilted the arch over the entrance to the magazine.

**5 Union garrison monument.** The U.S. Government erected this monument in 1932 in memory of the Union defenders during the opening bombardment of the Civil War.

**6 Parade ground.** When Battery Huger was built in 1899, the remainder of the parade was filled with sand. The Na-

tional Park Service removed fill 20 feet deep from this area in the 1950s.

**7 Left-face casemate ruins.** The left-face casemates were destroyed by the fire of Union guns on Morris Island, 1863-1865. Several of the projectiles still protrude from the wall. Outside the casemate ruins are two 15-inch Rodman guns, an 8-inch Columbiad, and a 10-inch mortar.

**8 Right face.** Union forces on Morris Island fired these eleven 100-pounder Parrott guns against Fort Sumter. The Army moved them to the fort in the 1870s.

**9 Right-gorge angle.** From a gun in the first-tier casemates, Capt. Abner Doubleday fired the first shot from Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861.

**10 Mountain howitzer.** Confederates used light field pieces like this 12-pounder mountain howitzer to defend against a surprise landing by Union forces.

**11 Esplanade and wharf site.** A 25½-foot-wide promenade ran the full length of the gorge exterior, and a 171-foot wharf extended out from the sally port. This was the original entrance to the fort.

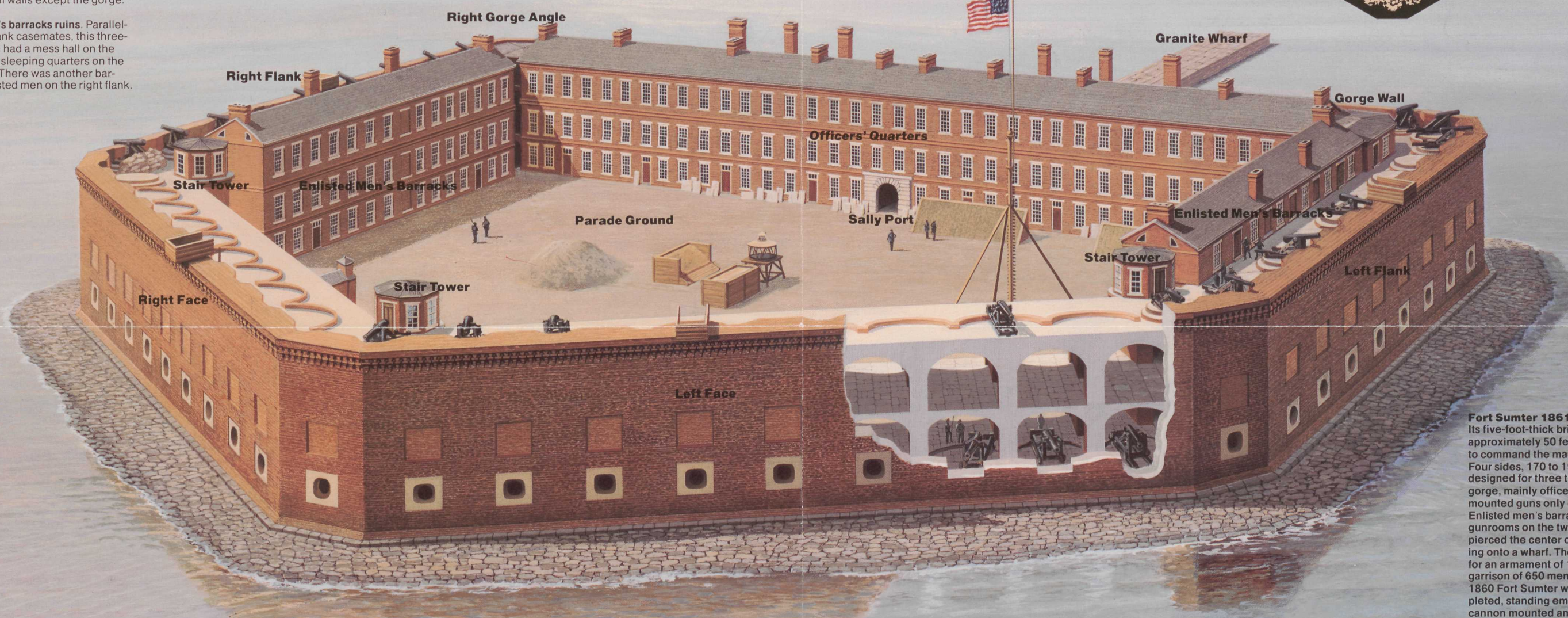
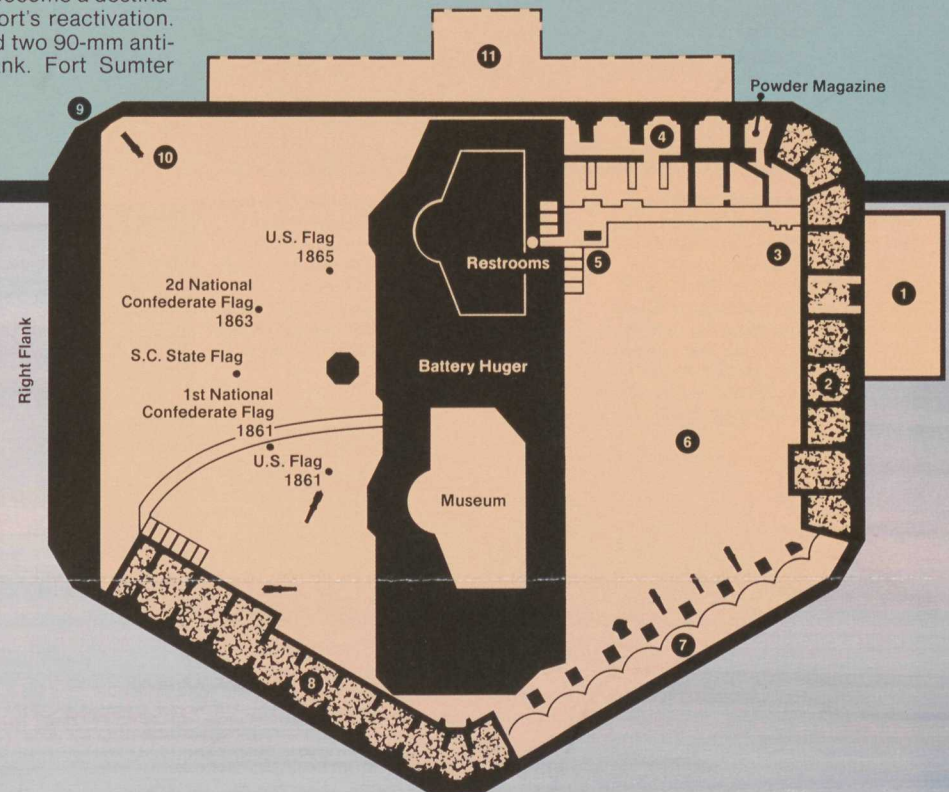
## About Your Visit

Fort Sumter National Monument is located in Charleston Harbor and can be reached only by boat. The fort is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. between April 1 and Labor Day. At other times of the year the hours vary and can be ascertained by calling (803) 883-3123. The fort is closed December 25.

Tour boats operated by a National Park Service concessionaire leave from the City Marina on Lockwood Drive, just south of U.S. 17 in Charles-

ton and from Patriots Point in Mount Pleasant. For boat schedules, call (803) 722-1691 or write Fort Sumter Tours, Inc., 205 King Street, Suite 204, Charleston, S.C. 29401.

**Administration**  
Fort Sumter National Monument is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A superintendent, whose address is 1214 Middle Street, Sullivan's Island, SC 29482 is in immediate charge.



**Fort Sumter 1861**  
Its five-foot-thick brick walls towered approximately 50 feet above low water to command the main ship channel. Four sides, 170 to 190 feet long, were designed for three tiers of guns; the gorge, mainly officers' quarters, mounted guns only on the third tier. Enlisted men's barracks paralleled the gunrooms on the two flanks. A sally port pierced the center of the gorge, opening onto a wharf. The fort was designed for an armament of 135 guns and a garrison of 650 men. But by December 1860 Fort Sumter was 90 percent completed, standing empty, with only 15 cannon mounted and ready.

Illustration by L. Kenneth Townsend