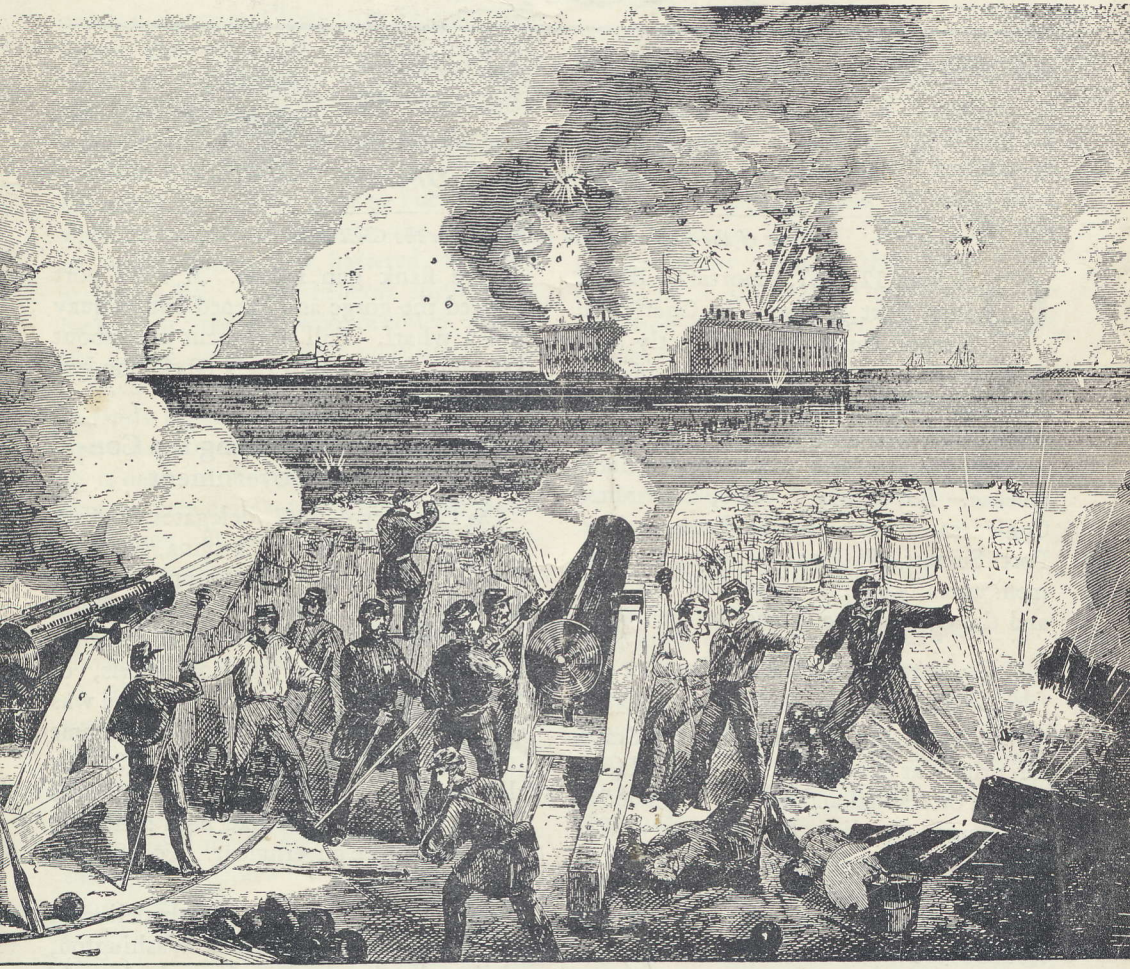
FORT SUMTER

National Monument • South Carolina



NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

FORT SUMTER *National Monument*

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Douglas McKay, *Secretary*

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
Conrad L. Wirth, *Director*

Scene of the bombardment which began the Civil War

ON April 12, 1861, a mortar shell fired from Fort Johnson, in Charleston Harbor, burst almost directly over Fort Sumter, and the tragedy of the American Civil War had begun. Two years later, the fort, now in Confederate control, became the scene of a gallant defense. For nearly 2 years, determined Confederates kept Federal forces at bay. Fort Sumter National Monument commemorates both the "first shot" of 1861 and the Confederate defense of 1863–65.

Construction of Fort Sumter

Fort Sumter is one of a series of coastal fortifications built by the United States after the War of 1812. The five-sided fort, erected on a shoal and bearing the name of the South Carolina Revolutionary War patriot, Thomas Sumter, was started in 1829 and essentially completed by 1860. The 5-foot-thick brick walls towered 48.4 feet above low water to command the main ship channel into Charleston Harbor. Four sides, 170 to 190 feet long, were designed for three tiers of guns; the gorge, designed for officers' quarters, supported guns only on the third tier. Enlisted men's barracks paralleled the parade side of the flank gun rooms. A sally port pierced the gorge and opened onto a quay and a wharf. Full armament was about 135 guns, but by 1861 only 60 cannon had been placed.

Secession and Forming the Confederate Government

On February 4, 1861, delegates from six seceding States—South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana—met at Montgomery, Ala., to form the Confederate government. A constitution was adopted; Jefferson Davis, of Mississippi, was elected President and was inaugurated February 18. Texas came into the Confederacy on March 2. By this time nearly all forts and navy yards in the seceding States had been seized by the Confederate government. Fort Sumter was an exception.

On March 4, Abraham Lincoln delivered his first inaugural address at Washington, stating that he would enforce the laws of the United States and "hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the government." He was referring particularly to the forts and arsenals located in the seceded States.

Major Anderson Moves Garrison From Moultrie to Sumter

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina had been the first State to secede from the Union. During the night of December 26–27, Maj. Robert Anderson moved his small Federal garrison at Fort Moultrie, on the north side of the harbor, to Fort Sumter out in the harbor where they could not be reached by land. Immediately after completing the move, he reported to the War Department that he had about a 4-months' supply of provisions and justified his action by saying, "The step which I have taken was, in my opinion, necessary to prevent the effusion of blood."

Charlestonians immediately occupied Fort Moultrie and started to build batteries elsewhere about the harbor. In March, President Davis issued a call for 15,000 volunteers, and about 5,000 of these, mostly from South Carolina, were placed under the command of Brig. Gen. Pierre G. T. Beauregard to man the defenses of Charleston.

The Fort Sumter Crisis

Meanwhile, in January, President James Buchanan had made an effort to reinforce and supply Fort Sumter. The *Star of the West* sailed from New York, unarmed, to the relief of Sumter, but was fired on as it entered the harbor, January 9, by one of the recently established Confederate shore batteries. The ship turned back for New York. When President Lincoln took office it was apparent that Sumter would have to be supplied very soon or the garrison would have to abandon it for lack of food.

Shortly after taking office, Lincoln ordered supply ships to sail from New York on April 6 for Fort Sumter. At the same time Lincoln sent a message to Governor Pickens of South Carolina notifying him that an attempt was to be made to supply Fort Sumter.

Upon receipt of this message, the Confederate cabinet debated the situation. Despite some disagreement, a telegram was sent to Beauregard at Charleston, on April 10, ordering him to fire on Sumter, if absolutely necessary, to prevent reinforcement.

Shortly after noon, on April 11, a small boat flying a white flag left a wharf at Charleston and made for Sumter. In it were three officers carrying a message from General Beauregard demanding the evacuation of the fort. Anderson refused, but said he would be starved out in a few days anyway. Notified of Anderson's statement, the Confederate government at Montgomery, on April 11, telegraphed to Charleston that if Anderson would say

"The Flag of Sumter, Oct. 20, 1863" painted by Conrad Wise Chapman from sketches made on the spot. Courtesy of The Confederate Museum, Richmond.

when he would evacuate Sumter, Beauregard should not precipitate bloodshed by needlessly bombarding the fort. Confronted with this new request, Anderson replied that he would leave Sumter by noon, April 15, unless, prior to that time, he should receive controlling instructions from Washington or additional supplies. But the relief expedition was expected before the 15th. The Confederate officers rejected this reply and handed Anderson a note at 3:20 a. m., April 12, stating that in 1 hour the Confederate batteries would open fire.

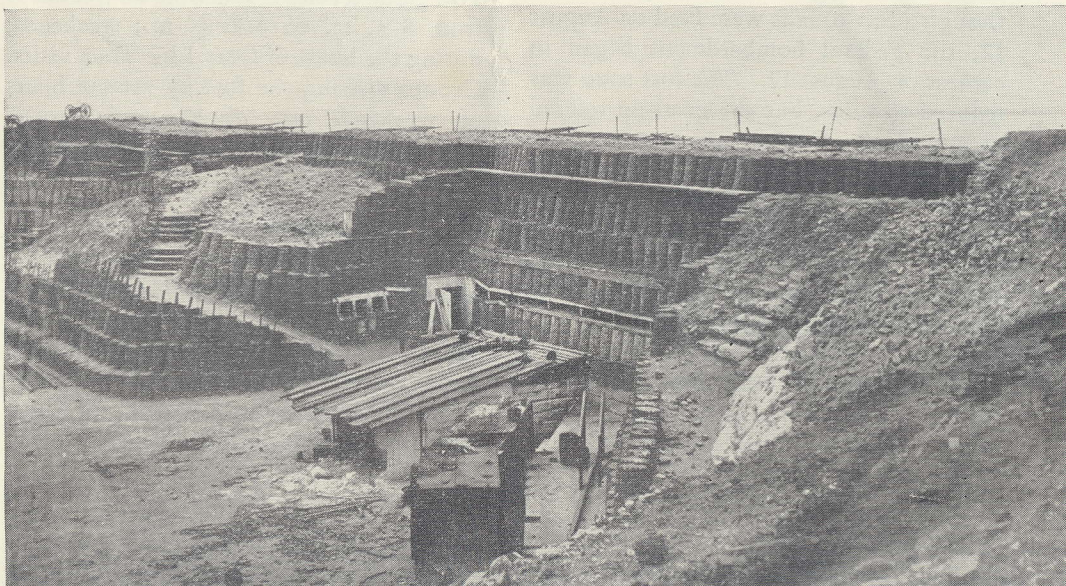
Confederate Batteries Fire on Fort Sumter, April 12, 1861

At 4:30 a. m., a mortar at Fort Johnson fired a shell which burst almost directly over Fort Sumter. This was the signal for opening the bombardment. Within a few moments a gun directed at Fort Sumter was fired from the ironclad battery at Cummings Point by Edmund Ruffin, of Virginia, who had volunteered for the duty. By daybreak, 43 guns from Fort Johnson, Fort Moultrie, and batteries at Cummings Point and elsewhere were firing at the fort. Not till 7 o'clock did the guns at Sumter reply. Ammunition was low and by noon only six guns were kept in action. The men were held to the shelter of the gun rooms and only five were wounded during the bombardment.

Throughout the night the firing continued. The next morning, about 9 o'clock, a hot shot from Moultrie started a fire at Sumter. The smoke issuing from the fort was a signal for intensified Confederate fire. In the early afternoon the flagstaff, hit many times, was shot away. At about 2 p. m., on April 13, an offer of truce was carried to Sumter by Col. Louis Wigfall of Texas. Anderson accepted it, later agreed on the final surrender terms in meetings with General Beauregard's aides, and evacuated the fort on April 14. For 34 hours Sumter had been defended until, as Anderson said in his official report, "the quarters were entirely burned, the main gates destroyed by fire, the gorge walls seriously injured, the magazines surrounded by flames." During the bombardment the Confederates had fired more then 3,000 shells at Sumter.

On April 15, Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers. The Civil War, so long dreaded, had begun. Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina now joined the Confederacy.

The Confederate defenders converted the masonry fort into an earthwork during the siege of 1863–64



The Federal Bombardments of 1863–64

By 1863 the Federal Navy controlled all important Atlantic coastal ports, except Charleston and Wilmington. In 2 months of 1863, 21 Confederate vessels cleared Charleston and 15 came in, escaping the blockade. The North wanted to make its blockade complete and to shut off the South from all outside aid. Rear Admiral S. F. DuPont, accordingly, was ordered to enter Charleston Harbor and secure the surrender of Fort Sumter. Early on the afternoon of April 7, 1863, nine armored vessels steamed slowly into a long battleline and headed for the fort.

In the 2-hour artillery duel between the Federal ships and the guns at Fort Sumter and nearby coastal defenses, the fort had its walls scarred and battered, but the attack failed. Nine Federal ships took part in the attack; 5 were disabled, and 1, the *Keokuk*, sank the next morning.

With the failure of the ironclads, the Federals began a combined land and sea operation to seize Morris Island and from there demolish Fort Sumter. Heavy rifled cannon were emplaced to breach the walls of Sumter. In the meantime, 400 Negro laborers worked day and night in the fort, with bales of cotton and sand, to buttress the walls facing the Federal guns. Although a few rounds were fired on August 12, the Federal bombardment began in earnest on August 17. The fort soon was reduced to ruins, but the garrison refused to surrender. Confederate guns at Fort Moultrie and other points took up the defense of Sumter. A Federal assault failed the night of September 9; 5 boats and 115 men were captured. The bombardment continued intermittently until the end of December when activities stopped for the winter.

The summer of 1864 saw a renewed attempt to take Fort Sumter, but this too failed. Desultory fire against the fort continued through January 1865. For 22 months Fort Sumter had withstood Federal siege and bombardment, and at the end it was stronger defensively than ever. Big Federal guns had hurled 3,500 tons of shells at it, yet the Confederate casualties during this period had been only 52 killed and 267 wounded. Sherman's troops advancing north from Savannah, however, caused the Confederate troops to be withdrawn; and Sumter was evacuated on February 17, 1865.

The Monument

Fort Sumter National Monument was established by an act of Congress on April 28, 1948. The fort, containing 2.4 acres, stands on a shoal at the entrance to Charleston harbor, about 3½ miles from the Charleston Battery. Today, the fort reflects many changes that have taken place in it since 1865, particularly the addition of Spanish-American War Battery Huger.

How to Reach the Monument

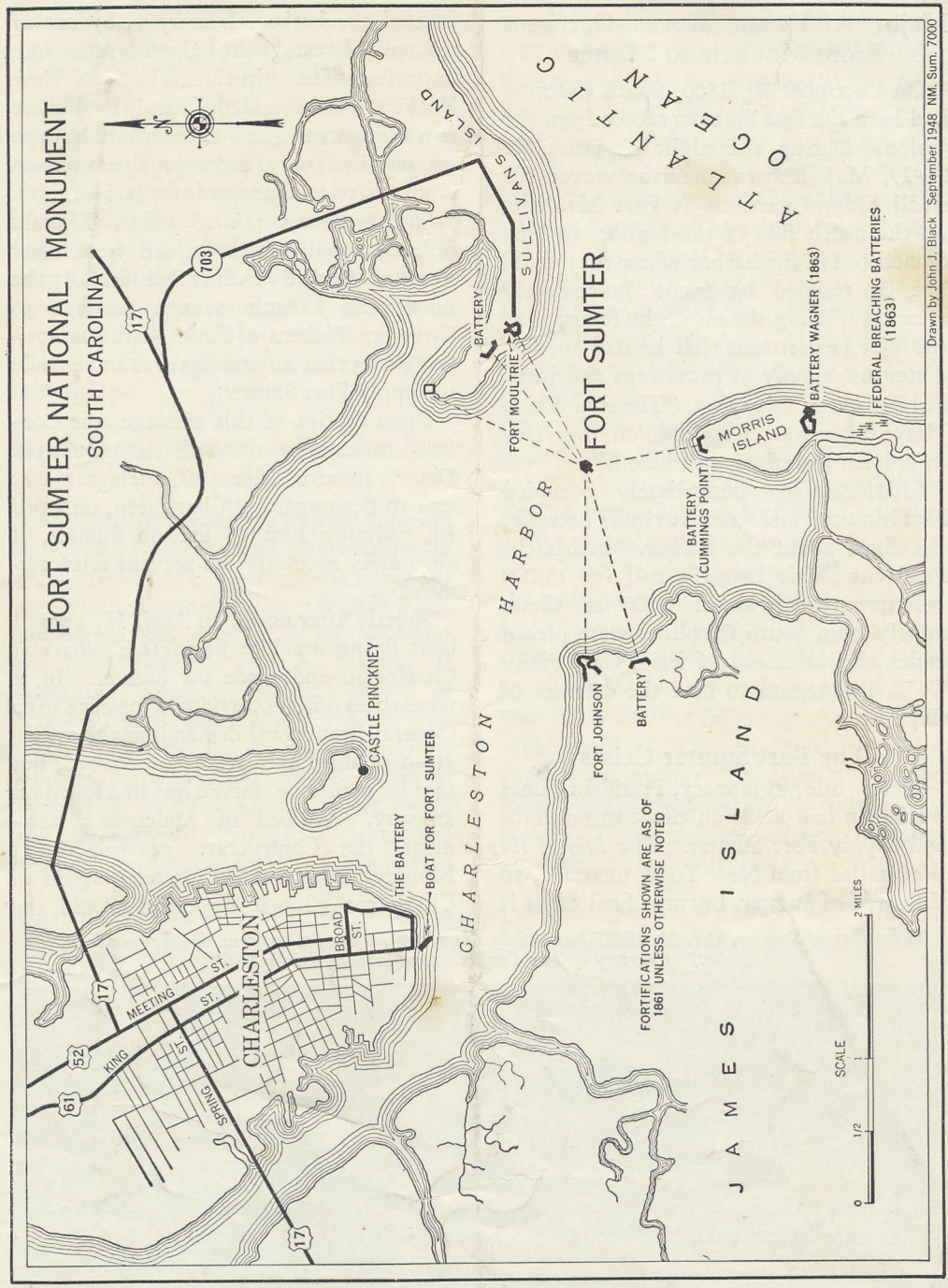
Boats to the fort by Gray Line Tours, Inc., leave Murray Boulevard at the foot of King Street, Charleston, daily at 10 a. m. and 2:30 p. m.

Services to the Public

There is a small museum at the fort. Free guide service is available on weekdays from 8 a. m. to 4:30 p. m.; weekends, during the hours of Gray Line Tour visits. Groups visiting the fort by private boats on weekends may obtain guide service by making advance arrangements with the superintendent.

Administration

Fort Sumter National Monument is administered by the National Park Service of the United States Department of the Interior. Communications should be addressed to the Superintendent, Fort Sumter National Monument, Chamber of Commerce Building, Charleston, S. C.



Cover: *Contemporary artist's conception of the bombardment of Fort Sumter, April 13, 1861. In this sketch the distances are somewhat distorted for the sake of dramatic emphasis.*

The National Park System of which Fort Sumter National Monument is a unit, is dedicated to the conservation of America's scenic, scientific, and historic heritage for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.

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