392/D-189

DECISION AT FORT SUMTER

Prologue

In 1846 Congressman Jefferson Davis of Mississippi presented to the House of Representatives a resolution calling for the replacement of Federal troops in all coastal forts by state militia. The proposal died in committee and shortly thereafter Davis resigned from Congress to lead the red-shirted First Mississippi Rifles to war and glory in Mexico.

G-11

Now it was the morning of April 10, 1861, and Davis was President of the newly proclaimed Confederate States of America. As he met with his cabinet in a Montgomery, Alabama hotel room he had good reason to regret the failure of that resolution of fifteen years ago. For had it passed, he would not have had to make the decision he was about to make: Order Brigadier General P. G. T. Beauregard, commander of Confederate forces at Charleston, South Carolina to demand the surrender of the Federal garrison on Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor.

T-42-3

But before Davis made this decision, other men had made other decisions -- decisions which formed a trail leading to that Montgomery hotel room on the morning of April 10, 1861.

The War Department's Decision

In a sense the first of those decisions went back to 1829 when the War Department dumped tons of granite rubble brought from New England on a sandspit at the mouth of Charleston harbor. On the foundation so formed a fort named after the South Carolina

Revolutionary War hero, Thomas Sumter, was built.

However it was built very slowly, as Congress appropriated the needed money in driblets. Thirty one years later it remained far from finished, without a garrison, and with most of its cannons unmounted. Even so, potentially it was quite formidable. Surrounded by the sea, its five-sided brick walls stood 50 feet high and tapered in thickness from 12 feet at the base to 8½ feet at the top. Adequately manned, gunned, and supplied, it could -- and in fact eventually would -- resist the most powerful assaults.

R-7,133
C-2-4

South Carolina's Decision

Three miles to the northwest across the harbor lay Charleston. Here, on December 20, 1860, a state convention voted unanimously that "the union now subsisting between South Carolina and other States, under the name of 'The United States of America,' is hereby dissolved." During the rest of that day and all through the night jubilant crowds celebrated.

To South Carolinians the election of the "Black Republican" Abraham Lincoln to the Presidency in November had been tantamount to a declaration of war by the North on the South. They had responded by secession, the doctrine so long advocated by their great leader John C. Calhoun, now lying in Charleston's St. Stephen's churchyard beneath a marble monument. Soon, they were confident, the other slave states would join them in forming a glorious Southern Confederacy.

Meanwhile South Carolina would be a nation among nations! For that reason the continued presence of "foreign" United States troops

in the forts which controlled Charleston's harbor was more than irritating -- it was intolerable! They must go!

Hopefully the Federal Government would pull them out. To that end Governor Francis Pickens of South Carolina appointed three commissioners to go to Washington and negotiate the evacuation of the forts. But if they did not leave voluntarily, then they would have to be removed!

That did not appear difficult to accomplish. Hundreds of militia, Citadel cadets, and freelance volunteers were gathering in Charleston, spoiling to fight. In contrast the United States soldiers numbered a scant seventy-five and most of them were in Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island. Designed to repeal sea attack, the fort was practically defenseless on its land side: Overlooking it were high sand dunes from which riflemen could slaughter the garrison. R— 176-81

Anderson's Decision #1

In 1779 Major Richard Anderson gallantly but unsuccessfully defended the original Fort Moultrie against British assault. Eighty-one years later his son, Major Robert Anderson of the First United States Artillery, arrived at the new Fort Moultrie and took command of the Federal troops stationed at Charleston.

Secretary of War John B. Floyd of the lame-duck Buchanan administration personally selected him for the post in November, 1860. Fifty-five, a West Pointer, and twice promoted for bravery in battle, he was an experienced and competent officer -- exactly what was needed at Charleston. Moreover his background should be reassuring

to the Carolinians. As a Kentuckian he qualified as a Southerner, he had owned slaves, and his wife came from an aristocratic Georgia family. Indeed, it is just possible that Floyd, a Virginian, hoped that the major would do what he himself was already doing -- support secession! R:-34-7

If so, Floyd had picked the wrong man. Anderson may have been a Southerner but he was dedicated to "Duty, Honor, Country." Above all he was resolved to do everything in his power consistent with those principles to avoid a clash at Charleston that might plunge the nation into civil war.

That is why Fort Moultrie's vulnerability alarmed him. As early as November 23 he reported to the War Department that the Carolinians have "a settled determination to obtain possession of this work." Since then they had made their determination even more evident. Should they attack, duty would compel him, despite the odds, to resist. And that meant war.

Hence he decided to transfer his troops to Fort Sumter. There they would be much more secure and so would peace. For on being confronted with a target less tempting than Moultrie, presumably the Carolinians would be less bellicose. R: 38-41

To be sure, Floyd had instructed him on December 11 to "avoid any act which would needlessly tend to provoke" the Carolinians. But Floyd had also authorized him to move his command to any of the other two forts in Charleston harbor should he have "tangible evidence of a design to proceed to a hostile act." He ignored a "confidential" letter from Floyd, received December 23, which in effect urged him to surrender the forts rather than "make a vain and useless sacrifice

of your life and the lives of your command upon a mere point of honor." Also he was unaware that on December 10 President Buchanan had informally promised a group of South Carolina congressmen that no change would be made in the military status quo at Charleston.

R: 50, 93-4

C: 38-9

The transfer to Fort Sumter took place December 26-27. Private John Thompson described how it was managed in a letter to his father in Ireland:

> Our Commander set about fortifying himself in Moultrie with such unparalleled vigor that our opponents soon became thoroughly convinced that he intended to make a desperate stand in the position he then held, and the duty of watching us was performed with laxity corresponding to the strength of their conviction. So completely did our Commander keep his own counsel, that none in the garrison /except a few officers/ . . . even dreamed that he contemplated a move. . . .
>
> On the night of the 26th Dec. shortly after sundown, we were formed in heavy marching order and quietly marched out of Moultrie leaving only a few men behind on Guard, and embarking on board a number of small boats . . . were safely landed in Sumter.

L: 418-9

Several schooners carrying food, munitions, medical supplies, and forty-five army wives and children followed the soldiers. In the morning the rearguard also made the crossing after spiking Moultrie's cannons and setting fire to their carriages.

C: 102-8
(F2): 44-6

Pickens Makes A Decision

The column of smoke which arose from Moultrie merely confirmed what had been reported in Charleston by the crew of a harbor patrol boat -- that the Federals had slipped away to Sumter. The Carolinians fumed with anger and chagrin, and Governor Pickens promptly sent Colonel J. Johnston Pettigrew to the fort.

R, 103

Pettigrew accused Anderson of breaking Buchanan's December 10

promise to maintain the existing military situation at Charleston. Anderson replied, truthfully enough, that he knew of no such promise, that he had every right to move to Sumter, and that he had done so to protect his men and prevent bloodshed. "In this controversy between the North and the South," he added, "my sympathies are entirely with the South" -- but his duty came first.

"Well, sir," said Pettigrew with a bow, "however that may be, the Governor of the State directs me to say to you, courteously but peremptorily, to return to Fort Moultrie."

"I cannot and will not go back," answered Anderson.

Pettigrew left. Soon afterwards, at noon, Anderson assembled his troops on Sumter's parade ground. Chaplain Matthias Harris delivered a prayer of thanksgiving, then to the accompaniment of the band playing "Hail Columbia" Anderson personally raised the United States flag, which he had brought from Moultrie, to the top of a pole where it waved above the fort.

In Charleston Pickens, on learning that Anderson refused to return to Moultrie, ordered the state troops to seize that fort, Castle Pinckney, and the Federal arsenal, treasury, custom house, and post office. He believed that he was carrying out justified retaliation against aggression. Instead he committed a bad blunder.

C!108-22
R!106

Buchanan Makes A Decision

Buchanan would retain the constitutional powers of the Presidency until March 4, 1861. However he no longer possessed its moral and political authority, he was old and tired, and his overriding desire was to finish out his term in peace - and with the

nation still at peace.

To that end he sought to appease the South and thus prevent war. The North, he declared, was to blame for the sectional crisis. Secession, he announced, was unconstitutional -- but so would be any attempt of the Federal Government to resist it by "coercion." He refused to reinforce the tiny garrison at Charleston and even ordered it to return muskets and ammunition it had drawn from its own arsenal! This was in keeping with his December 10 promise to the South Carolina congressmen which, along with the instructions sent Anderson, he hoped would keep the Charleston powder keg from exploding.

P: 142-6
R: 20-1

On December 26 the three commissioners appointed by Pickens to negotiate the evacuation of the Charleston forts arrived in Washington. William Trescot, a South Carolinian who was acting as an intermediary, informed Buchanan of their arrival and purpose. Buchanan replied that he would see them "as private gentlemen" and that he would submit to Congress their proposal that the forts and other Federal facilities in Charleton be turned over to South Carolina in exchange for a fair monetary compensation.

The following morning the commissioners were discussing matters in the mansion Trescot had rented for them when a burly, bearded man came slamming through the door. He was Senator Louis T. Wigfall of Texas, a native South Carolinian and fanatical secessionist. A telegram, he announced, had just arrived from Charleston: Anderson had spiked his guns at Moultrie and moved his troops to Sumter!

The commissioners refused to believe it. So did Secretary of War Floyd, who also showed up. "It is impossible!" he said. Then

came another telegram from Charleston confirming the first.

Trescot, accompanied by two top Southern leaders, Senator Jefferson Davis of Mississippi and Robert M. T. Hunter of Virginia, hastened to the White House. Davis told the President the news from Charleston. Buchanan was dumbfounded. "I call God to witness," he exclaimed, "this is not only without but against my orders. It is against my policy."

The Southerners urged him to order Anderson back to Moultrie. Otherwise, they warned, South Carolina almost surely would seize the other forts, attack Sumter, and begin civil war. But he refused to do so until he consulted his cabinet.

At the cabinet meeting Floyd charged that Anderson had disobeyed orders. Secretary of State Jeremiah Black, a Pennsylvanian, disagreed. To settle the issue, Buchanan and his secretaries examined a copy of Anderson's December 11 instructions. There it was, the authorization to leave Moultrie "whenever you have tangible evidence of a design to proceed to a hostile act." Obviously what constituted "tangible evidence" had to be determined by Anderson and he had so determined.

Nevertheless Floyd (who had been asked several days previously by Buchanan to resign for having misappropriated $870,000 of government funds) insisted that Anderson be ordered back to Moultrie. Unless this was done, he argued, Buchanan would be guilty of breaking his "pledge" to the South Carolina congressmen.

Attorney General Edwin Stanton, backed by the other Northern cabinet members, took a different view. "A President of the United States who would make such an order," he asserted, "would be guilty of treason."

"Oh, no. not so bad as that, my friend!" cried Buchanan in dismay. "Not so bad as that!"

R: 169-16
C: 740-6
150-1

The cabinet meeting ended without a decision. Several days later Floyd finally resigned. Eventually as commander of Confederate forces at Fort Donelson he would render great service -- to the Union cause.

On December 28 the South Carolina commissioners visited the White House. They demanded that Anderson's troops be removed from Charleston harbor, "as they are a standing menace which renders negotiations impossible and threatens a bloody issue." They also pressed for an immediate reply to this ultimatum.

Again Buchanan refused to commit himself: "You don't give me time to consider; you don't give me time to say my prayers. I always say my prayers when required to act upon any great state affair."

As Trescot shrewdly noted, Buchanan had "a fixed purpose to be undecided." Yet he could not avoid making a decision much longer. What would it be?

His impulse was to grant the Carolinians their demand: Anything to forestall war. But he felt countervailing pressures. The North cheered Anderson's action and hailed the pro-Southern major as a hero. To repudiate what he had done by ordering him to evacuate Sumter would raise a storm that might result in impeachment! Moreover Black, a close friend, declared that he would resign if the Sumter garrison was pulled out -- and undoubtedly the other Northern cabinet members would follow suit.

What tipped the balance, however, was Pickens' seizure of Moultrie, Pinckney, and the other Federal instalations in Charleston.

This was, Black pointed out, an act of aggression which could not be justified. It was also something which could not be ignored by a President of the United States without violating his oath of office.

Hence on December 30 Buchanan sent a reply, drafted by Black, to the South Carolina commissioners. After referring to the "armed action" taken by South Carolina against Federal property in Charleston, Buchanan stated: "It is under . . . these circumstances that I am urged immediately to withdraw the troops from the harbor of Charleston, and am informed that without this, negotiation is impossible. This I cannot do: This I will not do." Instead, Sumter would be defended, and "I do not perceive how such a defense can be construed into a menace of the city of Charleston."

Having thus decided, Buchanan next gave the commanding general of the army, Winfield Scott, the go ahead on a plan proposed by him earlier: Send the warship Brooklyn with supplies and 250 troops from Fortress Monroe in Virginia to reinforce Sumter.

C: 146-161, 170-5
R: 116-21.

Anderson's Decision #2

On Sumter Anderson's soldiers and forty-some loyal civilian workers busily prepared to resist attack, which they expected at any time. They had a lot to do. Although the fort contained 66 cannons, only 15 had been mounted prior to their arrival. Forty-one unfinished embrasures resulted in as many eight-foot square holes in the ramparts. There was plenty of powder and shot, but it lay scattered about the parade ground amidst piles of bricks and sand. Means for repelling a landing on the wharf, which lay outside the wooden gate on the south or gorge wall, were practically non-existent.

C: 131
(F): 78

Fortunately for the garrison, the Carolinians thought the fort impregnable. "Twenty-five well-drilled men could hold it against all Charleston," warned the Charleston Courier on December 31. "Its batteries could level Fort Moultrie to the ground in a few hours, and shell the city effectively. . . ." Besides, they were confident that Buchanan would evacuate the fort, thus making an attack unnecessary. R: 134

Hence they concentrated on building up their own defenses. They removed the soft iron nails with which the Federals, for lack of anything better, had spiked Moultrie's cannons, then remounted the big guns on new carriages. At the same time they constructed a battery on the east shore of Morris Island parallel to Charleston harbor's main channel. Hundreds of black slaves and white volunteers did the work. Among the latter was sixty-seven year old Edmund Ruffin of Virginia. For years he had dreamed and preached secession. Now he had come to Charleston to "commit a little treason." R: 137, 139

While the Carolinians labored, so did the garrison. By early January Anderson was able to report to the War Department that he could "hold this fort against any force which can be brought against me," and that therefore the government could reinforce him "at its leisure." C: 126-30.

Which was exactly what the government was doing. First Buchanan postponed sending the Brooklyn to Sumter until the South Carolina commissioners replied to his rejection of their ultimatum. Then General Scott had some second thoughts -- he feared that the deep-drafted Brooklyn would have trouble crossing the bar of Charleston harbor and that Virginia secessionists might sieze Fortress Monroe

if its garrison was reduced. So with Buchanan's approval he arranged to charter the unarmed paddle wheeler Star of the West at New York, where several days were consumed loading her with supplies and two hundred troops. He and Buchanan also hoped that a vessel of this type would be less provocative to the Carolinians than a warship.

Because of this shilly-shallying the relief expedition did not set forth until January 5. Worse, not until that date either did the War Department get around to dispatching a letter to Anderson informing him that the Star of the West was on the way with reinforcements and instructing him to aid the ship if she were attacked. Furthermore, instead of sending this vital message by special courier, it entrusted it to the regular mail, apparently oblivious to the possibility that the South Carolina authorities might be intercepting all letters to Sumter -- which in fact they had been doing for a week. C! 170-6

Consequently Anderson and his men remained unaware that a relief expedition was on the way. Which meant that they were about the only ones in the Charleston area who did not know. Despite efforts by Buchanan and Scott to keep the Star of the West's voyage secret, Southern sympathizers in Washington and New York provided ample advance warning. Panic gripped Charleston and the South Carolina forces frantically prepared to beat back the Yankee ship when it appeared. However their commander openly doubted that his ill-trained artillerists could hit a fast-moving steamer and predicted that Sumter's guns would blast Moultrie off the face of the earth. R! 130, 138-9

At dawn, January 9, the Star of the West, with two hundred soldiers below deck, entered Charleston's main channel. When she was two miles from Sumter the Morris Island battery, which had been

alerted by a patrol boat, opened fire. George Haynesworth, a Citadel cadet, touched off the first cannon. He missed. So did most of the other rounds from the battery's two cannons. Soon the Star of the West passed by, having suffered only minor damage.

From the rampart of Sumter, Anderson watched the approaching ship through a spyglass. The normally calm major appeared "excited and uncertain what to do." He could see that the Carolinians were shooting at an unarmed vessel flying the United States flag and yesterday he had read in the Charleston Mercury that the Star of the West was heading for Sumter with reinforcements. However that rapidly secessionist paper was notoriously unreliable and in any event he had no official information or instructions concerning the ship. Besides, the Morris Island battery was beyond the reach of Sumter's guns.

Then the Star of the West came within range of Fort Moultrie, which opened up on her. Anderson's gunners eagerly expected his order to return the fire. However one of his officers, Lieutenant Richard K. Meade of Virginia, pleaded with him not to give the order: "It will bring civil war on us." In contrast, Captain Abner Doubleday, the New York-born "inventor of baseball," stamped his feet in frustration and a soldier's wife attempted by herself to fire a cannon aimed at Moultrie!

Meanwhile shot and shell rained about the Star of the West and an armed schooner approached her. Concluding that he could expect no assistance from Sumter, and fearful of sinking or capture, the Star of the West's captain turned his ship about and headed back to sea.

On seeing the ship retreat, Anderson decided not to fire on Moultrie. Instinct and training urged him to do so, and he felt humiliated at not doing so. But while there remained the slightest chance of peace he would not strike the blow that could lead only to war.

C: 183-8
32:144-9

The North Makes A Non-Decision

By all precedents of law and history the Federal Government would have been justified in enploying the full power of its armed forces against South Carolina for having fired on the Star of the West.

It did nothing of the kind, nor did Buchanan even consider such action. First of all the armed forces of the United States were not very powerful. To be sure, the navy probably could have bombarded Charleston in retaliation, but the bulk of the army was scattered throughout the West, barely holding its own against the Indians. More importantly, the free states were not ready for a showdown over secession. Most Northerners hoped for, even expected, another great sectional compromise as in 1820, 1833, and 1850. Many of them believed that South Carolina was just throwing a tantrum, that the talk of a Southern Confederacy was merely a bluff designed to extract concessions. Others, mainly Democrats, sympathized with the Southerners, whom they viewed as defending themselves against Republican radicalism. Thus Democratic congressman John Logan of Illinois compared the Dixie secessionists to the patriots of the Revolution! At the opposite ideological extreme, such prominent abolitionists as William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Charles

Sumner, and Horace Greeley expressed a willingness to "let the erring sisters go in peace." That way the United States would rid itself of the sin of slavery!

Hence, as a disgusted New Yorker who favored retaliation against South Carolina wrote in his diary, "The nation pockets this insult to the national flag, a calm, dishonorable, vile submission." R: 160-1

Adam Slemmer Makes A Decision

The attempt to reinforce Sumter incensed the Southern secessionists, who saw it as "coercion." At the same time the repulse of the Star of the West and the failure of the North to react to it made them all the more confident that the money-grubbing Yankees would not dare fight to keep the South in the Union. Senator Judah P. Benjamin of Louisiana sneered that the Federal Government in effect had relinquished all claim to sovereignty. Jefferson Davis met with other Cotton State Senators in Washington to plan a convention at Montgomery, Alabama for the establishment of an independent confederacy. During January R; 161-4 Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana seceded and Texas prepared to do the same.

As these states pulled out, their militia took over Federal arsenals, forts, custom houses, and post offices. Nowhere did they encounter resistance. Thus on January 12 semi-senile Commodore James Armstrong surrendered the Pensacola Navy Yard to Florida and Alabama troops. However two days before First Lieutenant Adam Slemmer, anticipating such an eventuality, transferred 46 soldiers and 30 sailors from nearby Fort Barrancas to powerful Fort Pickens on Santa Rosa Island in Pensacola Bay.

Following the seizure of the naval yard, representatives of the Governors of Florida and Alabama demanded the surrender of Fort Pickens (which was named after the grandfather of the South Carolina Governor!). Slemmer replied, "I am here by authority of the President of the United States, and I do not recognize the authority of any governor to demand the surrender of United States property -- a governor is nobody here."

Thanks to Slemmer's initiative, the Federal Government now held another fort off the coast of a seceded state. Like Sumter it was too strong for the secessionists to seize immediately, but unlike the Charleston fort its location made reinforcement easy.

1: 26-9
R: 167, 199

Anderson and Pickens Make A Decision

Anderson had refrained from blasting Fort Moultrie. Nevertheless he was angered by the firing on the United States flag. As soon as the Star of the West steamed out of sight he dispatched a note to Governor Pickens. In it he threatened to close Charleston harbor -- which he could readily do -- unless Pickens disavowed the attack on the ship as having been made without his "sanction or authority."

Pickens answered that the attempt to reinforce Sumter was a deliberate act of hostility, and that to close the harbor would be to impose on South Carolina "the condition of a conquered province" -- something it would resist. In effect he countered Anderson's threat with a threat of his own: All out war.

Since this is what Anderson hoped to avoid, he agreed in subsequent negotiations to a de facto truce while one of his officers, Lieutenant Theodore Talbot, went to Washington for

instructions. For his part Perkins allowed mail to enter Sumter and the women and children to leave it. Moreover the garrison could purchase bread, meat, and vegetables (but not flour) in Charleston, and a South Carolina officer sent over several cases of claret. C: 188-204 R: 149-59

Notwithstanding these friendly gestures, Pickens was anxious to attack Sumter. Two factors restrained him. First, a number of other Southern leaders cautioned him that precipitate action at Charleston might produce war before a confederacy could be organized. Thus Jefferson Davis wrote him on January 20 that the "little garrison" at Sumter "presses on nothing but a point of pride . . . you can well aford to stand still . . . and if things continue as they are for a month, we shall then be in a condition to speak with a voice that all must hear and heed. . . ." C: 263-6 R: 166

The other and more basic factor was that Pickens lacked the means to assault Sumter successfully. Time was needed to furnish these means, the truce supplied the time, and the governor made the most of it. At his orders four hulks crammed with stones were sunk in the main channel in order to block future relief ships (the tide however soon swept them away). Working day and night, militiamen and slaves added more guns to Moultrie, strengthened the "Star of the West Battery," established an "Iron Battery" on Cumming's Point due south of Sumter, rebuilt Fort Johnson on James Island, implanted additional cannons at various other places, and constructed an ironclad "Floating Battery." C: 208-11.

The garrison watched as the "enemy" surrounded Sumter with a circle of fire. Captain Doubleday, who was second in command, proposed to Anderson that he tell the Carolinians to cease work, and

that if they refused, to level their still-vulnerable fortifications. But the major rejected his advice. Even had he been willing personally to accept it he could not. His orders from the new Secretary of War, Joseph Holt, echoed those from Floyd: He was to "act strictly on the defensive." (F1);

Furthermore the Carolinians represented no immediate or direct danger to the fort. By January 21 the garrison had fifty-one guns in position, among them two ten-inchers planted in the parade ground as mortars. Also the soldiers and the two dozen remaining civilian workers had closed the open embrasures and prepared a variety of devices calculated to inflict ghastly casualties on storming parties. Some cannoneers, experimenting with one of the ten-inchers, discovered that Charleston itself could be bombarded: Using only a small powder charge, they splashed a cannon ball near the city's waterfront.

What worried Anderson -- and all of his men -- was the long-range prospect. Despite purchases in Charleston, food stocks were dwindling steadily. At the same time the ever-increasing strength of the Carolina batteries, Anderson notified the War Department, "will make it impossible for any /relief expedition/ other than a large and well-equipped one, to enter this harbor. . . ." In short, unless relieved or evacuated soon, the garrison would starve. C: 203, 210-11, 289-9; B: 53-60

Buchanan Makes Another Decision

Buchanan realized Anderson's predicatment. But after the Star of the West fiasco he returned to his basic policy of appeasing the South -- which probably was for the best, given the fragmented

and fluctuating state of public opinion in the North.

Hence when Lieutenant Talbot returned from Washington to Sumter on January 19, he brought instructions from Secretary of War Holt which boiled down to this: The government did not "at present" intend to reinforce or supply the fort. An "attempt to do so would, no doubt, be attended by a collision of arms and the effusion of blood -- a national calamity which the President is most anxious, if possible, to avoid. . . ." But if Anderson decided he needed more troops and supplies, he was to inform the War Department at once, "and a prompt and vigorous effort will be made to forward them."

In other words, the peace-seeking major was asked to decide whether there would be war.

It was a decision that he was not prepared to make.

C: 204-5
R: 175-8

Buchanan Makes Yet Another Decision

At about the same time that Talbot reported back to Sumter, Buchanan agreed to let General Scott send the Brooklyn with a company of regulars for Fort Pickens. As already noted, the Florida fort differed from Sumter in that there was no way the secessionists could block access to it, thus there was little risk of an armed clash. Meanwhile three other United States warships took station in Pensacola Bay.

Former United States Senator Stephen R. Mallory of Florida, soon to be the highly competent Confederate Secretary of the Navy, assessed the situation at Pensacola and found it inauspicious. Therefore, through Washington intermediaries, he proposed a deal: If the Federal Government promised not to reinforce Fort Pickens

or try to retake the naval yard, he pledged that no attack would be made on Slemmer's garrison. Buchanan agreed to this de facto truce, even though it meant that the government was refraining from doing what it could do easily whereas the secessionists merely promised not to do what they were incapable of doing successfully. When the Brooklyn arrived, February 9, it landed supplies but not troops at Fort Pickens, then joined the other Federal ships nearby. As for the secessionists, they stepped up their preparations for an attack on the fort.

R: 198-9
N: 6-7

President Davis' First Decision

On February 18, 1861 the sun shone brightly over Montgomery, Alabama. Jefferson Davis, standing on the portico of the state capitol took the oath of office as the first President of the Confederate States of America.

So far, however, the Confederacy consisted on only seven states, all from the Lower South. The Upper South (Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas) and the slaveholding Border States (Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri) remained outside the fold. Even worse, a foreign flag, that of the United States, waved over forts in two of the Confederacy's main ports, flouting its claim to independence.

Davis pondered the situation, decided what had to be done, then did it. Late in February he dispatched three commissioners -- Martin J. Crawford, John Forsyth, and A. B. Roman -- to Washington. He instructed them to seek recognition of the Confederate States by the United States and to settle "all questions of disagreement

between the two governments" -- that is, induce the Federal Government to evacuate Sumter and Pickens.

Next, early in March, he sent Brigadier General P.G.T. Beaugegard to Charleston and Brigadier General Braxton Bragg to Pensacola. Both had the same orders: As rapidly as possible make all preparations necessary to take, respectively, Fort Sumter and Fort Pickens.

R: 217-20
N: 8-9

Davis hoped that Crawford, Forsyth, and Roman would succeed in persuading Washington to let the South and the two forts go in peace. But if they failed, then time would have been gained for the Confederacy to acquire the means to assert its independence and take the forts by war. Either way, peace of war, the result would be the same: The establishment of a great new nation embracing all of the slave states.

President Lincoln Announces A Decision

March 4, 1861 was dreary and chilly in Washington, D. C. Standing on a wooden platform in front of the domeless Capital, Abraham Lincoln donned his steel-rimmed spectacles and began reading his inaugural address. The crowd listened intently. Since being elected nearly five months ago he had not given the slightest public clue as to what he proposed to do about secession in general and Forts Sumter and Pickens in particular. Now, surely, he would announce his decision on these matters.

He did so. Secession, he said in essence, was unconstitutional and unjustifiable. The seceded states remained in the Union. He would not send troops into any state nor interfere with slavery. But he would "hold, occupy, and possess" those places in the South

still under Federal control -- e.g., Sumter and Pickens. Should they be attacked, they would be defended.

"In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen of the South, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to 'preserve, protect, and defend' it."

D:36-41

Lincoln thereupon took that oath.

Lincoln Postpones One Decision But Makes Another

The next morning Joseph Holt, who was remaining on as Secretary of War until Simon Cameron arrived in Washington to take over, handed Lincoln a letter from Major Anderson which had arrived on Inauguration Day. It stated that the Sumter garrison had only forty days food left and that the Confederate batteries at Charleston were now so formidable that to reinforce and supply the fort would require "twenty thousand good and disciplined men" in order to succeed.

Lincoln was dismayed. His declared intention to "hold, occupy, and possess" the forts was threatened with becoming so many hollow words, at least as it applied to the most important fort of all. Anderson's communication also implied strongly that he believed that his garrison should be evacuated -- that indeed there was no alternative.

Did Holt, asked Lincoln anxiously, have any reasons to suspect Anderson's loyalty? None replied Holt. Had there been any previous indication from the major that he was in such a precarious plight?

Again Holt said no. Which was not quite accurate. During February Anderson had kept the War Department fully informed about the increasing power of the Confederate armaments at Charleston and the decreasing level of his food reserves. What he had not done was to state explicitly, in accordance with his January 19 instructions from Holt, that he needed supplies and reinforcements. He knew that to do so would result in another relief expedition which in turn would lead to war.

Faced with this unexpected crisis on his first day in office, Lincoln asked General Scott's advice. That night Scott gave it: "I see no alternative but a surrender, in some weeks." He also informed Lincoln of the Buchanan - Mallory "truce" with respect to Fort Pickens -- another disturbing bit of news.

Scott's opinions on military matters carried great weight -- as much as the general himself did, which was three hundred pounds! Nevertheless Lincoln, the one-time militia captain, was unwilling to give up on Sumter without further consideration. Therefore he directed Scott to make a thorough study of the problem of relieving the fort.

On March 11 "Old Fuss and Feathers" reported: To "supply and re-enforce" Sumter would require such a large force of warships, transports, and troops that it would take six to eight months to assemble it! Thus, "As a practical military question the time for succoring Sumter . . . passed away nearly a month ago. Since then a surrender under assault or from starvation has been merely a question of time."

But even this did not convince Lincoln that Sumter was doomed.

There must be some way of relieving it, or at least some alternative to meek surrender. In any case, there was one thing that could be done to affirm his determination to retain possession of the surviving Federal ouposts in the seceded states: Reinforce Fort Pickens. To be sure, there was the Buchanan - Mallory truce, but he did not consider himself bound by it, and obviously the Confederates were taking advantage of it to prepare an attack on the fort. Hence he instructed Scott to order the commander of the troops aboard the Brooklyn, Captain Israel Vogdes, to land them as soon as possible and hold Pickens at any cost. Scott sent the order to Vogdes the following day, March 12.

D: 43-51

Seward Makes A Decision

William Henry Seward was the new Secretary of State. He believed he should be President. As a Senator from New York he had been playing a leading role in national affairs while Lincoln was just a country lawyer in Illinois. Only bad luck had prevented him from getting what rightfully should have been his, the Republican nomination in 1860.

But if he could not be President in name he proposed to be so in fact. Twice before he had been the power behind the White House throne -- first with William Henry Harrison, then with Zachary Taylor. There should be no difficulty in establishing the same sort of domination over Lincoln. Already the Illinoisan was revealing his inexperience and incompetence by his his hesitation over what to do about Sumter.

Seward knew what do do: Evacuate the fort immediately. Indeed,

do everything possible to avoid an armed showdown with the secessionists. For he was convinced -- utterly convinced -- that the majority of Southerners remained in their hearts loyal to the Union, and that sooner or later their latent patriotism would assert itself, thereby setting the stage for North-South reconciliation. On the other hand, for the Federal Government to employ force against the Confederates, or even threaten to do so, would only intensify and spread the secessionist distemper and result ultimately in civil war.

From the vantage point of historical hindsight it is easy to condemn "Seward's Folly" in underestimating Lincoln and overestimating Southern Unionism. But it should be remembered that few people sensed Lincoln's greatness in the spring of 1861, and that Seward himself was among the first to recognize it. Also it should be pointed out that some of the seven original Confederate states approved secession by very narrow margins, that the other slave states either rejected it or refused even to consider it prior to the actual outbreak of hostilities, and that many knowledgeable people in the South as well as the North shared Seward's belief that the secessionist fever would ultimately burn itself out. Indeed Lincoln himself hoped that the South's love of Union would prevail over its hatred of the North, and had sought to appeal to this in his inaugural address.

Nevertheless the fact remains that Seward's unrealistic view of Lincoln's ability and of Southern attitudes caused him to pursue a course that was morally dubious and nearly disastrous for the Union cause.

First, via pro-Southern ex-Senator William Gwinn of California,

he assured Confederate commissioner Crawford, now in Washington, that Lincoln's announced intention to "hold, occupy, and possess" the forts actually meant only "so far as practicable." Next he implied to Crawford and another of the commissioners (again through Gwinn) that the evacuation of Sumter was being delayed only by "the difficulties and confusion incident to a new administration." At the same time he told his good friend James Harvey, Washington correspondent of the New York Tribune, that the government had decided to withdraw Anderson. ~~As he no doubt anticipated, Harvey, Washington correspondent of the New York Tribune, that the government had decided to withdraw Anderson.~~ As he no doubt anticipated, Harvey, who was a native of South Carolina, telegraphed this intelligence to Charleston on March 11 -- the same day that Scott, who also had close personal ties to Seward, reported to Lincoln that it was ~~practically~~ impossible to relieve Sumter.

Seward said and did these things without Lincoln's knowledge, much less approval. But he believed that sooner or later the "President" would abandon Sumter. He would have no other choice.

D: 21-5, 52-4
O: 21-2
R: 226-32

Lincoln Ponders A Decision

There was another choice! So declared Postmaster General Montgomery Blair. When, on March 11, Lincoln informed him and the other cabinet members that Scott had stated that Sumter could not be relieved and so must be evacuated, he telegraphed his brother-in-law Gustavus Vasa Fox in Massachusetts to come to Washington immediately.

Blair was more than just a Postmaster General -- the lowest

ranking cabinet post. His father Frank Blair had been Andrew Jackson's right hand man, his brother Frank, Jr. was a congressman from Missouri. Together the three Blairs constituted the most politically influential family in America.

Nor was Gustavus Fox an ordinary brother-in-law. Thirty-nine and an Annapolis graduate, he had served with distinction in the navy before entering the textile business. Back in February he had submitted a scheme for relieving Sumter to Scott. Now on the morning of March 13 he arrived at the White House, accompanied by Montgomery Blair, to present it to Lincoln.

Organize, he said, an expedition of two warships, a transport, and three tugboats. When it arrived outside Charleston harbor, transfer troops and supplies from the transport to the tugs, then at night run the tugs into Sumter. Darkness would protect them from the Confederate shore batteries, the warships from naval attack. It all could be done within a few days and Fox would be proud to command the operation.

Here was an alternative to the impossibly large force of ships and soldiers deemed necessary by Anderson and Scott. But would it work? And would it not put the Federal Government in the role of the aggressor? As Lincoln had declared in his inaugural, if war came, it would have to be by an act of the South.

On March 14 Lincoln informed his cabinet of Fox's plan, then the following day asked each member to give a written answer to the question: "Assuming it to be possible to now provision Fort Sumter, under all the circumstances is it wise to attempt it?"

Later in the day Seward promised Supreme Court Justice John A.

Campbell, a Virginian who had replaced Gwinn as his go-between with the Confederate commissioners, that Sumter would be evacuated in three days. Exactly three days later the cabinet members submitted their replies to Lincoln's question. Five of them -- Seward, Secretary of War Cameron, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Interior Caleb Smith, and Attorney-General Edward Bates -- advised withdrawing the garrison. Only Blair and Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase favored making an effort to maintain it -- and the latter did so with many qualifications.

Obviously Seward had expected this outcome -- thus his promise to Campbell. But, to his dismay, Lincoln still refused to order an evacuation. Instead he adopted a suggestion from Blair and sent Fox to Sumter for an on-the-spot investigation. Also he had two of his Illinois friends, Stephen Hurlbut and Ward Hill Lamon, go to South Carolina to sound out Unionist sentiment.

While Lincoln's three agents were away, Davis' three commissioners repeatedly asked Seward (via Campbell) when the promised evacuation of Sumter would occur. Seward repeatedly assured them that it was just a matter of time. The commissioners hoped, but did not fully believe, that what he said would prove true. In any case, for the time being it did not make much difference. Davis had instructed them to "play with Seward" -- that is, hint to him that the seceded states would voluntarily return to the Union if the Federal Government gave certain guarantees regarding slavery. That way additional time would be gained for the Confederacy to arm.

On March 25 Fox returned to Washington and reported to Lincoln. During a quick visit to Sumter Anderson had told him that relief

from the sea was impossible. However after studying the situation himself he was more confident than ever that his plan was feasible. Anderson had also stated that by putting his men on short rations he could hold out longer than previously estimated. Possibly because he distrusted the major's loyalty, he made no arrangements with Anderson for supplying or reinforcing the fort, nor did he reveal his plan for doing so.

Two days later Lamon and Hurlbut likewise came back from Charleston. The former had accomplished worse than nothing. Having been led by Seward to believe that Lincoln intended to evacuate Sumter, he had not only told Governor Pickens that, but also Anderson! Hurlbut, on the other hand, brought valuable information. A native of South Carolina, he had talked with many intelligent and informed people there. All agreed that Unionism in the Lower South was as good as dead. Furthermore, even "moderates" in South Carolina would approve resisting any attempt to provision Sumter.

D: 56-75
R: 232-41
246-50
O: 47-54

Lincoln Makes His Decision

Throughout the night of March 28 Lincoln lay in bed sleepless, his mind churning. A decision on Sumter could not be postponed any longer -- in two, at most three, weeks the garrison would be starving. But what should it be? An attempt to supply the fort would certainly result in war and probably the secession of most, perhaps all, the slave states still in the Union. On the other hand evacuation would discredit him, undermine the already sagging authority of the Federal Government, demoralize the North, and increase the prestige and strength of the Confederacy. Moreover it would not settle anything.

The crisis would merely be transferred to Fort Pickens or to some other issue.

When Lincoln got up in the morning he felt "in the dumps" -- but he had made his decision. That afternoon he proposed it to his cabinet: A relief expedition to Sumter. However Governor Pickens would be informed that it was on the way and that if it met no resistance, supplies only would be landed. Otherwise -- troops as well as provisions would be sent into the fort under the cover of cannon fire.

Every member of the cabinet approved except Seward. And even he based his opposition on the grounds that it would be better to have the war start at Pickens than Sumter. His stated reason for so contending were deficient both in logic and sincerity. D: 78-81

Lincoln Implements His Decision: Phase One

Having made his decision, Lincoln proceeded to implement it. He ordered the Navy Department to assemble ships and the War Department three hundred troops and supplies at New York, then sent Fox there to take charge.

Seward, however, was far from abandoning his effort to impose his leadership and policy on Lincoln. On the eventing of March 29 he went to the White House accompanied by Captain Montgomery C. Meigs of the Army Corps of Engineers for the purpose of discussing the situation at Fort Pickens. Two days earlier Lincoln had learned from a newspaper report that the Brooklyn, which he had sent to reinforce Pickens early in March, had showed up at Key West (which the Union also retained) with troops still aboard. Obviously, as

—— Lincoln put it, the Pickens expedition had "fizzled out." Would Meigs, he asked, prepare a plan for relieving and holding the fort?

Meigs said he would and left to do so. Seward was pleased. Hopefully now Lincoln would call off the Sumter expedition in order to concentrate on holding Pickens. In addition, Seward influenced certain New York businessmen to withhold the assistance needed by Fox to acquire ships and supplies!

On March 31 Meigs presented his Pickens plan to Lincoln, who approved it and instructed Scott that "he wished this thing done and not to let it fail." He adopted this peremptory tone toward the ancient general because several days before Scott had shocked him with a proposal to evacuate the Florida fort as well as Sumter! D! 82-C.

Some April Fool's Day Decisions

On April 1 confirmation that the order to reinforce Pickens had not been executed reached Lincoln in a letter from Captain Vodges, commander of the troops on the Brooklyn. Vogdes neglected to explain this failure, but did speak of "uncertain" communications with Washington and warned that the Confederates might attack Pickens "without a moment's notice."

This alarming news hastened preparations for the Pickens expedition. All through the day Meigs and Navy Lieutenant David D. Porter sat in a White House office drawing up orders for Lincoln to sign. Seward, who so to speak was sponsoring the expedition, personally handed many of the orders to Lincoln. One of them was a telegram to the New York Naval Yard to "Fit out Powhatan to go to sea at the earliest possible moment." Meigs and Porter planned to

use this warship to support the landing of men and stores at Pickens.

Pickens, however, was not the only thing on Seward's mind that day. There was still Sumter. On March 30 he had promised Justice Campbell that on April 1 he would give him definite word about the government's intentions concerning that fort to pass on to the Confederate commissioners. Now Campbell came to Seward for that word.

Seward excused himself, visited Lincoln, then returned and wrote a message to be delivered in Campbell's name to the commissioners: "I am satisfied the government will not undertake to supply Fort Sumter without giving notice to Governor Pickens."

Campbell protested that this was a betrayal of Seward's oft-repeated promises, which Campbell had personally guaranteed, that Sumter would be evacuated. Seward, however, somehow persuaded him that this was not so, with the incredible result that Campbell reported to the commissioners that Seward's promise still held good!

But the commissioners themselves were not so easily fooled. They telegraphed Robert Toombs, the Confederate Secretary of State, that Lincoln would not issue an order to evacuate Sumter because he feared the North's reaction. Instead, they reported, he intended to "shift responsibility upon Major Anderson by suffering him to be starved out."

Meanwhile, on this same eventful April Fool's Day, Seward during one of his frequent calls at the White House handed Lincoln the most remarkable memorandum ever submitted by a cabinet member to a President. Entitled "Some Thoughts for the President's Consideration," it stated that the government was "without a

policy either domestic or foreign." Regarding the former, it proposed abandoning Sumter but defending Pickens. This, for reasons unexplained, would "change the question before the Public from one upon Slavery . . . for a question upon Union or Disunion." As for foreign policy, let the government initiate war with France (which was meddling in Mexico), or with Spain (which had occupied Santo Domingo), or with both. Then, faced with a common alien foe, the people of North and South would forget their differences and the Union would be restored!

Seward concluded the memorandum by declaring that "whatever policy we adopt, there must be an energetic prosecution of it. I neither seek to evade nor assume responsibility."

In brief, Seward offered to take command.

Lincoln would have been perfectly justified in demanding his resignation both for insubordination and incompetency. Instead later in the day he sent a reply to Seward which calmly, tactfully, and firmly said: No.

D: 80-92
O: 57-64

Lincoln Implements His Decision: Phase Two

Seward now realized that he could not dominate Lincoln. But he still hoped to influence him -- and to head off the Sumter expedition.

The President, he knew, was especially anxious to keep Virginia in the Union, for should she pull out the rest of the Upper South soon would follow. Hence on the morning of April 4 he brought to the White House John B. Baldwin, a leading Unionist member of the Virginia Convention which had been called to consider secession. His object was to arrange a deal whereby Lincoln would agree to

evacuate Sumter in exchange for the adjournment of the Virginia Convention.

Lincoln and Baldwin conversed long and earnestly -- but to no avail. Baldwin somehow got the impression that Lincoln was simply asking for the disbandment of the convention. Lincoln, on the other hand, concluded that Baldwin had contemptuously rejected his offer to give up Sumter in return for the non-secession of Virginia. Following the interview he denounced Virginia Unionists as nothing but "white crows." Again Seward experienced frustration.

That afternoon Lincoln and Fox, who had returned to Washington, made final preparations for the Sumter expedition. Despite the Seward-inspired obstacles he had encountered in New York, Fox had assembled a passenger steamer, three tugboats, two warships, and a revenue cutter. Lincoln instructed him to rendezvouz this flotilla outside Charleston Harbor, then send an unarmed supply boat towards Sumter. If the Confederates opened fire, the boat was to turn back at once and Fox would endeavor to land troops and provisions at Sumter by means of tugboats covered by the cannons of his warships and of the fort.

In order to make sure that <u>this time</u> the fort's cannons did fire, Lincoln also had Secretary of War Cameron send Anderson a letter (by regular mail) notifying him of the relief expedition and urging him to hold out, "if possible," until it arrived. However, should surrender become a necessity, he was "authorized to make it."

Andrew Foote Makes A Decision

Before returning to New York, Fox asked Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles for another and more powerful warship for use in repelling Confederate naval attack and transporting three hundred sailors, howitzers, and landing boats. Welles, who had been kept totally in the dark about the Pickens expedition, promptly sent orders to Captain Samuel Mercer to take command of the Powhatan as part of the Sumter expedition.

The result was a farce. On April 5 Captain Meigs and Captain Mercer both showed up at the New York Naval Yard, where the Powhatan was berthed. Meigs insisted that his authority to assume control of the ship took precedence because it was signed by the President. No, maintained Mercer -- his order from Welles bore a later date. Finally Meigs telegraphed Seward asking him to settle the dispute.

Feeling rather embarrassed, Seward notified Welles of the mix-up. Welles, understandably enough, was angry over not being informed of the Pickens expedition. Together he and Seward hastened to the White House, arriving shortly before midnight.

Lincoln apologized to Welles, explaining that he had confused the Powhatan with the Pocahontas! Welles asked him to confirm his order assigning the Powhatan to Mercer. Seward, however, insisted that the ship go to Meigs -- possibly he hoped even yet to thwart the Sumter expedition by denying it the means for success.

In any case, Lincoln supported Welles: Sumter was more urgent and important than Pickens. Hence he instructed Seward to telegraph the New York Naval Yard to deliver the Powhatan to Mercer. Seward did so -- but (perhaps deliberately) signed the message "Seward,"

not "Lincoln" as he should have.

As a consequence the officer in charge of the New York Naval Yard, Commander Andrew H. Foote (whose gunboat operations on the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers soon would make him a household name), decided to turn over the ship to Meigs' colleague Captain Porter (who also would become a Union naval hero). After all, the President's authority was supreme!

And so it was that on the afternoon of April 6 the Powhatan, unknown to Lincoln and against his desire, left New York as part of the Pickens expedition. By the same token, two days later Fox headed for Sumter with his fleet, confident that the Powhatan would follow him there!

Lincoln Implements His Decision: Phase Three

As Fox steamed out of New York, Lincoln dispatched Robert Chew, a State Department clerk, to Charleston with the following unaddressed and unsigned message to Governor Pickens:

> I am directed by the President of the United States to notify you to expect an attempt will be made to supply Fort Sumter with provisions only, and that if such attempt be not resisted, no effort to throw in men, arms or ammunition, will be made, without further notice, or in case of an attack upon the Fort.

R: 280

By thus giving advance notice of his intention to supply Sumter, Lincoln created a situation in which there was at least a chance that the Confederates would decide to withhold their fire. If they so decided, fine -- Sumter would be relieved and United States sovereignty upheld. But if not, then they would have been maneuvered into firing the first shot.

D: 92-102
R: 265-9
O: 65
K: 391-3

Davis' Decision: Part One

Lincoln did not know it and many historians have failed to realize it, but Jefferson Davis already had decided to shoot first.

His reasons were a mirror image of Lincoln's motives for sending the relief expedition to Charleston. As long as the United States flag flew over Sumter and Pickens, the Confederacy's claim to independence was a self-evident fiction. Unless that flag came down the authority of the Confederate government would melt away with the coming of the hot Southern summer. On the other hand, by forcing the Federal Government to relinquish the forts the Confederacy not only would establish itself but grow in power as the other slave states flocked to join it.

D: 143-4, 149-51.

So the question was when and where to use force. By April "when" could be soon, for the preceeding weeks had been put to good use in raising, organizing, equipping, and deploying troops. As for the "where," on April 3 Davis addressed an "unofficial" letter to General Bragg at Pensacola: Was he ready yet to take Fort Pickens? If so, he was to take it.

On April 8 Bragg's reply arrived. If ordered, he would attack Pickens. Unfortunately, however, he could not guarantee success -- and casualties would be severe.

N: 8-13

That same day another message reached Davis. It came from Governor Pickens. Chew had delivered Lincoln's message. A relief expedition was heading for Sumter.

Now Davis had an answer to "where." It would be at Charleston. Immediately he had his Secretary of War, Leroy P. Walker, telegraph Beauregard: "Under no circumstances are you to allow provisions to

be sent to Fort Sumter." R: 285-6 D: 148

Davis' Decision: Part Two

The previous day, April 7, Davis' commissioners had demanded, through Campbell, that Seward make good on his assurances that Sumter would be evacuated. On April 8 Seward replied: "Faith as to Sumter fully kept; wait and see. . . ." Even now he was unwilling to admit that he had promised what was not his to promise.

But then, later in the day he followed this message with an official memorandum, delivered to Campbell at the State Department, in which he flatly denied Confederate independence and refused to negotiate with the commissioners. The game he had been playing with them, and they with him, had ended.

The commissioners, who meanwhile had learned of Lincoln's note to Governor Pickens, were incensed by what they deemed to be Seward's duplicity. On April 9 they addressed to him a letter which asserted that Lincoln's announced intention of supplying Sumter "could only be received as a declaration of war." They also telegraphed Davis that the Federal Government "declines to recognize our official character or the power we represent." C: 339-44.

Davis, on reading this message, perceived that there was no longer the slightest possibility of establishing Confederate independence by negotiation. Thus it would have to be done by war.

And so it was that late on the morning of April 10 Davis laid before his cabinet a proposal that Beauregard be instructed to demand the surrender of Fort Sumter and to attack it if the demand was rejected. Citing in support a telegram just received from

Beauregard himself, Davis declared that Sumter had to be taken before the Federal relief expedition arrived, for once supplied and reinforced the fort would be practically impregnable.

All the cabinet concurred except Secretary State Toombs: "The firing upon the fort will inaugurate a civil war greater than any the world has yet seen. . . ."

Davis realized that this probably would be the consequence. Yet it would have to be risked. He saw no alternative if the Confederacy was to survive.

Hence he had Secretary of War Walker telegraph Beauregard to demand Sumter's evacuation, "and if this is refused proceed . . . to reduce it."

Q: 39-40
U: 56-7
O: 68-9

Anderson Makes Another Decision

At 3:30 on the afternoon of April 11 a small boat flying a white flag tied up to the wharf of Fort Sumter. Three men climbed out -- Captain Stephen D. Lee, Lieutenant Colonel A. R. Chisholm, and Colonel James Chesnut, an ex-U.S. Senator from South Carolina. All were members of Beauregard's staff.

They handed Anderson a letter from Beauregard demanding the surrender of the fort. In it Beauregard, who as a cadet had studied artillery tactics at West Point under Anderson, stated that means would be provided for the removal of the garrison, and that "The flag which you have upheld so long and with so much fortitude . . . may be saluted by you on taking it down."

Anderson had been awaiting -- and dreading -- such an ultimatum since April 7. On that date he had received Cameron's message

that Fox's expedition was on the way and that he was to hold out as long as possible. Until then he had both expected and hoped for an order to evacuate: Expected it because he considered it impossible to relieve the fort and because of what Lamon had told him; hoped for it because he believed it was the only way to avert the calamity of civil war, his prime objective from the start. Consequently, in the words of one of his officers, Cameron's letter "deeply affected" him.

However in responding to it he wrote: "We shall strive to do our duty, though I frankly say that my heart is not in the war which I see is to be thus commenced." And in keeping with that statement he gave Beauregard's aides a reply which read: C! 382-5,

> General: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your communication demanding the evacuation of this fort, and to say, in reply thereto, that it is a demand with which I regret that my sense of honor, and of my obligations to my Government, prevent my compliance. C! 423

The aides, without a word, headed for the wharf. Anderson accompanied them. As he did so, he suddenly thought of something which might even yet stop civil war from beginning at Fort Sumter. For the past week the Confederates had not permitted the garrison to purchase fresh food in Charleston. It had only a few barrels of salt pork remaining.

"Will General Beauregard," he called to the aides, "open his batteries without further notice to me?"

"No, I can say to you that he will not," replied Chesnut after some hesitation.

"Gentlemen," said Anderson, "if you do not batter the fort to pieces about us, we shall be starved out in a few days."

Surprised by this important admission, Chesnut asked if he

might repeat it to Beauregard. Anderson gave him permission to do so. In effect he was telling the Confederates: Wait a few days -- if the relief expedition does not show up, Sumter will be yours without a shot. M:75

Davis' Final Decision

Less than an hour later Beauregard sent a telegram to Montgomery in which he described Anderson's remark and asked for further instructions. Davis pondered, then had Walker telegraph Beauregard:

> Do not desire needlessly to bombard Fort Sumter. If Major Anderson will state the time at which, as indicated by him, he will evacuate, and agree that in the meantime he will not use his guns against us, unless ours should be employed against Fort Sumter, you are authorized thus to avoid the effusion of blood. If this, or its equivalent, be refused, reduce the fort as your judgment decides to be most practicable. M:75

This meant that unless Anderson agreed to a prompt surrender he was to be attacked at once. Davis did not intend to risk the relief of Sumter. One way or another it must be occupied before Fox's expedition arrived. And above all, he was determined to assert the power and independence of the Confederacy.

Anderson's Final Decision

Forty-five minutes past midnight, April 12, Chesnut, Chisholm, and Lee again docked at Fort Sumter. Anderson read the message they brought from Beauregard: "If you will state the time at which you will evacuate Fort Sumter we will abstain from opening fire upon you."

While the three Confederates waited with growing impatience, Anderson conferred with his officers for over two hours. All of them rejected immediate surrender -- even Lieutenant Meade of Virginia, who later joined the Confederate army. However in two more days -- that is by April 15 -- the garrison's food supply would be exhausted. Accordingly Anderson wrote a letter to Beauregard stating that he would "evacuate Fort Sumter by noon on the 15th instant . . . should I not receive prior to that time controlling instructions from my Government or additional supplies." C:76

Beauregard's aides, who had been authorized by him to determine whether or not Anderson met the terms of his ultimatum, read the reply. Chesnut pronounced it "manifestly futile." Then, standing in a casemate, Captain Lee (who was twenty-seven and destined to become the youngest lieutenant general in the Confederate army) wrote the following, which both he and Chesnut signed before giving it to Anderson:

> Fort Sumter, S. C., April 12, 1861, 3:20 A. M.-- Sir: By authority of Brigadier-General Beauregard, commanding the Provisional Forces of the Confederate States, we have the honor to notify you that he will open the fire of his batteries on Fort Sumter in one hour from this time.

Anderson read these words, displaying great emotion as he did. Then he escorted the Confederates to the wharf where he shook hand with them and said, "If we never meet in this world again, God grant that we may meet in the next." M:76

The Ultimate Decision

Instead of proceeding directly to Beauregard's headquarters in Charleston, Chesnut's party went to Fort Johnson. There, at

4 A.M., Chesnut ordered the fort's commander, Captain George S. James, to fire the gun which would signal the crews of the forty-seven other cannons trained on Sumter to open up. Presumably Beauregard had given him authority to issue this order. In any case he obviously felt no need to check with Beauregard before issuing it. The prospect of civil war did not unduly disturb him. Back in November he had declared, "The man most averse to blood might safely drink every drop shed in establishing a Southern Confederacy." R:16

Chesnut and his companions continued across the bay towards Charleston. At 4:30 they heard James' cannon boom. They turned and saw a shell burst one hundred feet directly above Fort Sumter. M:76-7 U:57-8

The Civil War had begun.

After The Decision

Soon all the Confederate batteries were blazing away. According to many historical accounts, the elderly Virginia secessionist Edmund Ruffin fired the first shot directed at the fort. In fact, however, he merely fired the first shot from the "Iron Battery" on Cumming's Point, and he did not do so until after several other batteries had opened up. If the signal shell from Fort Johnson be considered the opening shot of the Civil War, as it should, then Lieutenant Henry S. Farley fired it. He commanded the mortar which lobbed the shell over Sumter and according to his own testimony, which is supported by two eyewitnesses, he personally yanked the lanyard. J:27-36 A:44 E:28-9.

Beauregard's guns pounded the fort the remainder of the night. Anderson's soldiers did not reply. They ~~lacked lights by which to~~ could not sight their cannons accurately in the dark, and needed to conserve their limited supply of powder cartridges. And when they did begin

firing back in the morning, they used only the guns in the lower tier. Anderson feared that if he had them operate the pieces on the upper and more exposed tier, they would suffer such heavy losses that he would not have enough men left to repel a landing attempt. As a result, the fort's fire was not as effective as it otherwise might have been. Nor did Anderson employ the large cannons planted in the parade ground as mortars to shell Charleston. Even had he been so minded, which is unlikely, their use would likewise have entailed the risk of excessive casualties. C:431 F1:165-7 B:66-70

All through the day the bombardment and counter-bombardment continued. At night the fort again ceased firing and the Confederates slackened off to an occasional shot designed to prevent the garrison from resting. However most of Anderson's weary men could have echoed Private Thompson, who wrote "I for one slept all night as sound as ever I did in my life." L:423

April 13 dawned bright and sunny, and some people in Charleston witnessed what they hailed as an omen of victory: A gamecock alighted on the tomb of Calhoun, flapped its wings, and crowed!. Beauregard's batteries resumed heavy fire, the fort responded sporadically. Anderson's stock of powder bags was running low, flames had engulfed the barracks, and in Thompson's words the heat and smoke became so bad that the "only way to breathe was to lay flat on the ground and keep your face covered with a wet handkerchief. However only a few soldiers were wounded and damaged to the fort as such was minor. U:59 B:71-2 L:423

Both the garrison and the Confederates could see Fox's ships lying off the bar of Charleston harbor. They had arrived there during the night of April 12, but without the Powhatan Fox believed that he

dared not attempt to reach Sumter. Ironically, on April 12 Federal troops reinforced Fort Pickens before Meigs' expedition with the Powhatan arrived! More ironically, even had Fox had the Powhatan it is doubtful she would have been of much use. Despite his experience and ability, Fox had overlooked one thing: The bar to Charleston harbor had a clearance of thirteen feet -- the Powhatan drew twenty-one feet! She could not have gotten within five miles of the Confederate batteries.

R:393-6
O:70, Fig. 9

At 1:30 P.M. a shell cut Sumter's flagstaff, but Peter Hart, an ex-sergeant serving as Anderson's personal aide, replaced it and the flag it bore. Just after he did so Louis Wigfall of Texas, now a colonel on Beauregard's staff, appeared outside one of the fort's embrasures waving a sword with a white handkershief tied to it. Having seen the flag go down, on his own volition he had crossed the harbor to Sumter in a small boat to demand that Anderson surrender!

Anderson agreed to do so on the same terms Beauregard had previously offered. Obviously no help could be expected from Fox, hence there was no point in subjecting his hungry and exhausted men to further pounding. He had done his duty.

B:72-3
M:746-9
R:317-

On the afternoon of April 14, a Sunday, with drums beating "Yankee Doodle," the garrison marched out of the fort and boarded a Confederate boat which transferred it on the following day to one of Fox's ships. That morning Anderson's soldiers had begun firing what he intended to be a hundred-gun salute to the flag before lowering it. However midway in the ceremony a powder cartridge exploded prematurely. Five cannoneers were wounded, one mortally, and another killed outright. His name was Daniel Hough. He was the first soldier to die in the

Civil War. Four years and some weeks and days later, over six hundred thousand others would be dead also. C: 427-48 M: 77-81

On April 15 Lincoln issued a call for 75,000 volunteers to put down the Southern rebellion. Promptly Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas seceded and Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri threatened to do likewise. At the same time the vast majority of Southerners rallied enthusiastically behind the Confederacy, confident of victory and independence. Davis' decision to force a showdown at Sumter appeared justified by the outcome.

However the attack on the fort outraged the North. There too men flocked to the colors and crowds cheered them as they marched off to do battle for the Union. On May 1, 1861 Lincoln was able to state quite accurately in a letter to Fox consoling him for the failure of his expedition: "You and I both anticipated that the cause of the country would be advanced by making the attempt to provision Fort Sumter, even if it should fail; and it is no small consolation now to feel that our anticipation is justified by the result." D: 175

In years to come historians would debate the question: Who caused the Civil War to begin at Fort Sumter -- Lincoln or Davis?

The answer is simple.

Both.

Lincoln as President of the United States had a duty to preserve a nation. Davis as President of the Confederacy had a mission to create one. Each decided to do what had to be done.

The big difference is that Lincoln's decision ultimately led to the success of his cause.

Epilogue

The firing on Fort Sumter decided that war would determine whether ~~or not~~ the North and South would be two or one. In the war itself the fort did not play a decisive part. Yet its role was prominent. To both Federals and Confederates it symbolized the Confederacy. Hence the former resolved to take it, the latter to keep it.

On April 7, 1863 nine Union ironclad ships tried to blast their way into Charleston harbor. Sumter's cannons helped repulse them. In August, 1863 the Federals opened on the fort with dozens of huge siege guns implanted on Morris Island. Their navy joined in. By September Sumter was a ruin, it cannons silenced. Yet when on the ninth 500 sailors and marines tried to storm it, 320 Confederate defenders drove them back with heavy losses.

In December a second "Big Bombardment" took place. This, combined with an explosion in the powder magazine, reduced Sumter to a "volcanic pile." Nonetheless the grey garrison held on, crouching in bombproofs and defiantly playing "Dixie" whenever there was a lull in the shelling.

In July, 1864 the Federals made a third and last attempt to pulverise Sumter into submission. It was no more successful than the first two. In fact, the fort emerged stronger than ever! As a later generation of American soldiers were to learn at Monte Cassino, rubble makes good defense.

Sumter did not fall into Northern hands until February, 1865, when the approach of Sherman's army forced the Confederates to evacuate Charleston. By then the "Cradle of Secession" was a ruin,

a "city of ashes." First there had been a devastating accidental fire in December, 1861 -- the anniversary of secession. Then during 1863 and 1864 shellfire smashed and burned what was left. Even Calhoun's tomb was empty -- the Charlestonians had reburied the coffin in an unmarked grave to prevent the Yankees from getting hold of it.

A: 81, 136-41, 184-208, 254-63, 296-325.

Shortly before noon, April 14, 1865, a Good Friday, Robert Anderson, now a general on the inactive list, returned to Fort Sumter. With him was his six-year old son and Peter Hart. The latter carried the same flag which had been hauled down there four bloody years before. A large crowd stood around a newly-erected flagpole, many other people watched from boats in the harbor.

Hart attached the flag to the halyards of the pole, Anderson made a short speech, then grabbed the halyards and pulled the flag to the top of the pole. Sumter no longer was the symbol of the Confederacy. It now was the symbol of the victorious Union.

H: 45-52

That night in Washington, D.C., the last important shot of the Civil War was fired. It came from a derringer aimed at the back of Abraham Lincoln's head.

CITATIONS

Informal Bibliography of Sources

J

A Burton, E. Milby: The Siege of Charleston, 1861-1865

B Chester, James: "Inside Sumter in '61," Battles and Leaders, I, 50-73.

C Crawford, Samuel W.: The History of Fort Sumter: Genesis of the Civil War.

D Current, Richard N.: Lincoln and The First Shot (Paperback edition, 1963).

E Dickert, D. Augustus: History of Kershaw's Brigade (Morningside Reprint).

F1 Doubleday, Abner: Reminiscences of Forts Sumter and Moultrie in 1860-'61.

F2 "From Moultrie to Sumter," Battles and Leaders, I, 40-9.

G Foote, Shelby: The Civil War: A Narrative, Volume I.

H French, J. C.: The Trip of the Steamer Oceanus to Fort Sumter and Charleston, S. C. (published in 1865).

I Gilman, J. H.: "With Slemmer in Pensacola Harbor," Batles and Leaders, I, 26-32.

J Halsey, Ashley: Who Fired the First Shot? (Crest paperback edition).

K Hoogenboon, Ari: "Gustavus Fox and the Relief of Fort Sumter," Civil War History, IX, 383-98.

L Johnston, Edith M. (ed.): "Inside Fort Sumter" (letters of John Thompson), Civil War History, VIII, 417-24.

M Lee, Stephen D.: "The First Step in the War," Battles and Leaders, I, 74-82

N McWhiney, Grady: "The Confederacy's First Shot," Civil War History, XIV, 5-14.

O Nevins, Allan: The War for the Union, Volume I.

P Randall, J. G., and Donald, D.: The Civil War and Reconstruction.

Q Strode, Hudson: Jefferson Davis: Confederate President.

R Swanberg, W. A.: First Blood: The Story of Fort Sumter.

S Van Deusen, Glyndon: William Henry Seward.

T Vandiver, Frank: Their Tattered Flags.

U Williams, T. Harry: Napoleon in Grey.