

Chapter 326 – The Confederates Begin Their Attack On Ft. Sumter



Dates:
April 11-12, 1860

Sections:

- Anderson Sees Signs Of An Imminent Attack
- The Battle For Sumter Begins

Date: April 10-11, 1861

Anderson Sees Signs Of An Imminent Attack



On April 10, General Beauregard receives the order from Jefferson Davis to bombard Ft. Sumter when his preparations are complete.

From the parapet of the fort, Major Anderson spots a flurry of increased activity at the batteries which envelop him and orders his men to man their guns.

Time seems to stand still on both sides until 4pm on April 11 when a dingy arrives at Sumter under a white flag bringing three representatives from Beauregard: his military aide-de-camp, Lt. Colonel Alexander Chisolm, Captain Stephen D. Lee, and the spokesman for the party, ex-Senator James Chestnut.

Anderson greets Chestnut, who presents a demand that the fort be evacuated post haste. He also outlines the terms for departure: all men will be granted paroles and returned by ship to Northern ports; they will be allowed to carry their arms and personal possessions with them; and may salute the flag as they depart.

Robert Anderson (1805-1871)

The Major asks for a moment to confer with his officers, who are unanimous in rejecting the offer.

Anderson returns and delivers the news to Chestnut, saying:

I will await the first shot, and if you do not batter us to pieces, we shall be starved out in a few days.

The last part of this reply captures Chestnut's attention, as a possible way to avoid being labeled the aggressor in a civil war. Once back in Charleston, he wires Anderson's comment to Montgomery for their reaction. At 9:20pm word comes back from War Secretary Leroy Walker:

Do not desire needlessly to bombard Fort Sumter.

This comes with an instruction to return to the fort and ask Anderson if he would state a precise date and time for a peaceful departure. At 11pm that night Chestnut is back at Sumter seeking an answer.

When Anderson says that he will hold out four more days, until April 15, when his food runs out, an exasperated Chestnut heads back to report the disappointing news to Davis.

Date: April 12, 1861

The Battle For Sumter Begins



Edmund Ruffin (1794-1865)

General Beauregard's orders are now crystal clear:

Reduce the fort as your judgment decides to be most practicable.

He moves almost immediately, with much of Charleston still gathered near the harbor at night, after waiting all day to cheer the start of the action.

At 3:20am he follows military protocol with Chestnut back at Sumter handing Anderson a note that firing will begin one hour hence.

While still looking out to sea for the arrival of the anticipated reinforcements, the garrison braces for the bombardment.

It comes at 4:30am on April 12 from Ft. Johnson to the southwest, fired by Captain George James, as a signal shot to unleash the other batteries. Seconds later, Edmund Ruffin is given the honor of firing from Cummings Point, landing a 64 lb. shell that hits the outer wall.

Inside of Sumter, Major Anderson has only 700 shells at his disposal, and he waits until 7:30am to return fire, with Captain Abner Doubleday pulling the first lanyard. To protect his men, Anderson also abandons his heavy guns along the exposed parapet and utilizes only the lower batteries which peak out from behind five feet of solid concrete.

The Confederate pounding continues unabated, with the only hope for the garrison appearing on the horizon in the late morning.

Sidebar: The Remarkable Defenders Of Ft. Sumter

In addition to Major Robert Anderson, a host of other members of the Ft. Sumter garrison will go on to earn high military honors in the upcoming Civil War. Included here are subsequent Major Generals Abner Doubleday, Samuel Crawford, Truman Seymour, John Foster and Jefferson C. Davis. Another defender, artillery Captain Norman J. Hall, will earn fame at several battles, including Gettysburg, where his brigade turns back Pickett's Charge along Cemetery Ridge.



MAJOR ABNER DOUBLEDAY,
1862. Photo: Unknown.
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Abner Doubleday
(1819-1893)



Samuel Crawford
(1829-1892)



Truman Seymour
(1824-1891)



John Foster
(1823-1874)



Jefferson C. Davis
(1828-1879)