

Volume 14

Number 55

**LFM: Robert Anderson and Fort
Sumter**

Lead: For 400 years service men and women have fought to carve out and defend freedom and the civilization we know as America. This series on *A Moment in Time* is devoted to the memory of those warriors, whose devotion gave, in the words of Lincoln at Gettysburg, *the last full measure*.

Intro.: A Moment in Time with Dan Roberts.

Content: On April 12, 1861, the first military engagement of the

Civil War began in the harbor of Charleston, South Carolina. Fort Sumter was one of three Federal forts guarding the approaches to Charleston Harbor, one of the best anchorages on the east coast. After Lincoln won the presidential election of November 1860, on December 20, South Carolina passed an order of secession, followed by six other states in the Deep South. Then South Carolina and other states began seizing Federal properties. On December 26th, Major Robert Anderson, the Federal commander of the three forts at Charleston, relocated his small garrison to Fort Sumter, which, at more than three miles out

in the harbor, was less vulnerable to attack.

By January, Governor Francis Pickens had control of the Charleston Arsenal and the inner forts. Pickens demanded the evacuation of Sumter, but under orders from President James Buchanan, Anderson refused. On January 9, 1861, Star of the West, a Federal logistics vessel attempted to re-supply Fort Sumter. South Carolina militia fired on the ship and forced it away from Sumter. This act of open aggression complicated the Federal military situation and meant that it was only a matter of time before the there

would be a showdown in Charleston Harbor.

In February 1861, the newly formed Confederate government dispatched General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard to command Charleston, South Carolina, a city simmering on the edge of crisis. Ironically, Robert Anderson was Beauregard's artillery instructor at West Point, and at the time they were friends.

Shortly after Beauregard arrived in Charleston, on March 4, 1861, Lincoln took office in Washington. He had watched the crisis grow in the weeks just prior to his inauguration and one of the first

decisions his new office presented was what to do about the Charleston standoff. Major Anderson desperately needed supplies and reinforcements to hold the fort. After careful consideration, Lincoln authorized a relief expedition and notified the governor of South Carolina of his decision. In the early hours of April 11, 1861, Beauregard sent his emissary, James Chesnut, with a formal declaration of war if the fort was not surrendered in the hour. Anderson, again, refused to surrender the fort, and at 3:30 a.m. he escorted Chesnut and his party back to their boat, shook hands with each and said, “If we never

meet in this world again, God grant that we may meet in the next.”

At 4:30 a.m. on April 12, 1861, war erupted between the several United States of America. Southern forces attacked Ft. Sumter in Charleston harbor. The Battle of Fort Sumter was the first engagement of the Civil War. Confederate batteries around the harbor opened fire on the fort. In the fort were ten officers, sixty-eight soldiers, forty-three civilians and eight musicians – certainly no match to Beauregard’s command, approximately 6,000.

The next day, after eight hours of bombardment, the two Federal relief vessels appeared at the mouth

of the harbor. Confederate fire was so intense the ships were forced to withdraw. Finally after thirty-four hours, with little food and almost no ammunition, Anderson was forced to surrender. No one died on either side at Ft. Sumter, although a Federal gunner was killed during the surrender ceremony when a powder charge prematurely exploded. The same tattered flag Anderson carried away was raised over the fort exactly four years later on April 14, 1865, by none other than Robert Anderson. In 1948 the fort was declared a National Monument.

**At the University of Richmond, this
Dan Roberts.**

Resources

Constable, George, ed. The Time-Life History of the Civil War. New York: Time-Life Books Inc., 1990.

“Fort Sumter National Monument.”
<http://www.britannica.com>

Latner, Richard. “Crisis at Fort Sumter.”
www.tulane.edu

McPherson, James. Battle Cry of Freedom. New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1989.

Copyright by Dan Roberts Enterprises, Inc.