

**Edmund Ruffin the Fire-Eater**

**Lead: On April 12, 1861 Edmund Ruffin leaned forward and fired the cannon. It was aimed at Fort Sumter far out in the harbor channel in Charleston, South Carolina. It was the first shot of the Civil War. For Ruffin, it was a long time coming.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: Edmund Ruffin inherited a plantation in Tidewater, Virginia. He was a diligent and efficient planter and was among the first to apply the principles of scientific farming to his**

**acreage. Using fertilizers, rotation of crops, and periodically idling his fields, he became a rich and prosperous planter with numerous slaves and multiple plantations. As a lecturer and writer advocating scientific agriculture, his reputation spread all over the South. During one of his trips he became friends with Governor James Hammond of South Carolina one of the earliest southern leaders to think the unthinkable, he advocated secession. Ruffin was soon converted to the cause of Southern Independence.**

**By the 1850s he had turned over the operation of his plantations to his children and had become an ardent advocate of secession as he had been**

**for modern farming methods. Ruffin was convinced that the North was creating an industrial economy that was at fundamental odds with the Southern way of life. He believed that the South's best interests and that of its peculiar institution of chattel slavery were best served out of the Union. While this was too radical a stance for his native Virginia in the mid-1850s, Ruffin found a much more receptive audience in the Deep South, particularly South Carolina.**

**Ruffin and the other radical advocates of secession helped split the National Democratic Party in 1860 and this made possible the election of Abraham Lincoln. Even this failed to dislodge the pro-Union sentiment in**

**Virginia and other upper-South states. Disappointed, Ruffin moved his lecturing to South Carolina and there helped bring the declaration of secession on December 20, 1860. He asked for and received the pen with which the document was signed and months later the right to fire the first shot.**

**Ruffin witnessed the years of Southern victory and tasted the bitterness of its defeat. Several months after Lee's surrender, Edmund Ruffin penned the last entry in his diary, proclaiming his hatred of the "perfidious, malignant and vile Yankee race." That done he stuck the barrel of a rifle in his mouth and pulled the trigger. Edmund Ruffin was**

**69 years old.**

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

**Resources**

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**Matthew, William M. *Edmund Ruffin and the Crisis of  
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