



BLUE AND GRAY DISPATCH

The War Officially Begins

By Robert Jenkins, July 7, 2020
blueandgrayeducation.org



Bombardment of Fort Sumter | Currier & Ives

On Wednesday, April 10, 1861, Confederate Gen. Pierre Gustave Toutant (P.G.T.) Beauregard, a French Creole from New Orleans, Louisiana, who was in command of the provisional Confederate forces at Charleston, South Carolina, demanded the surrender of the Union garrison of Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. The Federal Commander, Maj. Robert Anderson, had taught artillery tactics at West Point where the French Creole was one of his favorite pupils. Anderson, who was born at a place called “Soldier’s Retreat, Kentucky,” refused.

The crisis in Charleston Harbor began on December 26, 1860, when Major Anderson moved his small force of 80 men out of the other forts surrounding the harbor to Fort Sumter, which was located at the mouth of the harbor and surrounded by water. Anderson made his move in response to the action of the South Carolina Legislature to become the first state to secede from the Union on December 20, but his refusal to voluntarily surrender the fort and his defiant act of flying the Stars and Stripes over the harbor infuriated the Confederates, who felt that Anderson should peacefully vacate Charleston and board a Federal ship for the North.



Maj. Robert Anderson | National Archives

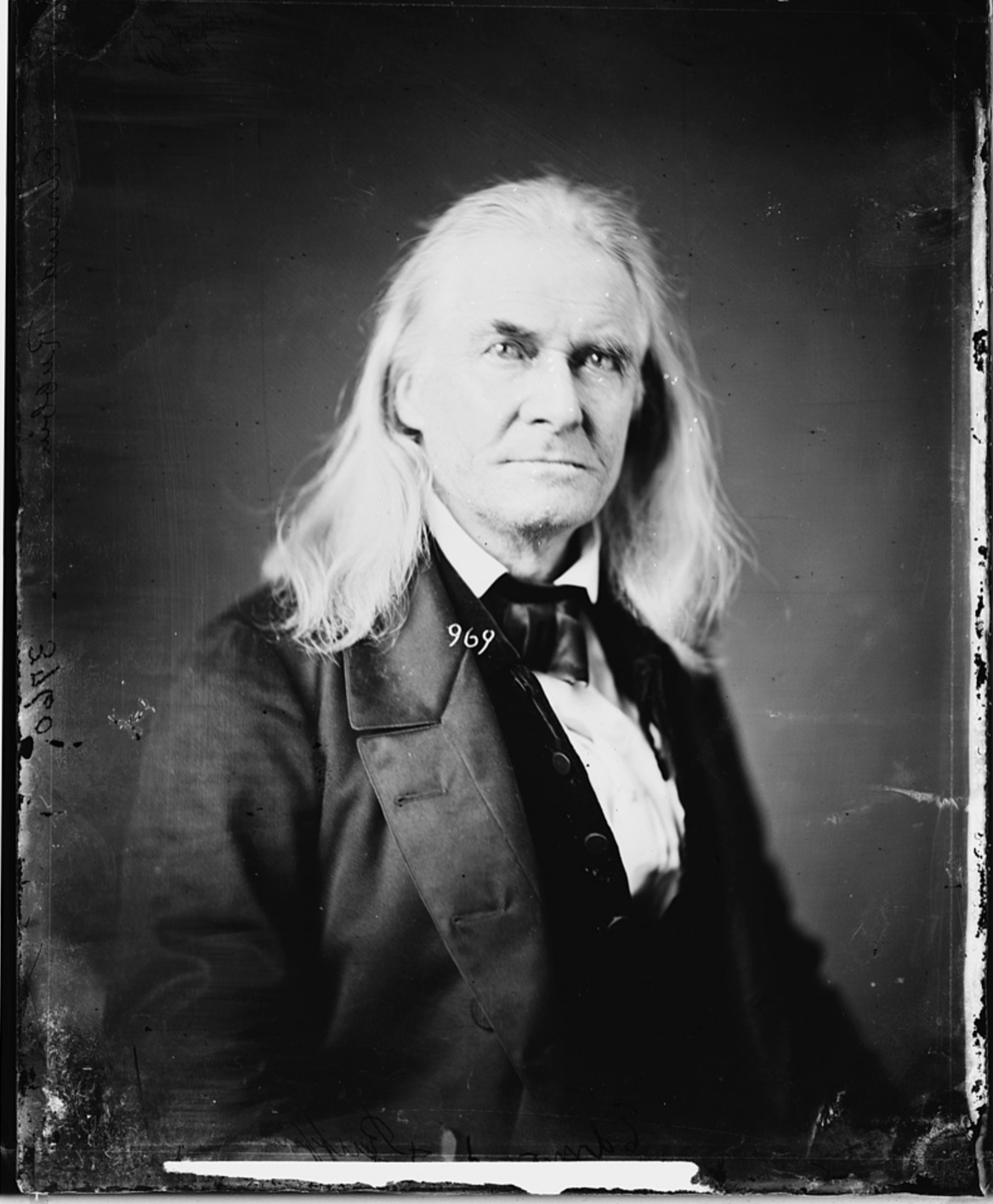


Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard | National Archives

Prior to his departure from office, U.S. President James Buchanan had tried to reinforce and resupply Anderson using the unarmed merchant ship, *Star of the West*, but this failed when the ship was fired upon by shore batteries on January 9, 1861. South Carolina authorities then seized all Federal property in the Charleston area, except for Fort Sumter. As the Confederates strengthened their positions around Fort Sumter, Anderson was rapidly becoming short of men, guns, food, and supplies.

Soon, six other states followed South Carolina in secession, and in February 1861, they formed a provisional government, elected a president, created a Cabinet, and set about arming and equipping an army for the defense of the newly created Confederate States of America. Eventually, four other states would join the Confederacy. As the provisional Confederate States Army began to take shape, many of the South’s leading military officers quickly resigned from positions in the United States’ Government and offered their services to the Confederacy, including Beauregard, who was appointed as General and sent to Fort Sumter to expel his former teacher.

Beauregard promised to begin firing on the fort at 4:00 a.m. on the morning of April 12 should Anderson’s force remain. When Friday, April 12 arrived, anxious Charleston citizens listened for sounds of the guns that would surely mark the beginning of war and the end of an era. Most did not go to bed that night in anticipation of what they expected would be the birth of a new Confederate nation and a glorious celebration. Four a.m. came, and there was still silence. Four fifteen a.m. and no sounds were yet heard. Perhaps Beauregard and the Confederates were bluffing? Or, perhaps Anderson had evacuated during the night?



Edmund Ruffin | Library of Congress

At 4:30, the booms of the thunderous cannon were heard, piercing the night sky with the streaking red-and-yellow fireballs that soared over the harbor toward the small fort. It was clear now that war was on as the unmistakable roaring continued for the next 34 hours. Anderson had ignored Beauregard’s ultimatum and Beauregard’s cannon had replied with a solemn resolve. Beauregard had allowed the first shot to be fired by 74-year-old fire-eater Edmund Ruffin, a native Virginian who had come to South Carolina to participate. Ruffin had preached the merits of secession for decades and, in 1858, he had founded the League of United Southerners, an organization dedicated to the creation of an independent Southern Nation. Ruffin has been largely credited with firing the first shot of the Civil War.

Unable to mount any effective reply from his outgunned and outmanned post, Anderson ordered the flag of surrender to be raised at 2:30 p.m. on Saturday, April 13. There were no casualties on either side during the four-month siege and the 34-hour bombardment, but before the Federal garrison evacuated on Sunday, April 14, one of Anderson’s artillerymen was killed and three more wounded, one mortally, while firing off a 100-gun salute prior to their departure. They stopped at 50 salutes when one of the cannon exploded. Anderson and the Federals were welcomed as heroes in the North including in New York City, where the flag that they flew over Charleston Harbor was cheered.

Following the battle of Fort Sumter, there would be widespread support from both the North and the South, and President Lincoln immediately called for 75,000 volunteers to suppress the rebellion, while in the South, thousands of young men and boys flocked to join the Confederate Army. The Civil War had officially begun.

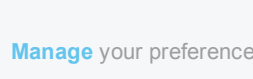


Fort Sumter storm flag | Fort Sumter National Monument



This Civil War Dispatch has been brought to you by the Blue and Gray Education Society, a non-profit 501-3C educational organization. Please visit us at www.blueandgrayeducation.org.

Share this email:



[Manage](#) your preferences | [Opt out](#) using TrueRemove®

Got this as a forward? [Sign up](#) to receive our future emails.

View this email [online](#).

P.O. Box 1176
Chatham, VA | 24531 US

This email was sent to .

To continue receiving our emails, add us to your address book.

emma

[Subscribe](#) to our email list.