

## **Major Anderson Moves to Fort Sumter** **<http://civilwar150.longwood.edu>**

After Major Robert Anderson took over command of the U.S. troops in Fort Moultrie in November of 1861, he began to look for ways to make the fort more defensible as tensions over Lincoln's election grew. Moultrie, located on the southern tip of Sullivan's Island, was one of four major forts defending Charleston Harbor. Directly across the harbor and about two miles from Moultrie sat Fort Johnson on the northern tip of James Island. In between these two, Fort Sumter sat in an unfinished state directly in the middle of the harbor entrance. Much closer to the city of Charleston, Castle Pinckney sat on Shute's Folley Island. At Moultrie, Anderson had less than one hundred men divided into two companies. Castle Pinckney was manned by a single ordnance sergeant while Sumter also had a single man in residence who acted as a lighthouse keeper.

Defending Moultrie would be very difficult. It was designed as a sea battery to defend the harbor. The designers had never imagined the installation would be attacked from the land side. The fort was of old masonry construction and with low walls. Sand dunes had drifted up against the walls for so long that cows would scale the ramparts. To make things worse, the nearby houses of Sullivan's Island looked down into the fort and men with muskets there could pick Anderson's small force apart.

Still, Anderson did what he could. He put up heavy gates on the fort and made a small man-hole entrance through which visitors could crawl in and out. He worked to have the sand removed and had wooden barriers built around the sides of the works facing land. An editor of a

Charleston newspaper mocked Anderson's efforts by writing: "Make ready your sharpened stakes, but you will not intimidate freemen."

Secretary of War John Buchanan Floyd began to take interest in Anderson's predicament and secured almost a quarter of a million dollars in appropriations to make quick improvements on Moultrie and Sumter. This delighted the secessionists who believed that war was coming and that both of these improved forts would soon be in their hands. Soon several hundred workmen arrived from Baltimore to put the forts in good order. Unfortunately for Anderson and his men, most of these men were secessionist sympathizers.

In December, secessionists began patrolling around the harbor, constantly observing Anderson and his forces. Anderson requested more ammunition and reinforcements from the North, but he did not receive either. Anderson's predecessor John Gardner had managed to procure six months worth of food before he was relieved of duty.

By the time of the secession vote on December 20, Anderson had decided that his position at Moultrie was untenable. On the evening of December 26, using boats that had ferried workmen back and forth to Sumter for construction, Anderson moved his forces to Sumter. Nearly completed at this point, Fort Sumter was thought to be one of the strongest fortifications in the world and its location in the middle of the harbor removed Anderson's worry of an attack by land. The fort was a five-sided brick structure, with walls nearly 200 feet long and rising about 50 feet above the low tide mark.

As Anderson's men entered the fort, they were greeted by angry secessionist workmen, some armed with pistols. Anderson's men drove the workmen into the center of the fort by bayonet and then herded them onto the boats to be taken back to shore. The next day the residents of

Charleston were furious at this turn of events and quickly seized both Fort Moultrie and Castle Pinckney. On December 30 they took over the United States Arsenal in Charleston and two days later they seized Fort Johnson. Anderson and his men hunkered down, now surrounded, in Fort Sumter to await reinforcements, supplies and coming events.