

***Star of the West* Attacked**
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As Wednesday January 9, 1861 dawned, the tide of secession continued to rise. Later that day the state of Mississippi issued a formal ordinance of secession, thus becoming the second Southern state to officially proclaim its independence from the United States. The seizure of U.S. fortifications would continue as the citizens of Smithville, North Carolina took control of Fort Johnson. And in Charleston, South Carolina, the *Star of the West*, a civilian steamer hired by the US government, entered the harbor loaded with supplies and more troops for the command of Major Robert Anderson at Fort Sumter.

As reveille was sounded inside Fort Sumter that morning, the soldiers became aware that a large merchant steamer was at anchor at the entrance to the harbor. There had been rumors from Charleston that the garrison would be removed from Fort Sumter or possibly returned to Fort Moultrie and many of the men believed the ship was their transport. There was little enthusiasm for being withdrawn as most of the soldiers believed they were a match for the Southerners and wanted a chance to prove it.

The secessionists in Charleston knew more about the ship than did Major Anderson as news of the *Star of the West's* journey had not yet reached Fort Sumter. The South Carolinians, on the other hand, had learned of the journey and its purpose through two telegrams sent from Washington. Secretary of the Interior Jacob Thompson, a Mississippian and author of one of the telegrams, had resigned his position with the U.S. government the day before and headed for home.

Shortly after daybreak, the *Star of the West* began to enter the harbor. As soon as she came within range, batteries at Fort Moultrie, staffed by cadets from The Citadel, fired a shot across her bow. At this, the men of Fort Sumter rushed to battle stations as Major Anderson conferred with his officers to try and determine what was going on and how they should respond. After the first shot, the *Star of the West* was clearly seen to be flying the United States flag but Anderson held fire.

Lack of communication on the U.S. side continued to hinder the resupply mission. Weeks before, Anderson had spiked the guns and burned the carriages at Fort Moultrie, so there were very few guns, possibly only one, in working order at Moultrie. But the captain of the *Star of the West* apparently did not know this. If he had, he would have known that Moultrie was not a very formidable obstacle to making his way to Fort Sumter. As events transpired, though, the *Star of the West* turned around and headed back out of the harbor, sustaining three shots to the hull for her trouble. The men at Fort Sumter still had no idea what was going on with the ship, although she apparently got near enough to Sumter for them to see that there were no troops on the deck. They obviously did not know about the men stationed below. The *Star of the West* exited Charleston Harbor and headed back home to New York.

This event seemed to accelerate the path to war in Charleston and beyond. Later that day secessionists seized the steamship *Marion* at anchor in Charleston harbor and on January 11 Governor Pickens of South Carolina demanded Fort Sumter's surrender. Major Anderson promptly refused. The wave of U.S. fortifications being seized across the South continued: Fort Caswell, North Carolina and the U.S. Arsenal in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on January 10; Fort Jackson and Fort St. Phillip, Louisiana on January 11; Fort Pike, Louisiana on January 14.

Back in Pensacola, Florida, Lieutenant Adam Slemmer transferred his men from Fort Barrancas to Fort Pickens farther out in the harbor on January 11 and the next day secessionists took control of Barrancas as well as Fort Mcree and the Navy Yard in Pensacola Harbor. The following day, the governors of Alabama and Florida demanded that Lieutenant Slemmer surrender Fort Pickens, and like Major Anderson, Slemmer refused.

During this same week, Florida and Alabama issued ordinances of secession, joining South Carolina and Mississippi in a growing confederacy of states no longer wishing to be part of the United States. All out war was only three months away.