

Riots in New York, Bombardment in South Carolina and Murder in Kansas

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During the week of August 17th, 1863, minor skirmishes continued between Northern and Southern troops throughout the country in Arkansas at Grand Prairie, and in Tennessee, Virginia and North Carolina. The draft in New York City resumed this week resulting in disastrous riots. In South Carolina, the first great bombardment on Fort Sumter was conducted and fighting continued for the rest of the week. In Kansas Confederates and Missouri guerillas stormed in, sacking the town of Lawrence.

On Monday the 17th of August, the first great bombardment of Fort Sumter occurred with the firing of 938 shots from Federal breaching batteries and naval armament. The shots crippled the brick exterior walls of the fort yet did not ruin it. The rubble of brick and sand formed an even stronger barrier against the Federal firing. The uproar of shooting beckoned the citizens of Charleston S.C. to the rooftops as they spent a sleepless night watching the fight. According to reports, "the noise was indescribable within Fort Sumter's brick gun enclosures." Along with the firing on Fort Sumter, Batteries Wagner and Gregg were also engaged. The fighting in Charleston continued for another 5 days when General Q.A. Gillmore demanded the surrender of Fort Sumter and evacuation of Morris Island. He threatened to bombard Charleston itself if the authorities did not surrender to his terms. When they did not, the fighting continued for another two days until there was only one usable gun left in the wrecked fort. This left no choice but to raise the white flag of surrender. In Washington, President Lincoln tested the new Spencer repeating rifle by firing it himself in a field near the Treasury building.

In New York City the draft was resumed by military authorities as troops guarded the induction headquarters from riots. The rioters were mostly working class folk, mainly Irish,

unhappy with the new laws passed to increase the war levy. These rioters resented that wealthier men, who could pay the 300 dollar fee to hire a substitute, were exempt from the draft.

In Kansas guerrilla forces under Confederate General William Clark Quantrill attacked the town of Lawrence on an expedition that lasted a week. On Friday, August 21, Quantrill and his 450 Confederates and bush whackers stormed into the unexpected town burning, sacking and murdering the citizens. The massacre left 150 boys and men dead and over a million dollars in damage. The attack on the town was due to its long time support of abolition and its reputation as a headquarters for Free State militia and vigilante groups. These groups were known for attacking pro-slavery farms and plantations in Missouri. It is said that Quantrill himself declared that his motivation for the attack was “to plunder and destroy the town in retaliation for Osceola.” This was in reference to the Union’s attack on Osceola, Missouri, in September of 1861 when Osceola was destroyed and nine men executed. One eyewitness said, “The town is a complete ruin. The whole of the business part and all the good private residences are burned down. Everything of value was taken by the Rebel fiends. I cannot describe the horrors. Only women and smaller children were spared.”

Thus was the war in the west waged.