

Treachery in Texas? Mission to Charleston

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During mid-March 1861 the nation focused attention on the new Lincoln administration and the situation in Charleston, South Carolina, where the Union garrison of Fort Sumter warily watched southern preparations for a possible attack on the facility. Meanwhile, hundreds of miles away in Texas, southern leaders moved to solidify their control by driving Federal garrisons out of the Lone Star State.

Texas had entered the Union in 1845, following a nine year period after winning its independence from Mexico, in which it had existed as an independent republic. In 1860 the state had a population of over 600,000, 30% of whom were slaves. Following Lincoln's election in November 1860, the leadership in Texas moved as quickly as possible to organize a secession convention. An exception was Governor and hero of the Texas Revolution Sam Houston, who maintained a staunchly pro-Union stance. The old statesman was largely ignored, however, and on February 1, 1861 the Texas Convention voted 166-7 to leave the Union. At the end of the month Texas voters ratified the decision by a three-to-one majority.

Following the ratification of secession, state officials moved to occupy Federal installations in the state. General David Twiggs, a seventy year old veteran of the War of 1812, the First and Second Seminole Wars, and the Mexican-American War, commanded United States forces in the Department of Texas, which were mostly spread in a number of smaller garrisons along the frontier. Twiggs was a native of Georgia, and had determined to resign from the U.S. Army should his native state secede. Recognizing the deteriorating political situation in Texas when he resumed command of his department in December 1860 following lengthy sick leave,

Twiggs made numerous requests to the War Department for instructions on his course of action should Texas secede. He received little guidance, and, following the secession convention's vote but before ratification by the people, the convention established a committee to negotiate with Twiggs for the surrender of United States property in the state.

With superior numbers of state troops threatening Twiggs' small garrison at San Antonio, the aged general agreed on February 18 to abandon U.S. installations and property within the state, on the condition that the troops themselves be allowed to withdraw with their personal arms and equipment. The War Department, meanwhile, had sent an officer to relieve Twiggs of his command, but he arrived a day after the surrender agreement had been signed, and could only oversee its implementation. Twiggs left for New Orleans with the intention of resigning his commission. He learned that on March 1 the War Department had dismissed him from the service for his actions in Texas. Most northerners viewed him as a traitor who had plotted to turn over his command to the rebels while still an officer in the U.S. Army. Historians have been more sympathetic, recognizing that he had been placed in a nearly impossible situation. In the aftermath of the agreement, United States troops evacuated the various positions that they occupied around the state, beginning with Camp Colorado on February 26. These activities continued throughout during the next month, peaking between March 17 and March 23, when seven forts were evacuated. On the latter date, Texas also ratified the Confederate Constitution, formally making it part of the newly declared nation.

As faraway Texas fell under Confederate control, the situation in Charleston remained tense. President Lincoln met several times with his cabinet in mid-March to discuss future moves. He also listened to ex-naval officer Gustavus Fox's plans for resupplying Fort Sumter. With his cabinet divided, Lincoln in the meantime ordered Fox to travel to Fort Sumter to meet

with both Major Anderson and Confederate officials, which he did on March 21. Fox reported back that he believed the fort could be resupplied by sea. The final decision on whether to do so was now up to the president and his cabinet.