

Fort Sumter Attacked!

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On April 11, 1861, General Beauregard, in command of Confederate forces at Charleston, sent a demand to Robert Anderson that he evacuate Fort Sumter. Beauregard did this in the realization that Abraham Lincoln intended to resupply the fort and maintain a federal presence in the harbor. Beauregard offered to transport Anderson and his men and property to any port in the United States and to salute his flag in lowering it.

The note containing this demand was delivered to Anderson at 3:45 pm on April 11. Forty-five minutes later, Anderson had written out his reply, refusing to acquiesce to the demand but remarked to the couriers that if the Confederates did not batter the fort around them, they would be starved out in a few days.

Beauregard relayed Anderson's message to Confederate Secretary of War L.P. Walker, who replied: "Do not desire needlessly to bombard Fort Sumter. If Major Anderson will state the time at which, as indicated by him, he will evacuate, and agree that in the meantime he will not use his guns against us, unless ours should be employed against Fort Sumter, you are authorized thus to avoid the effusion of blood. If this, or its equivalent, be refused, reduce the fort as your judgment decides to be most practicable."

A message with these contents was delivered by Confederates James Chestnut and Stephen D. Lee to Anderson just after midnight on April 12. Anderson attempted to delay reply until morning but finally at around 3:15 am told the Confederates that he expected to evacuate on

April 15 unless he was resupplied or ordered to do otherwise by his government. He refused, however, to promise to hold his fire against the Confederates.

Finding the response to be unacceptable, Chestnut and Lee promptly handed Anderson a message in reply: “By authority of Brigadier General Beauregard, commanding the provisional Forces of the Confederate States, we have the honor to notify you that he will open the fire of his batteries on Fort Sumter in one hour from this time.” Anderson escorted Chestnut and Lee to their boat, shook their hands and remarked “If we never meet in this world again, God grant that we may meet in the next.”

The boat containing Lee and Chestnut made its way to nearby Fort Johnson to the battery under the command of Captain George St. James. Also in the boat was ardent secessionist Roger Pryor of Virginia. St. James offered Pryor the honor of pulling the lanyard on the first shot of the war, but Pryor refused, stating “I could not fire the first shot of the war.”

The first shot was fired from a 10-inch mortar at 4:30 am on April 12, 1861. Fort Sumter did not respond with its own guns until around 7:30 am and from that point on both sides fired fairly steadily throughout the 12th and into April 13. Around 8:00 am on April 13, the barracks in Fort Sumter caught fire as the result of shot from the guns of Fort Moultrie. At around mid-day, the Confederates sent a boat with several men aboard to determine if Anderson needed help in extinguishing the flames. Shortly thereafter, a second boat arrived with a message from Beauregard offering the same surrender terms as the previous day. Anderson now accepted.

Both sides were delighted to find that it had been a battle without significant casualties. Anderson had instructed his men to only fire on military targets and Fort Sumter had held up

relatively well under the bombardment. The next day, Anderson and his men ran their flag up and saluted it before departing the fort to join the US fleet. The Civil War had officially begun.