

# THE SKIRMISHER

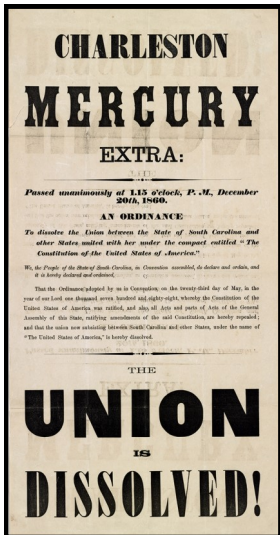


CIVIL WAR TRUST

THE STORM AFTER THE CALM: 1861

VOLUME 5

## THINGS FALL APART



*South Carolina seceded from the Union with great fanfare. (Library of Congress)*

The new year of 1861 opened with secession weighing heavily on the American mind. Citing abuses of constitutional law, plans for the abolition of slavery, and a rigged 1860 presidential election, the state of South Carolina had dissolved its bonds with the Union less than two weeks before.

Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana left by the end of January, seizing a number of Federal arsenals as they went. Northerners were agog at the rapid turn of events. Abraham Lincoln refused to surrender Federal forts in Confederate territory, but their garrisons would starve without fresh provisions. The new president, only 60 days into his first term, sent the steamer *Star of the West* to resupply Fort Sumter in the Charleston, South Carolina harbor.

Charleston's cannons opened fire on the ship, turning it away at the mouth of the harbor. The brief salvo showed the depth of feeling in the Rebel states. Texas left the Union, even though Texas governor Sam Houston refused to take the secession oath, telling his citizens that "you may, after a sacrifice of countless millions of treasures and hundreds of thousands of precious lives, as a bare possibility, win Southern independence...but I doubt it."

In February, the newly-named Confederate States of America held its first constitutional convention. The Confederate States Army took shape, and quickly forbade any further resupplies of Federal forts.

The Fort Sumter garrison was very low on food. Knowing the condition of the Federals inside, the Carolinians decided to increase the pressure and opened a heavy barrage on April 12. Batteries emplaced around the Charleston Harbor sent thousands of pounds of ordnance thudding into the walls and buildings of the fortress.

Federal Major Robert Anderson led his men through 34 hours of near-constant bombardment before raising the white flag on April 14. Confederate banners quickly took its place. To "suppress" the Rebel states, Lincoln and Congress called for 75,000 army volunteers from the remaining United States.

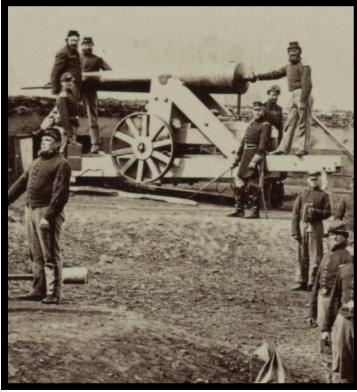
On the issue of providing young lives to preserve the Federal government, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee chose instead to leave the Union. The break was complete.

Abraham Lincoln immediately took steps to preserve the still-neutral states of Kentucky, Missouri, and Maryland. Huge paddle steamers with motley assortments of heavy firepower appeared in the Midwestern rivers and the newly formed "Army of the West" was dispatched to Missouri.



*Fort Sumter was targeted by 4,000 Rebel cannons and mortars. (Library of Congress)*

# THE FIRST BATTLES



Fort Totten, Washington, DC  
(Library of Congress)

In Washington, D.C., government buildings were fortified and the citizens experienced a panic before volunteers finally arrived to defend the capital. Confederate soldiers occupied much of Northern Virginia, and even the other side of the Potomac River on the south side of town was considered hostile territory.

The armies came into contact in late July on the banks of Bull Run, near Manassas Junction, Virginia. What many thought would be a harmless spectacle turned into the bloodiest battle of American history up to that point by a wide margin, and a dreadful rout of the Union Army. The next day, Lincoln called for 500,000 new volunteers.

Weeks later, Union and Confederate forces met with great violence at Wilson's Creek, Missouri. The Yankees were sent reeling once more. Nevertheless, resolve hardened in the North, and both sides settled down for a long war.

Lincoln and his chiefs decided to execute the "Anaconda Plan": the commercial choking of the Confederacy through blockade of the seaboard and capture of the Mississippi River. Battles flickered along the Atlantic coast as the army and navy struggled for control of the seaports. A Union general named Ulysses S. Grant proved himself to be a brave leader in the fight for the Mississippi.

The Confederacy launched campaigns into New Mexico and Kentucky. Both had lofty goals—the opening of a Pacific trade route and the conversion of an entire state, respectively—and both faced significant setbacks due to unfamiliar territory and Union resistance.

Both Union and Confederate national governments raised taxes and infringed on rights thought to be reserved for the states and the people. Renegade Northern generals began to explore abolitionist plans within their spheres of territorial influence. A series of victories sustained Unionist sentiments in western Virginia.

Just before the arrival of winter, Union troops suffered another nightmarish defeat at the Battle of Ball's Bluff, Virginia. Senator Edwin Baker, a close friend of Abraham Lincoln, was killed, and soldiers' bodies floated in the Potomac River for days. By the end of the year, the Confederacy was holding its ground.

## ACTIVITY

Assume the role of a newspaper reporter and write a news story either about the attack on Fort Sumter or the Battle of Bull Run. Try to use as many primary accounts as possible to craft your report.

## VOICES FROM THE STORM

### SULLIVAN BALLOU

*Sullivan Ballou was a Union major from Smithfield, Rhode Island who volunteered shortly after President Lincoln called for volunteers. Before the Battle of Bull Run he wrote a letter to his wife, Sarah. He was killed in the battle.*

"Sarah, my love for you is deathless, it seems to bind me to you with mighty cables that nothing but Omnipotence could break; and yet my love of Country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly on with all these chains to the battlefield."

*Why might Ballou be feeling conflicted at this moment in time?*

