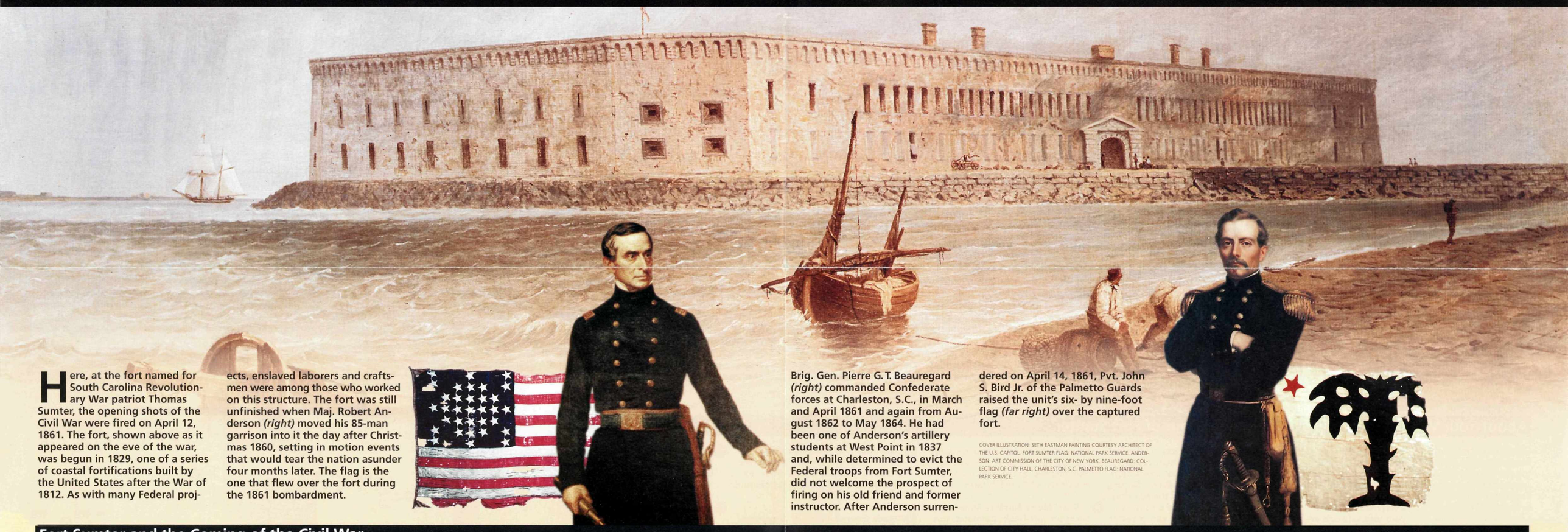
Fort Sumter

Fort Sumter National Monument
South Carolina

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Here, at the fort named for South Carolina Revolutionary War patriot Thomas Sumter, the opening shots of the Civil War were fired on April 12, 1861. The fort, shown above as it appeared on the eve of the war, was begun in 1829, one of a series of coastal fortifications built by the United States after the War of 1812. As with many Federal projects, enslaved laborers and craftsmen were among those who worked on this structure. The fort was still unfinished when Maj. Robert Anderson *(right)* moved his 85-man garrison into it the day after Christmas 1860, setting in motion events that would tear the nation asunder four months later. The flag is the one that flew over the fort during the 1861 bombardment.

Brig. Gen. Pierre G. T. Beauregard *(right)* commanded Confederate forces at Charleston, S.C., in March and April 1861 and again from August 1862 to May 1864. He had been one of Anderson's artillery students at West Point in 1837 and, while determined to evict the Federal troops from Fort Sumter, did not welcome the prospect of firing on his old friend and former instructor. After Anderson surrendered on April 14, 1861, Pvt. John S. Bird Jr. of the Palmetto Guards raised the unit's six- by nine-foot flag *(far right)* over the captured fort.

COVER ILLUSTRATION: SETH EASTMAN PAINTING COURTESY ARCHITECT OF THE U.S. CAPITOL. FORT SUMTER FLAG: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE. ANDERSON: ART COMMISSION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK. BEAUREGARD: COLLECTION OF CITY HALL, CHARLESTON, S.C. PALMETTO FLAG: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE.

Fort Sumter and the Coming of the Civil War

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina delegates to a special secession convention voted unanimously to secede from the Federal Union. In November, Abraham Lincoln had been elected President of the United States with no support from southern states. The critical significance of this election was expressed in South Carolina's Declaration of the Immediate Causes [of] Secession: "A geographical line has been drawn across the Union, and all the States north of that line have united in the election of a man to the high office of President of the United States, whose opinions and purposes are hostile to slavery." The Declaration claimed that secession was justified because the Federal Government had violated the Constitutional compact by encroaching upon the rights of the sovereign states. As the primary violation, the Declaration listed the failure of 14 northern states to enforce the Federal Fugitive Slave Act or to restrict the actions of antislavery organizations. "Thus the constituted compact [the U.S. Constitution] has been deliberately broken and disregarded by the non-slaveholding States, and the consequence follows that South Carolina is released from her obligation." The Declaration expressed South Carolina's fear that "The slaveholding States will no longer have the power of self-government, or self-protection, and the Federal Government will have become their enemy."

The South Carolina Declaration shows how national arguments related to state sovereignty arose from questions about the nature and expansion of slavery. Competing interests were evident at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 when the Founding Fathers were unable to effectively deal with the national problem of slavery. Unable to resolve the issue, it was put off for future generations. The lack of either a clear Constitutional recognition of chattel slavery or a provision for leaving the Union meant that both issues would be passionately debated. In the early years of the republic slavery became more entrenched and vital to the southern economy even as it was slowly dying out in the northern states.

As the country expanded, regional conflict centered on the extension of slavery into new American territories. Included in the arguments was the fate of enslaved African Americans fleeing from the South. Over decades, North and South tried and failed to reach agreements on geographic boundaries for slavery, the recapture of runaways, and the status of free blacks living throughout the nation. National political parties, religious denominations, and even families divided over these issues.

In the months between Lincoln's election and his inauguration, as Lower South states proclaimed secession, efforts at compromise continued. Southern Unionists and their northern supporters believed that the Union could be restored without war if only the southern states had guarantees that the Federal Government would not interfere with their slave property. A Constitutional amendment guaranteeing the rights of slave owners was suggested, but Lincoln concluded that no plan of compromise would ever fully satisfy South Carolina, the state that led the South in defense of the rights of slaveholders and the right of secession.

Within six weeks after South Carolina's secession, five other states—Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Louisiana—followed its example. Early in February 1861, delegates met in Montgomery, Ala., adopted a constitution, set up a provisional government—the Confederate States of America—and elected Jefferson Davis as their president. By March 2, when Texas officially joined the Confederacy, nearly all the Federal forts and navy yards in the seven seceding states had been seized by the new government. Fort Sumter was one of the few that remained in Federal hands.

When South Carolina seceded, there were four Federal installations around Charleston Harbor: Fort Moultrie on Sullivans Island, Castle Pinckney on Shute's Folly Island near the city, Fort Johnson on James Island across from Moultrie, and Fort Sumter at the harbor entrance. The only post garrisoned by more than a nominal number of soldiers was Fort Moultrie, where Maj. Robert Anderson commanded two companies, 85 men, of the First U.S. Artillery. Six days after South Carolina seceded, Anderson concluded that Moultrie was indefensible and secretly transferred his command to Fort Sumter, a mile away. On December 27 South Carolina volunteers occupied Forts Moultrie and Johnson and Castle Pinckney, and began erecting batteries elsewhere around the harbor.

The state regarded Anderson's move as a breach of faith and demanded that the U.S. Government evacuate Charleston Harbor. President James Buchanan refused and in January attempted a relief expedition. South Carolina shore batteries, however, turned back the unarmed merchant vessel *Star of the West*, carrying 200 men and several months' provisions, as it tried to enter the harbor. Early in March, Brig. Gen. Pierre G. T. Beauregard took command of the Confederate troops at Charleston and pushed work on fortifying the harbor. As the weeks passed, Fort Sumter gradually became the focal point of tensions between North and South. When Abraham Lincoln assumed office as President of the United States on March 4, 1861, he vowed in a firm but conciliatory address to uphold the national authority. The Government, he said, would not assail anyone, but neither would it consent to a division of the Union. "The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the Government."

By April 4 Lincoln believed that a relief expedition was feasible and ordered merchant steamers, protected by ships of war, to carry "subsistence and other supplies" to Anderson. He also notified Governor Francis W. Pickens of South Carolina that an attempt would be made to resupply the fort. After debate—and some disagreement—the Confederate secretary of war telegraphed Beauregard on April 10 that if he were certain Sumter was to be supplied by force "you will at once demand its evacuation, and if this is refused proceed, in such manner as you may determine, to reduce it."

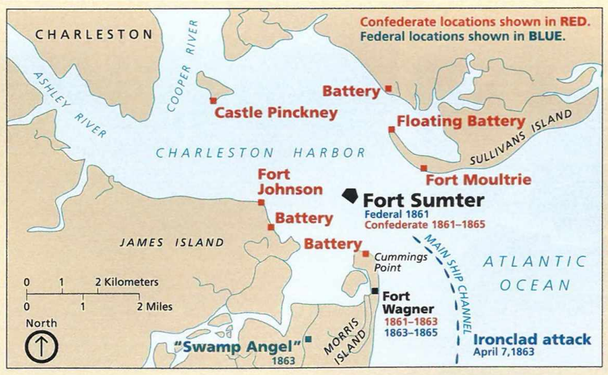
On April 11 Beauregard demanded that Anderson surrender Sumter. Anderson refused. At 3:20 a.m., April 12, the Confederates informed Anderson that their batteries would open fire in one hour. At ten minutes past the allotted hour, Capt. George S. James, commanding Fort Johnson's east mortar battery, ordered the firing of a signal shell. Within moments Edmund Ruffin of Virginia, firebrand and hero of the secessionist movement, touched off a gun in the ironclad battery at Cummings Point. By daybreak batteries at Forts Johnson and Moultrie, Cummings Point, and elsewhere were assailing Fort Sumter.

Major Anderson withheld his fire until 7 o'clock. Though some 60 guns stood ready for action, most never got into the fight. Nine or ten casemate guns returned fire, but by noon only six remained in action. At no time during the battle did the guns of Fort Sumter greatly damage Confederate positions. The cannonade continued throughout the night. The next morning a hot shot from Fort Moultrie set fire to the officers' quarters. In early afternoon the flagstaff was shot away. About 2 p.m., Anderson agreed to a truce. That evening he surrendered his garrison. Miraculously, no one on either side had been killed during the engagement. Only five Federal soldiers suffered injuries.

On Sunday, April 14, Major Anderson and his garrison marched out of the fort and boarded ship for transport to New York. They had defended Sumter for 34 hours, until "the quarters were entirely burned, the main gates destroyed by fire, the gorge walls seriously injured, the magazines surrounded by flames." Civil war, so long dreaded, had begun.

Confederate Stronghold, 1863–1865

With Fort Sumter in Confederate hands, the port of Charleston became an irritating loophole in the Federal naval blockade of the Atlantic coast. In two months of 1863, 21 Confederate vessels cleared Charleston Harbor and 15 entered. Into Charleston came needed war supplies; out went cotton in payment. To close the port—and also capture the city—it was necessary first to seize Fort Sumter, now repaired and armed with some 95 guns. After an earlier Army attempt had failed on James Island, the job fell to the U.S. Navy, and Rear Adm. Samuel F. Du Pont was ordered to take the fort.



On the afternoon of April 7, 1863, nine armored vessels steamed slowly into the harbor and headed for Fort Sumter. For 2½ hours the ironclads dueled with Confederate batteries in the forts and around the harbor. The naval attack only scarred and battered Sumter's walls, but the far more intense and accurate Confederate fire disabled five Federal ships, one of which, the *Keokuk*, sank the next morning.

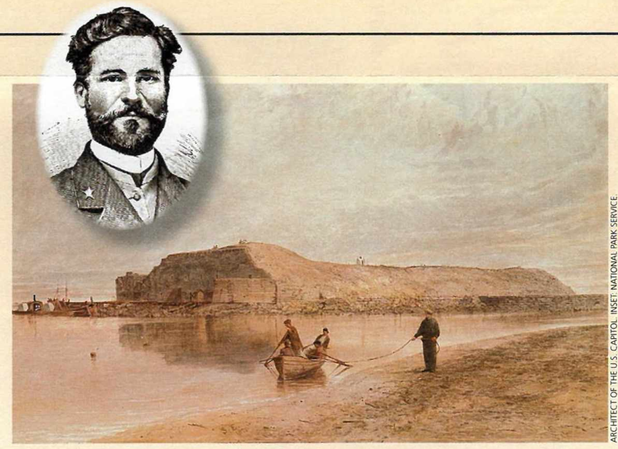
When the ironclads failed, Federal strategy changed. Du Pont was removed from command and replaced by Rear Adm. John A. Dahlgren, who planned to combine land and sea operations to seize nearby Morris Island and from there to demolish Fort Sumter. At a position secured by U.S. forces on Morris Island, Union troops under Maj. Gen. Quincy A. Gillmore began to place rifled cannon powerful enough to breach Sumter's walls. Meanwhile, Confederate laborers and slaves inside Fort Sumter worked day and night with bales of cotton and sand to buttress the walls facing the Federal guns. The fort's garrison at this time consisted of five companies of the First South Carolina Artillery under Col. Alfred Rhett.



Rear Adm. John A. Dahlgren *(far left)* and Maj. Gen. Quincy A. Gillmore. Their combined attacks on Fort Sumter resulted in its virtual demolition by November 1863.
BOTH: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE.

Federal troops fired a few experimental rounds at the fort in late July and early August. The bombardment began in earnest on August 17, with almost 1,000 shells fired the first day alone. Within a week, the fort's brick walls were shattered and reduced to rubble, but the garrison refused to surrender and continued to repair and strengthen the defenses.

Confederate guns at Fort Moultrie and other points now took up the defense of Sumter. Another Federal assault on September 9 fell short; this time the attackers lost five boats and 124 men trying to take the fort from Maj. Stephen Elliott and fresh Confederate troops under his command. Except for one 10-day period of heavy firing, the bombardment continued intermittently until the end of December. By then Sumter's cannon were severely damaged and dismounted and its defenders could respond with only "harmless musketry."



Fort Sumter withstood all Federal efforts to batter it into submission, thanks largely to chief engineer Maj. John A. Johnson *(inset)* and the workmen under his command.

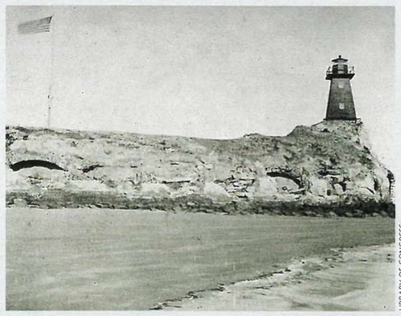
ARCHITECT OF THE U.S. CAPITOL. INSET: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE.

In the summer of 1864, after Maj. Gen. John G. Foster replaced Gillmore as commander of land operations, the Federals made one last attempt to take Sumter. Foster, a member of Anderson's 1861 garrison, believed that "with proper arrangements" the fort could be taken "at any time." A sustained two-month Union bombardment, however, failed to dislodge the 300-man Confederate garrison and Foster was ordered to send most of his remaining ammunition and several regiments of troops north to aid Grant's overland campaign against Richmond.

Desultory fire against the fort continued through January 1865. For 20 months Fort Sumter had withstood Federal siege and bombardment, and it no longer resembled a fort at all. But defensively it was stronger than ever. Big Federal guns had hurled seven million pounds of metal at it, yet the Confederate losses during this period had been only 52 killed and 267 wounded.

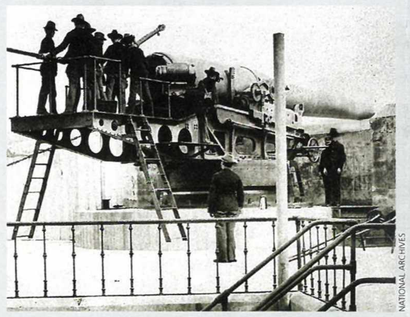
Gen. William T. Sherman's troops advancing north from Savannah, however, caused the Confederates to evacuate Fort Sumter on February 17, 1865. On April 14, with Charleston in Union hands, the U.S. flag that was lowered when the fort was surrendered in 1861 was once again raised above Sumter's battered ramparts.

Fort Sumter Today



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

This photograph of Fort Sumter was made in the early 1870s, after the U.S. Army had begun to clear away the rubble from the Civil War years in an attempt to make the fort once again serviceable as a coastal defense. It shows Sumter's right flank and the remains of the lower-tier casemates, just starting to emerge from the ruins. The lighthouse was built in 1865 at the right shoulder angle where the fort's right face and right flank meet. Its appearance changed over the years as it was moved to facilitate reconstruction work. The lighthouse was finally demolished in 1948.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

The massive concrete Spanish-American War structure known as Battery Isaac Huger has dominated the entire central section of Fort Sumter since 1899, when the battery was completed. Like the fort in which it stands, it was named for a South Carolina hero of the Revolutionary War. The photo at left, taken in 1901, shows one of the two long-range 12-inch rifles that made up the battery's armament. Its companion gun, located where the Museum stands today, was called a "disappearing rifle." It was visible over the parapet when firing, with the recoil causing it to "disappear" into a recessed area behind the parapet for reloading. Both guns had a maximum range of 9¾ miles.



NPS

Fort Sumter today bears only a superficial resemblance to its original appearance. The multi-tiered work of 1861 was reduced largely to rubble during the Civil War. Battery Huger, built across the parade ground at the time of the Spanish-American War, dominates the interior.

From Wartime Ruin to National Monument

When the Civil War ended, Fort Sumter presented a very desolate appearance. Only on the left flank, left face, and right face could any of the original scarp wall be seen. The right flank wall and the gorge wall, which had taken the brunt of the Federal bombardments, were now irregular mounds of earth, sand, and debris forming steep slopes down to the water's edge. The fort bore little resemblance to the impressive work that had stood there when the war began in 1861.

During the decade following the war, the Army attempted to put Fort Sumter back into shape as a military installation. The horizontal irregularity of the damaged or destroyed walls was given some semblance of uniformity by levelling jagged portions and rebuilding others. A new sally port was cut through the left flank; storage magazines and cisterns were constructed; and gun emplacements were located. Eleven of the original first-tier gunrooms at the salient and along the right face were reclaimed and armed with 100-pounder Parrott guns.

From 1876 to 1897 Fort Sumter was not garrisoned and served mainly as a lighthouse station. During this period maintenance of the area was so poor that the gun platforms were allowed to rot, the guns to rust, and the area to erode. The impending Spanish-American War, however, prompted renewed activity that resulted in the construction of Battery Huger in 1898 and the installation of two long-range 12-inch rifles the following year. Fortunately, the war ended quickly and the guns were never fired in anger.

During World War I, a small garrison manned the rifles at Battery Huger. For the next 20 years, however, although maintained by the Army, the fort was not used as a military establishment. But it did become a destination for tourists until World War II brought about the fort's reactivation. The Battery Huger rifles, long since outmoded, were removed about 1943. During late World War II, 90-mm antiaircraft guns were installed along the fort's right flank and manned by a company of Coast Artillery. In 1948, transferred from the War Department to the National Park Service, Fort Sumter became a national monument. The guide below highlights the main historical portions of the fort today.

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About Your Visit

Fort Sumter National Monument is in Charleston Harbor and can be reached only by boat. The fort is open 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily between April 1 and Labor Day. At other times of the year the hours vary; call 843-883-3123.

Tour boats operated by a National Park Service concessionaire leave from the Fort Sumter Tour Boat Facility at Liberty Square in downtown Charleston. Liberty Square is located on the Cooper River at the eastern end of Calhoun Street and includes the South Carolina Aquarium.

For boat schedules, call 843-883-3123.

For Your Safety
While every effort has been made to make your visit safe and enjoyable, you must remain alert and cautious in all areas of the fort. Be especially careful on stairways and uneven surfaces.

Information
Fort Sumter
National Monument
1214 Middle Street
Sullivans Island, SC
29482
843-883-3123
www.nps.gov/fosu

A Walking Tour of Fort Sumter

For those who wish to inspect the fort at their own pace, this text, keyed to the fort plan at right, describes a short tour of both ruins and exhibits. By comparing the fort plan and the painting of the fort as it appeared on the eve of the Civil War, you will gain a better understanding of how the Fort Sumter you see today compares to the Fort Sumter of 1861.

1 Sally Port The left-flank wall here is less than half its original height. This entryway was built in the 1870s and replaced a gun embrasure.

2 Confederate Defenders Plaque The Charleston Chapter, United Daughters of the Confederacy, erected this plaque in 1929 to honor the Confederate defenders of Fort Sumter,1861–65.

3 Left-Flank Casemates The first tier of casemates (gunrooms) was surmounted by a second tier similar in appearance but considerably taller. This pattern was also followed on the fort's right flank and on its right and left faces.

4 Enlisted Men's Barracks Ruins Paralleling the left-flank casemates, this three-story building had a mess hall on the first floor and sleeping quarters on the upper floors. There was another barracks for enlisted men on the right flank.

5 Officers' Quarters Ruins Three stories high, this building extended the entire length of the gorge. In it were lodgings for officers, administrative offices, storerooms, a guardhouse, and powder magazines. For an unknown reason, the powder magazine in this corner of the barracks exploded on December 11, 1863, killing 11 and wounding 41 Confederates. The explosion also tilted the arch over the entrance to the magazine.

6 Union Garrison Monument The U.S. Government erected this monument in 1932 in memory of the Union defenders during the opening bombardment of the Civil War.

7 Parade Ground When Battery Huger was built in 1899, the remainder of the parade was filled with sand. The National Park Service removed fill 20 feet deep from this area in the 1950s.

8 Left-Face Casemate Ruins The left-face casemates were destroyed by the fire of Union guns on Morris Island, 1863–1865. Several of the projectiles still protrude from the wall. Outside the casemate ruins are two 15-inch Rodman guns, an eight-inch Columbiad, and a 10-inch mortar.

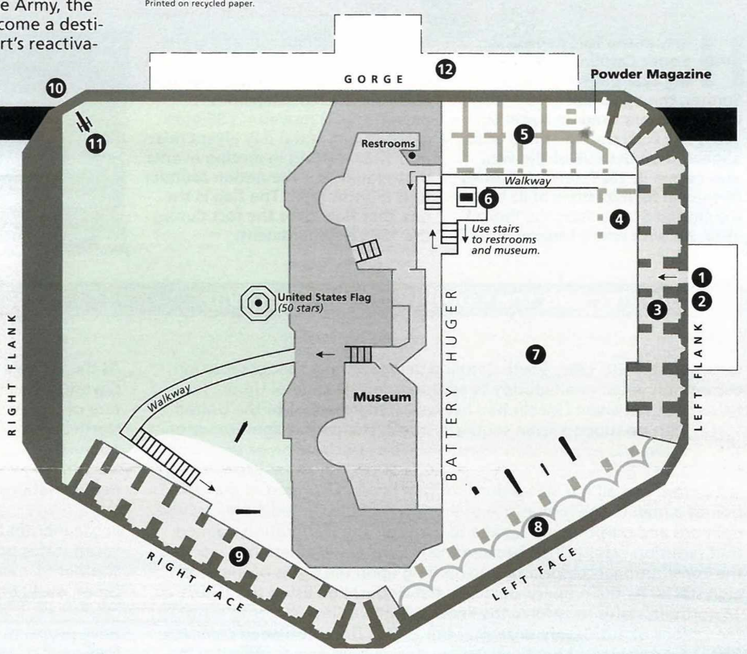
9 Right Face Union forces on Morris Island fired these 11 100-pounder Parrott guns against Fort Sumter. The Army moved them to the fort in the 1870s.

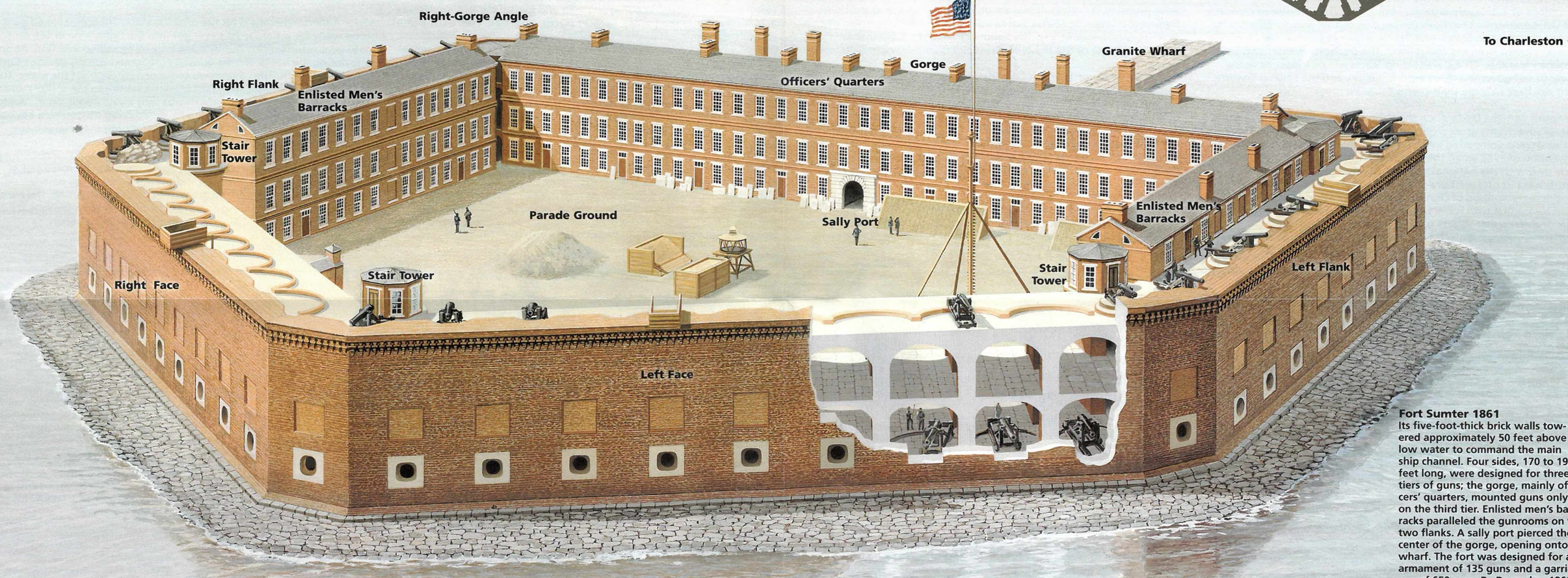
10 Right-Gorge Angle From a gun in the first-tier casemates, Capt. Abner Doubleday fired the first shot from Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861.

11 Mountain Howitzer Confederates used light field pieces like this 12-pounder mountain howitzer to defend against a surprise landing by Union forces.

12 Esplanade and Granite Wharf Site A 25½-foot-wide promenade ran the full length of the gorge exterior, and a 171-foot wharf extended out from the sally port. This was the original entrance to the fort.

To help preserve the fort, we ask that you not climb or sit on cannons or brickwork. Do not disturb or remove artifacts.





Fort Sumter 1861
Its five-foot-thick brick walls towered approximately 50 feet above low water to command the main ship channel. Four sides, 170 to 190 feet long, were designed for three tiers of guns; the gorge, mainly officers' quarters, mounted guns only on the third tier. Enlisted men's barracks paralleled the gunrooms on the two flanks. A sally port pierced the center of the gorge, opening onto a wharf. The fort was designed for an armament of 135 guns and a garrison of 650 men. By December 1860 Fort Sumter was 90 percent completed, standing empty, with only 15 cannon mounted and ready.

ILLUSTRATION NPS / L. KENNETH TOWNSEND