

# THE SKIRMISHER

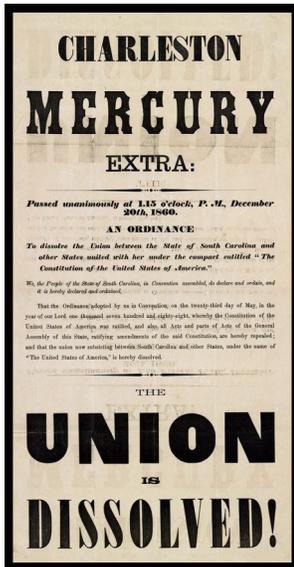


CIVIL WAR TRUST

THE STORM AFTER THE CALM: 1861

VOLUME 5

## THINGS FALL APART



The new year of 1861 opened with secession weighing heavily on the American mind. Citing abuses of constitutional law, hostile plans for the abolition of slavery, and a befouled 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. Lincoln's first attempt was a failure. The brief salvo showed the depth of feeling in the Rebel states. Texas left the Union, even as Tennessee citizens voted to avoid a vote on the secession question. In February, the newly-named Confederate States of America held its first constitutional convention.

Lincoln prepared to launch another convoy in April. The Confederate States Army took shape, and quickly forbade any further resupplies of Federal forts. 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."

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

An armed supply convoy cut into the Atlantic Ocean from April 7-10, bound once more for Fort Sumter. The 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 honor was satisfied and the white flag was raised 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.

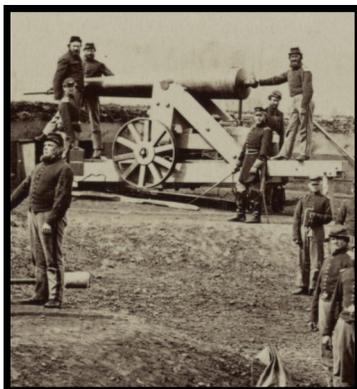
On the issue of providing young lives to preserve the Federal government, North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee chose instead to leave the Union. The break was complete. As newly appointed Confederate president Jefferson Davis once put it, "it was time to smell Southern powder, feel Southern steel."



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

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, menacing but mostly incapable. A newly formed "Army of the West" entered Missouri and confronted secessionist elements in the state. Many were killed when the rookie troops fired into a crowd of civilians in St. Louis.

# THE FIRST BATTLES



Fort Totten, Washington, DC  
(Library of Congress)

In Washington, D.C., government buildings were preemptively fortified and stockpiled and the citizens experienced a panic before state 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 volunteers, who arrived in time to prevent an incursion, immediately set about the task of clearing the capital's space through Northern Virginia. In a series of small skirmishes throughout May and June, the Confederates fell back to a position around Manassas Junction, the first position along the railroad line between D.C. and Richmond.

The armies came into contact in late July along the banks of Bull Run. What many thought would be a harmless spectacle turned into a brutal martial conflict, the bloodiest battle of American history up to that point by a wide margin, and a dreadful rout of the Union Army and its attendants. 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. But 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 general named Ulysses S. Grant proved himself a brave fighter in the fight for the Mississippi, though little progress was achieved beyond the Federal base at Cairo, Illinois.

The Confederacy explored expansionist options, launching 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, respectively.

Both Union and Confederate national governments levied new taxes on their people 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, another battle rocked northern Virginia, the mid-point between the two capitals and the natural focus of the continent's most robust press corps. At Ball's Bluff, Union troops suffered another crushing defeat. Bodies floated in the Potomac River for days and Abraham Lincoln lost a close personal friend. 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 First Battle of Manassas. 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 First Battle of Bull Run he wrote a letter to his wife, Sarah.*

*"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."*

*What are Ballou's sentiments regarding love of family and love of country?*

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

