THE GATHERING STORM

IMAGES OF AMERICA ON THE EVE OF THE CIVIL WAR

A Problem in Charleston Harbor

Six days after South Carolina seceded, and under cover of darkness, Maj. Robert Anderson transferred his small garrison from the coastal Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter, located on an island in Charleston Harbor, to secure that important bastion for the Union. In 1861, the newly established Confederate government focused its attention on the fort, demanding Anderson's withdrawal. Despite dwindling supplies, Anderson refused to leave. A northern steamship, the Star of the West, attempted to deliver reinforcements and supplies, but was shelled and repulsed by cadets from The Citadel. Tensions continued to heighten as winter became spring. After his inauguration, Lincoln decided to resupply the fort, despite Southern insistence on withdrawal, including a looming deadline. When the Confederate demands went unmet, shore batteries opened fire and the shelling of Fort Sumter began on the morning of April 12, 1861. Outgunned and outmanned, Anderson surrendered after 34 hours of bombardment that left the fort a burning hulk. The Civil War had begun.
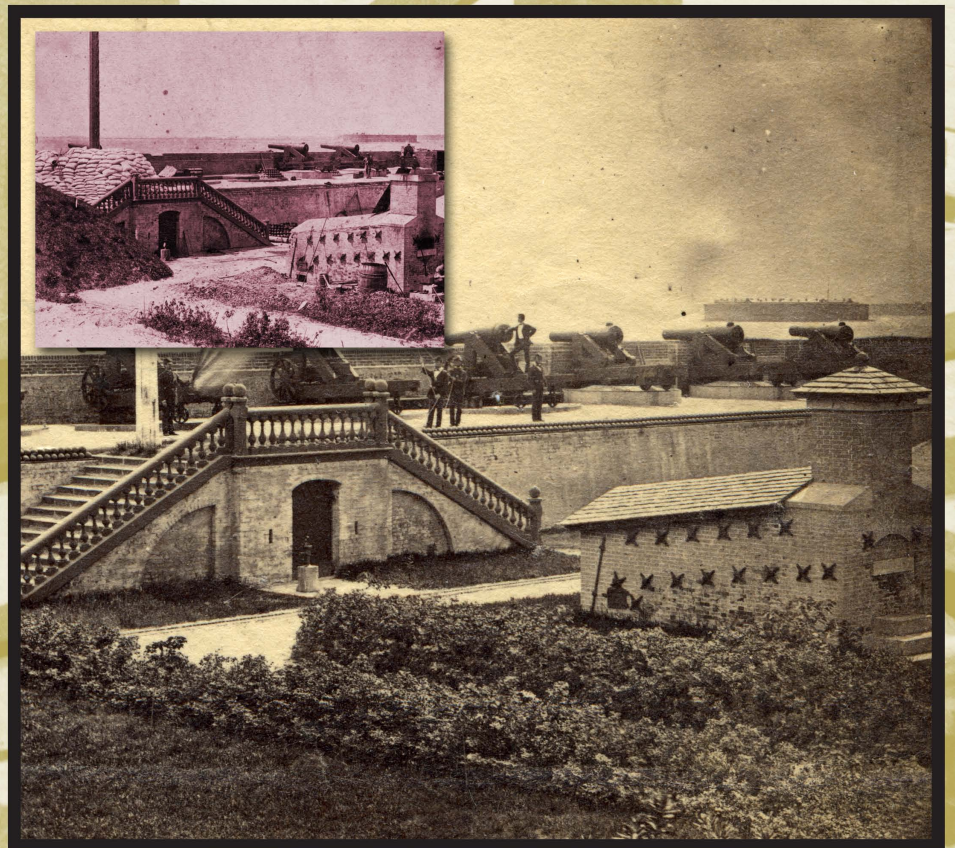

In the midst of the crisis in February, 1861, Charleston photographer George S. Cook photographed Anderson and his officers inside Fort Sumter. His images sold by the thousands, and one was converted to an engraving used on the cover of *Harper's Weekly. Library of Congress*

Gen P. G. T. Beauregard, commander of Confederate forces in Charleston, and gave the order to bombard the fort. *Library of Congress*

No photographs are known to exist of the 1861 bombardment, but this engraving shows the conflagration that erupted within Fort Sumter as the barracks and quarters burned during the shelling. *Library of Congress*

This remarkable matched pair of 'before-and-after' photographs by Osborn & Durbec of Charleston show Confederate Fort Moultrie and a distant Fort Sumter in August 1860, before the bombardment, and in April 1861, just after it. *Library of Congress*