

Name: _____ Class: _____

Attack on Fort Sumter Marked Start of War

By Carolyn Reeder
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The American Civil War (1861-1865) was a war fought between Northern and Southern states. When Abraham Lincoln became president in 1860, Southern states feared that slavery would be outlawed. This caused eleven Southern states to form the Confederate States of America. The Northern states formed the Union. In this informational text, Carolyn Reeder discusses the attack that started the Civil War. As you read, take notes on the events that lead to the start of the Civil War.

- [1] Boom! A single cannon shell burst in a flash of light high above Fort Sumter. This was the signal for the Confederate attack on the U.S. fort to begin. It was also the moment our Civil War began — 4:30 a.m. on April 12, 1861 — 150 years ago this week.

For 34 hours, Confederate cannon fire from the shores of South Carolina's Charleston Harbor battered the towering walls of the island fortress as fiery shells crashed into the open area in its center. The noise was deafening, and thick smoke made it hard for the defenders of the U.S. fort to see — or breathe. With little ammunition, they fired back just often enough to let the Southerners know they were still fighting.

Who were Sumter's defenders? Just 82 soldiers — including members of the military band — aided by about 40 workmen employed at the fort. The soldiers knew it was their duty to defend U.S. property that President Abraham Lincoln had vowed to protect. But they were greatly outnumbered.



["InteriorViewFtSumter1864.jpg"](#) by Wikimedia Commons is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0.

Finally, with fires raging inside, Fort Sumter's commander surrendered. A great shout went up from the Confederates when they saw a white flag of truce replace the battle-torn American flag that had flown over the fort.

- [5] For months, that flag had angered the Southerners. They didn't want a U.S. fort in Southern territory, but Lincoln, who had taken office the month before, had made it clear he wouldn't give it up. When he told South Carolina's governor that he was sending an unarmed supply ship to the men inside Sumter, it was the last straw. Confederate leaders decided to bombard¹ the fort unless the U.S. soldiers left right away. But their orders were to defend the fort, so they did.

1. to attack a person or place continuously with bombs or guns

The bombardment of Fort Sumter was the first battle of the American Civil War. Force had finally brought an end to the standoff between North and South. Here's what happened next:

In the South, Confederates rejoiced² at their victory. People cheered and rang church bells.

A wave of patriotism swept through the North. Enraged that the U.S. flag had been fired on, people organized parades and public meeting to show support for their government. Lincoln called for volunteers to serve for 90 days and put down the rebellion of the seven deep-South states that had formed the Confederacy. He also called for a blockade³ of Confederate ports so the South couldn't import goods—including weapons—or export their cotton and tobacco.

Virginia seceded⁴ from the United States and joined the Confederacy rather than send volunteers to fight against "her sister states." Three other Southern slave states quickly moved toward secession. Soon, the Confederacy would include 11 states, and the Union would include 23.

- [10] The first blood shed during the war is widely accepted to have been in Maryland. A riot broke out in Baltimore when U.S. volunteers answering the president's call passed through on their way to Washington — increasing Lincoln's concern that Maryland, too, might secede.

All this happened during the first week after Fort Sumter. In coming weeks, young men rushed to sign up to fight. Both North and South were sure they would win — and win in a matter of months. But they were wrong. The bombardment of Fort Sumter began four long, hard years of war.

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2. **Rejoice (verb):** to feel or show great joy or delight
3. an act or means of sealing off a place to prevents goods or people from coming or going
4. to withdraw formally from a membership in an alliance, union, or political organization

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement expresses the central idea of the text?
 - A. The South's attack on Fort Sumter was completely unexpected, as the North believed that they had come to an agreement.
 - B. The attack on Fort Sumter was enough to start the Civil War because of the high number of soldiers who were killed.
 - C. The attack on Fort Sumter was the result of prolonged tensions between the North and the South and was the official beginning of a long and bloody war.
 - D. While the South attempted to weaken the North by attacking their forts, the North tried to deprive the South of necessary resources.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "Who were Sumter's defenders? Just 82 soldiers — including members of the military band — aided by about 40 workmen employed at the fort." (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "The bombardment of Fort Sumter was the first battle of the American Civil War. Force had finally brought an end to the standoff between North and South." (Paragraph 6)
 - C. "He also called for a blockade of Confederate ports so the South couldn't import goods —including weapons —or export their cotton and tobacco." (Paragraph 8)
 - D. "The first blood shed during the war is widely accepted to have been in Maryland. A riot broke out in Baltimore when U.S. volunteers answering the president's call passed through on their way to Washington" (Paragraph 10)

3. What did the United States' flag in the southern territory mean to the Confederates?
 - A. It emphasized the strength of the North's military.
 - B. It was a symbol of the North's dislike of slavery.
 - C. It made the South feel as if they were never truly safe from the North.
 - D. It showed how the North was interfering in Southern affairs.

4. How does the discussion of the attack on Fort Sumter in paragraphs 2-4 help readers understand how important the fort was to the North?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Could the fighting at Fort Sumter been avoided? What steps could each side have taken to resolve the conflict without fighting? Would this have helped avoid the Civil War?
2. How were citizens of the United States affected by the knowledge that they were going to war with their neighboring states? What additional conflicts did this cause within the United States?