

The first quarter of the year was one of great uncertainty, apprehension, and political double-crossing. It became a test of wills early on as the State of South Carolina plucked its star from the flag of the United States and declared itself an independent nation, demanding that the Federal government relinquish all claims to military facilities in the state. Focus became centered on Fort Sumter in the middle of Charleston Harbor, where Major Robert Anderson and his small Federal garrison were pawns in a political chess game of impending civil war. Anderson and his men, not more than 120 in number, including 34 civilian workmen, had been holed up in the fort since the day after Christmas, after moving from nearby Fort Moultrie on Sullivan's Island, which had been deemed too vulnerable to assault from the mainland. The garrison had not been supplied or reinforced, and its capacity to wage war, even to defend itself, dwindled with each passing day, while the enemies grew, as the Carolinians ringed the harbor with guns and fortifications.

If the hapless Sumter garrison looked to Washington for help, the men soon realized that the lame duck occupant of the White House, James Buchanan, wanted nothing more than for the final days of his term to slip away rapidly and without incident. Let the president-elect sort out the mess, Buchanan reasoned. After all, was it not the election of Abraham Lincoln that had sparked the whole crisis of secession? If Buchanan attempted to supply and reinforce Fort Sumter, it could be just the impetus needed for the Fire-eaters 'in South Carolina to claim an act of war. General Winfield Scott, 73 years old, obese, and chief of all United States forces, cautioned against resupplying the fort under armed escort. Send a merchant vessel, a fast one, Scott advised. It was not as threatening.

Tensions mounted everywhere. In Georgia, militia troops took over the high-walled, moated Fort Pulaski, which guarded the sea route to the waterfront of old Savannah. Also, the nation's capital, nestled squarely in the lap of secessionist sympathy, was said to be in peril of invasion by marauders. Federal arsenals at Mount Vernon, Alabama, and Apalachicola, Florida, were declared properties of those respective states, though both were still in the Union. Then, on January 9, Mississippi seceded, followed over the next two days by Florida and Alabama, then Georgia on the 19th, Louisiana on the 26th, and Texas on February 1. These were the states of the Deep South, where King Cotton ruled, and where the Federal threat to the region's economy and way of life loomed greatest.

Meanwhile, President Buchanan was plagued by double-dealing in his own cabinet. The fast merchant vessel recommended by General Scott, *Star of the West*, had left New York for Fort Sumter on January 5. News of its departure and mission reached South Carolina through the offices of Jacob Thompson, a Mississippian who was also Secretary of the Interior in Buchanan's shaky cabinet. Thompson tele-graphed Charleston that *Star of the West* was on its way with troops and supplies for Fort Sumter, then he resigned his cabinet post and headed south. This incident followed close on the heels of the resignation of Secretary of War John B. Floyd, a Virginian by birth and alumnus of South Carolina College. He had apparently attempted to aid the Southern Cause by stockpiling ordnance in Southern-based installations which, presumably, would soon be seized by the secessionists. Floyd resigned his powerful cabinet position on December 29. Five days later the War Department cancelled one of Floyd's orders to ship guns south from a Pittsburgh arsenal. The country was falling apart.

When *Star of the West* steamed into Charleston Harbor on the morning of January 9, a battery on Morris Island let loose with a salvo. The message was all too clear. It did not matter whether supplies came by warship or merchant vessel or rowboat. Any attempt to assist the Fort Sumter garrison, according to South Carolina Governor Francis Pickens, would be considered an act of war.

On February 4, a convention of the seven seceded states met at the Alabama state capitol in Montgomery and organized a provisional government called the Confederate States of America. After five days of debate, Jefferson Davis, a former U.S. Senator from Mississippi, and one-time Secretary of War (who neither sought nor relished a post in the fledgling government of the South), became provisional president. Georgia's Alexander H. Little Aleck Stephens (he reputedly weighed a scant 90 pounds) was selected as vice president. Neither man was considered a radical secessionist, or Fire-eater, ' so choosing them to head the government seemed to be intended to appeal to the Upper South states, which were still sitting on the secession fence. It was still a game of politics. No one had been killed yet.

Abraham Lincoln, after avoiding alleged plots to kill him in Baltimore, while in-route to Washington from his Illinois home, was inaugurated as the 16th President of the United States on March 4. Lincoln pledged in his inaugural address not to interfere with slavery where it existed. Furthermore, he declared the secession ordinances of the seven departed states null and void, because it was unconstitutional to attempt the dissolution of the Union. And he challenged his

dissatisfied fellow countrymen 'in the South that the onus of civil war, should it come, would be upon their shoulders, not the new administration's. Reaction from the South was quick and sharp. Every word of Lincoln's address was construed as nothing short of a declaration of war.

War was not long in coming. On March 29, Lincoln pledged to save Fort Sumter, as well as pledging aid for threatened Fort Pickens at Pensacola, Florida. Three warships and a revenue cutter prepared to sail. On April 6, official notification of the relief expedition was made to Governor Pickens, who now shared the leadership limelight at Charleston with General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard, the recently appointed commander of all Confederate military forces in the area. All of Charleston and its harbor environs were placed on military alert.

On the 11th a formal demand for the surrender of Fort Sumter was made to Major Anderson by three emissaries under a white flag of truce. He attempted to skirt the surrender issue by stating he would soon be starved out, so why resort to armed aggression? The three Confederates were not prepared for this sort of response, so they rowed back to the mainland to confer with higher officials. By eleven o'clock that night they were back at Fort Sumter, asking Anderson just how long it would be before he was starved out. The major left them waiting for two and a half hours while he thought it over. His answer: the 15th - he would evacuate the fort at noon on the 15th of April. That was totally unacceptable. Everyone knew a relief expedition was on its way and would surely arrive before the 15th. The emissaries put Anderson on notice that guns would open on him in one hour. At 4:30 a.m., April 12, 1861, the guns opened, and the American Civil War exploded into headlines worldwide.

After a 34-hour bombardment, which occasionally turned into a duel, whenever the garrison engaged in limited return fire (none of which was targeted at Charleston itself, so as not to injure civilians), Major Anderson, at about two-thirty on the afternoon of April 13, ran up a white surrender flag. Meanwhile, the relief expedition had arrived at the harbor mouth, but dared go no further. The ships watched helplessly as Fort Sumter was pounded, then they steamed away with all the supplies. Anderson formally surrendered the fort in a ceremony on the 14th, which cost the life of one soldier when a salute gun exploded. He was the only casualty of the opening engagement of the war.

On April 15, President Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteers to put down the insurrection. States in the Upper South thought his actions were too rash and uncalculated in the circumstances. Talk of secession conventions became rampant, and before the month was out Virginia - the Old Dominion - had cast its lot with the new Confederacy, followed in May by Arkansas and North Carolina, and Tennessee in June. Young men answered the call of their states, North and South, and fields, shops and factories emptied as military ranks swelled with youthful bravado, everyone eager for fighting and glory. Many predicted it would all be over soon - one big battle would settle it - and no one wanted to miss out.

Washington was in turmoil. It seemed as if no worse place could have been found for the nation's capital. Across the Potomac River was Virginia, just seceded from the Union. Surrounding the capital on its other sides was Maryland, a state seething with secessionist sympathies to the point that a firefight had broken out between armed citizens and Massachusetts troops who were marching through Baltimore on their way to Washington. About a dozen people lost their lives in the Baltimore Riot of April 19, which was finally quelled by force of arms. Lincoln placed the city under martial law for the rest of the war.

Old General Scott had complained on numerous occasions of the inadequate Regular Army of the United States, with hardly enough men in uniform (fewer than 20,000) for peacetime necessities, let alone in time of national crisis. His opinion was justified as Lincoln looked upon his legions of green warriors fresh from New England shops and Pennsylvania farms and the backwoods of the Midwest, marching to and from with phony guns and laughable order, trying to learn how to be soldiers. But sufficient time was not at hand to allow these boys proper training.

Rebel forces (just as untrained) under Generals Joseph E. Johnston and Beauregard, the latter having been relocated from South Carolina, posed a real threat in Virginia. Johnston was in the strategic Shenandoah Valley, a perfect invasion corridor aimed at Washington that would become a constant battleground of the war, while Beauregard's force was at Manassas, not three dozen miles from the Federal capital city.

Union General Irvin McDowell was prodded to deal with the threat. Exasperated by meddling politicians and the urgency

of public opinion, he finally set his army in motion long before it was professionally trained and organized. They met the Rebels along Bull Run, near Manassas, on July 21. McDowell's plan was well thought out: defeat Beauregard before he could join forces with Johnston. But luck was against McDowell, for Johnston's men arrived in time to turn the tide of battle. It was a very confused clash, often characterized as a battle between two mobs, as the inexperience of both armies was all too evident. To make matters worse, some Confederate units wore blue uniforms, and some Federal units wore gray, and the two sides had flags so similar in color and features that after the battle the Confederates designed a new, more distinctive one. The Confederates won this first significant engagement of the war, and one commander, Thomas J. Jackson, earned the nickname Stonewall, ' ironically for a defensive stand his men had made, when Jackson's forte would prove to be lightning marches and audacious attacks. The Yankees were swept from the field in an embarrassing retreat that literally overran picnickers and other curious sorts who had come out to the country from Washington to witness the battle.

After the Battle of Manassas, or Bull Run as it was called in the North, both sides settled into a period of fortifying, training and stockpiling supplies, as the realization dawned on everyone that this would not be a quick, one-battle war. The Confederates, heartened by their recent victory, moved as close to Washington as Centreville, astride one of the main roads to the capital, but still a respectful distance away. Southern spirits were lifted even higher in August when news arrived of a victory at Wilson's Creek in Missouri, in which the Union commander, General Nathaniel Lyon, was killed.

The North, stinging from defeat and humiliation, nevertheless was stronger in its commitment to avenge the losses and preserve the Union. General Scott, known as Old Fuss and Feathers, 'was quietly shelved as an old soldier well past his prime. He was replaced by the swaggering, 34-year-old General George B. McClellan, who had enjoyed minor successes in western Virginia. At the time, though, they seemed like monumental victories considering other events. McClellan, known as Little Mac ' or, as time went by, the Young Napoleon, ' set about drilling and refitting his command, which was called the Army of the Potomac, and generally bragging himself into an inflated status that even he began to believe was true, but which he would prove incapable of fulfilling.

West of the Alleghenies, Confederates under General Leonidas Polk, who wore the robes of an Episcopal Bishop when not soldiering, violated Kentucky's neutrality in early September by marching into Columbus and erecting a stronghold high on bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River. A few miles upriver, at Cairo, Illinois, where the Ohio River met the Mississippi, General Ulysses S. Grant commanded a small Federal force. In response to Polk's occupation of Columbus, Grant, on September 6, seized Paducah, Kentucky, at the confluence of the Tennessee and Ohio rivers.

The following November, Grant dropped down the Mississippi with his men on steamboats to test the Columbus defenses. The result was the Battle of Belmont, Missouri, fought opposite the Columbus fortifications, during which Grant's men seized a Rebel camp and plundered it before Polk's main force could respond from across the river. The battle was a learning experience for the men and officers of both sides, and it even turned comical as Grant became one of the last men back on the transports after playing a dangerous game of hide-and-seek with pursuing Confederates. Grant never forgot this early battlefield escapade, when his men lost control of themselves and nearly met disaster.