

## **Post Fort Sumter**

### *The First Crises of the War*

**Saturday, April 13, 1861** – Lincoln hears the news about Fort Sumter’s surrender.

**Monday, April 15, 1861** – Lincoln issues his proclamation to the governors of all remaining states, including the upper South states, with detailed instructions for the mustering of 75,000 volunteers to serve three-month terms. Stirred by “fire-eaters,” the border states, including perhaps most importantly Virginia, react with dismay and discontent, repulsed by the prospect of having to fight against their Southern brethren.

In Richmond ex-governor Henry Wise wires John Daniel Imboden to come Richmond immediately.

City newspapers in Baltimore print provocative, emotional stories about the growing crisis.

**Tuesday, April 16, 1861** – Secretary of Navy Gideon Wells writes a note to Commodore Charles S. McCauley, the commander of the Gosport Naval Yard at Hampton Roads -- where the James River flows into the mouth Chesapeake Bay near Norfolk, Virginia -- urging him to remain vigilant.

Imboden arrives and meets with Wise and others to plot the capture of the Federal arsenal at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia. Wise also makes contact with Norfolk to urge that Federal ships be stopped from leaving Gosport.

In Boston, Ben Butler, an astute criminal lawyer, wealthy factory owner, and active politician, persuades Governor John Andrews to appoint Butler to be in charge of four regiments of Massachusetts volunteers, two of which have already been ordered to proceed directly to Fort Monroe.

**Wednesday, April 17, 1861** – Virginia’s convention – which only 13 days earlier had been leaning strongly in favor of staying with the Union – votes to secede, quickly followed by three others of the remaining seven slave states. Virginia Governor Letcher calls up the militia with some units, headed by Imboden, heading toward Harper’s Ferry. Alexander Stephens, CSA Vice-President, reports “Events transpire so rapidly now that it is useless to speculate two days ahead.”

As promised by Governor Andrew, the 6<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment, under Butler’s nominal command, leaves Boston headed for Washington.

**Thursday, April 18, 1861** – Virginia militia surrounds Harper’s Ferry, coercing the Federal garrison to set fire to some of the facilities before fleeing across the Potomac

into Maryland. The militiamen save some important equipment and several thousand muskets. The important B & O railroad also falls into Rebel hands.

In New York City Major Anderson and the Fort Sumter garrison arrive and are greeted as heroes as is the 6<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts as it passes through the city.

In Baltimore, then the nation's third largest city, five unarmed companies of Pennsylvania militia, on their way to Washington by train, are set upon as they march from one depot to another. These militiamen stagger into Washington that evening, being the first volunteers to arrive to that beleaguered city.

Earlier that day in Washington, Robert E. Lee speaks with Francis Blair, Sr, the father of Lincoln's Postmaster General. Later that day Lee also speaks with Winfield Scott.

**Friday, April 19, 1861** – Lincoln orders a blockade of all ports in Confederate states. This action is a traditional act of war, constitutionally reserved to the Congress.

In Baltimore, a huge and vocal anti-Lincoln rally takes place. Later a throng attacks companies of the 6<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts as they attempt to march through downtown from one railroad station to another. Despite the valiant efforts of Marshall Kane, the so-called "Pratt Street Riot" results in the deaths of three soldiers and 12 civilians as well as dozens being injured. Some historians will believe this represents the real "high water mark" of the rebellion. George Brown, the mayor of Baltimore sends a message imploring Lincoln to "Send no troops here." In order to prevent more troop movements through the city, Baltimore officials, with the concurrence of Governor Hicks, order the burning of railroad bridges north of the city.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, with Benjamin Butler in command, arrives in Philadelphia.

In New York City the 7<sup>th</sup> New York -- reputedly the best-drilled militia in the country -- leaves for Washington.

In Washington, Welles and Scott, agreeing that Gosport ought to be reinforced, order the *Pawnee* to steam to Gosport with some Marines aboard. The ship is ordered to take on some Massachusetts volunteers at Fort Monroe before proceeding to the navy yard.

**Saturday, April 20, 1861** – Under pressure from local militia the commandant of Gosport reluctantly gives orders to start burning the facility while scuttling ships. The *Pawnee* arrives, too late to save the ships. Much of the fires are extinguished as soon as occupied by the Rebels, the outcome resulting in one of the greatest naval disasters prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Across the bay, the 4<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts arrives to reinforce the defenses of Fort Monroe.

Lincoln responds to the mayor of Baltimore that in the future "troops *must* be brought here, but I make no point of bringing them *through* Baltimore." Bridges north

of Baltimore are burned while telegraph lines going north are cut, virtually cutting off the nation's capital.

Lee submits his letter of resignation from the US Army and learns that a representative of the Governor of Virginia wants to speak with him.

Lincoln orders raids upon all important telegraph offices to seize and read every telegraph written during the past year, looking for treason.

In Philadelphia the 7<sup>th</sup> New York departs via a rented steamer hoping to go directly to Washington but if not then to Annapolis, from where they will march on to the capital. The 8<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, the only regiment left to Butler, also sails from Philadelphia intending to go directly to Annapolis.

**Sunday, April 21, 1861** – In order to avoid another Pratt Street confrontation, Lincoln meets with Mayor Brown and agrees that a troop train coming from Pennsylvania will turn around at Cockeysville and return to Philadelphia.

All telegraph lines between Baltimore and Washington are cut.

The 7<sup>th</sup> New York and the 8<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, having taken different routes, arrive at Annapolis apparently just in time to prevent local rabble from storming the Naval Academy. Three more New York regiments leave for Washington.

Scott, believing that the Virginians may attack momentarily, issues orders in preparation for a long siege. Lincoln also meets with his cabinet and takes a long series of actions: obtaining and arming ships, transporting troops and munitions of war, and empowering private individuals in New York to take action and spend money for the “military and naval measures necessary for the defense and support of the government.”

**Monday, April 22, 1861** – At this point the capital is effectively cut off from the nation it ostensibly governs.

Several hundred governmental clerks and officers in the armed services, including the commandant of the Washington Naval Yards as well as the upper echelon of officers at Gosport, resign en masse. Lee accepts command of all Virginia forces.

Butler meets Maryland Governor Hicks on the grounds of the Naval Academy where the 8<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts and 7<sup>th</sup> New York are staying. Hicks shows much hostility refusing, among other things, to let them buy provisions in town. Butler proceeds to find and repair an old locomotive and to modify some cattle cars to transport the troops into Washington.

**Tuesday, April 23, 1862** – “The world is convulsed as it probably never has been since the creation, with wars and rumors of war, by famine and desolation. . . . It would seem that the vials of the Revelations were opened, and that the discord and blood were rained down upon our generation.” *The Athens Messenger* as quoted in Washington, DC *National Intelligencer*, April 23.

**Wednesday, April 24, 1861** – Aleck Stephens meets with a committee of Virginia's convention to reach an agreement that Virginia will join the Confederacy once the state referendum approves secession.

The 7<sup>th</sup> New York as well as the 8<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts leaves Annapolis, repairing tracks as they proceed.

**Thursday, April 25, 1861** – After Scott sends Lincoln a message that an attack “may be expected at any moment” and after the 8<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts remains at a key junction south of Baltimore, the 7<sup>th</sup> New York arrives in Washington, much to the relief of everyone, including Lincoln. One young passenger in the first train was Andrew Carnegie.

**Saturday, April 27, 1861** – Lincoln suspends the writ of habeas corpus along the rail line between Washington and Baltimore.

**Monday, May 13, 1861** – Under cover of a violent electrical storm, and at the risk of another riot, Butler moves in force to occupy Baltimore. Scott scolds Butler for such a rash move and has him transferred to a less delicate command at Hampton Roads, including Fort Monroe.

**Saturday, May 23, 1861** – Pursuant to the plan devised by Scott and his friend, newly promoted Brig Gen Joseph K. F. Mansfield, launch a crossing of the Potomac at three points intending to seize a thin strip of Virginia. One element, led by Charles Stone, almost has the honor of being the first Federals to invade Confederate territory. After removing a confederate banner that had been visible from Washington, Col Ellsworth, who had accompanied Lincoln to Washington, is shot and killed as he descends down the stairs from the rooftop. A Union soldier in turn kills his assailant. The episode is an immediate journalistic sensation that contributes much to arousing war sentiment in the North. Lee's home in Arlington is also seized as a Union headquarters; Ellsworth becomes the North's first martyr.

At Fort Monroe, a slave named Luke asks for asylum. (Eventually Butler uses his legal acumen to justify Federal retention of slaves on the basis that they were captured personal property of slave owners, thus leading to the coinage of the term “contrabands.”)

**Monday May 25, 1861** – Under the direction of George Calwalader, Butler's successor, Federal troops in Maryland arrest and incarcerate John Merryman, who is accused of burning railroad bridges and destroying telegraph lines in northern Maryland. Merryman, a wealthy landowner, has attorneys who immediately file a writ

of habeas corpus in the Federal Circuit Court, which is under the direct supervision of Chief Justice Taney who immediately issues an order directing that Merryman be tried in the civil, as opposed to military, courts. Concluding that Lincoln, acting through his military commanders, had acted illegally in suspending habeas corpus, Taney directs that a copy of his order be delivered to the White House where Lincoln takes no immediate public notice of Taney's order except eventually to have Congress enact legislation that suspends habeas corpus.

**Friday, May 29, 1861** – A joint land-naval task force under the command of Butler completes the bombardment of a Confederate battery protecting the railroad terminus where Aquia Creek spills into the James. As a result Gosport, also known as Newport News, falls back into Union hands without any bloodshed.

Resources: *Cry Havoc! - The Crooked Road to Civil War, 1861* Nelson D. Langford, Viking (2007)

*Dissonance - The Turbulent Days Between Fort Sumter and Bull Run*, David Detzer, Harcourt (2006)

*Lincoln and Chief Justice Taney - Slavery, Secession, and The President's War Powers*, James F. Simon, Simon & Schuster (2006)

*Mr. Lincoln Goes to War*, William Marvel, Houghton Mifflin Company (2006)