

A Ball at Sunrise

****Summary of "A Ball at Sunrise"****

On the morning of March 8, Confederate artillery stationed at Fort Moultrie and Cummings Point initiated fire, seemingly as a practice drill. Initially, the first three shots fired were blank, followed by additional blank discharges until an unexpected real shot soared through the air, landing dangerously close to Fort Sumter. This cannonball struck the water about thirty yards from the fort, ricocheting and damaging Sumter's wharf, which led to a swift response from the fort's guards.

As the shot alarmed a German-born soldier, he promptly closed the main gate, triggering an alert at the fort. The long roll sounded, prompting gunnery teams to rush to their posts, readying themselves for battle as Assistant Surgeon Crawford noted in his journal. Major Anderson and other officers were positioned on the parapet, observing the confusion among the Confederate gunners, who appeared more frightened than the Sumter forces. Confederate soldiers, clad in their uniforms, fled in panic from their own batteries, leaving behind only the horses as they tried to escape the forthcoming return fire.

Recognizing that the cannonball incident seemed accidental, Anderson chose to refrain from retaliatory fire, and laughter replaced tension within the fort's ranks. The feeling was lighthearted enough that breakfast was prioritized over conflict. However, Anderson desired an apology for the incident; no immediate response was forthcoming until a Confederate boat arrived later that morning, bearing an officer with a white flag.

This emissary, Major Peter F. Stevens, admitted the firing was accidental and attributed the mishap to a loading error during drills. Despite the tensions, the discussion remained civil, with Anderson expressing a desire to avoid escalation while Captain Doubleday and others within Sumter were keen to engage in battle. As Stevens departed, he expressed hope that the incident would remain a singular occurrence, to which Anderson subtly confirmed that the shot had not struck the fort, although later reflections by Crawford revealed that it nearly could have.