

Sunrise

As the first light of *Sunrise* illuminated the battered walls of Fort Sumter on April 12, Captain Doubleday and his fellow officers braced themselves for the long-awaited confrontation. The men gathered in the mess hall, hastily consuming a meager breakfast of salt pork, farina, and rice, knowing it might be their last meal before exhaustion took over. Despite the tension, a quiet sense of duty filled the room as the officers finalized their strategies and prepared their men for the barrage that was sure to come. Doubleday led the first squad to their designated posts, positioning their guns toward the Confederate Iron Battery on Morris Island. Though aware that the enemy had superior positioning and firepower, he felt a deep sense of resolve, understanding that this battle would mark a defining moment in American history. The fort's defenders were not just fighting to hold a piece of land—they were fighting for the very survival of the Union and its ideals.

Major Anderson, standing atop the fort's parapet, gave the long-awaited command at precisely six-thirty, initiating the first Union counterfire. The opening volley from Sumter struck the Iron Battery but failed to cause substantial damage. Confederate artillery quickly responded with overwhelming force, launching a relentless bombardment that echoed across Charleston Harbor. The sheer force of the Confederate shells shook the walls of Sumter, sending shards of brick and debris flying through the air. The defenders struggled to return fire, as the enemy's well-coordinated assault left them scrambling for cover between each counterstrike. Doubleday noted that the Confederate batteries appeared to be adjusting their aim with increasing precision, honing in on key defensive positions inside the fort. With each impact, the Union soldiers grew increasingly aware that their ammunition and supplies would not last forever.

As the battle intensified, the situation inside Fort Sumter grew increasingly dire. Confederate mortars rained incendiary shells down upon the wooden barracks, igniting fires that rapidly spread through the fort. Smoke billowed into the sky as men rushed to extinguish the flames, all while maintaining their defensive positions under heavy enemy fire. The growing inferno forced Major Anderson to order a drastic action—several barrels of gunpowder had to be thrown into the sea to prevent a catastrophic explosion. Meanwhile, Captain Seymour, known for his quick wit even in the face of danger, attempted to lighten the mood with an offhand remark about the cannon fire, momentarily distracting the men from their grim reality. Yet, the humor was fleeting, as the Union soldiers understood that their situation was becoming increasingly unsustainable. The enemy's relentless barrage showed no sign of stopping, and the very structure of the fort was beginning to crumble under the pressure.

Across the harbor, Confederate forces watched their assault unfold with growing confidence. The gunners on Morris Island developed an efficient rhythm, coordinating their fire to maximize damage while minimizing their own exposure to return fire. Some soldiers, in a moment of reckless bravado, even chased after rolling cannonballs, treating the chaos of battle with an air of playful competition. Despite their enthusiasm, the Union resistance remained steadfast, and Major Anderson's men refused to surrender easily. The Confederate forces, recognizing the sheer determination of Sumter's defenders, began to cheer each time the Union cannons returned fire, a strange display of respect amidst the violence. The battle had evolved into a brutal yet oddly theatrical contest, where both sides understood the gravity of the conflict but could not ignore the peculiar mix of fear and admiration that filled the air.

As the relentless exchange of fire continued, a new crisis emerged—at precisely 12:48 PM, a Confederate shell struck the fort's flagpole, sending the American flag crashing to the ground. A deafening cheer erupted from the Confederate lines, mistaking the fallen flag as a sign of surrender. Inside Fort Sumter, however, the Union troops

refused to accept defeat. Determined to maintain morale, Private Peter Hart, a former New York City police officer, risked his life to retrieve the flag and reattach it using a makeshift pole. His act of defiance momentarily lifted the spirits of the Union soldiers, who continued to fight despite overwhelming odds. The sight of the tattered but still-standing flag became a symbol of resilience, reminding everyone inside the fort that they were not just defending a position—they were defending the very idea of the Union itself.

As the sun began its descent, Fort Sumter stood battered but unbroken. Fires still raged within the walls, and ammunition was running dangerously low. Yet, the men inside remained resolute, knowing that surrender was not yet an option. The night would bring little respite, as Confederate cannons continued their assault under the cover of darkness. Doubleday, exhausted but determined, surveyed the damage and braced for the next day's inevitable trials. Though vastly outgunned and isolated, the defenders of Fort Sumter remained unwavering, standing as a testament to the resilience of those who refused to let the Union fall.