

# The Angel of Death

The Angel of Death seemed to hang over Charleston on the morning of April 12, 1861, as Captain Gustavus Fox aboard the *Baltic* struggled to find his fellow Union ships. Despite the treacherous weather, Fox searched the dark waters for any sign of the expected *Powhatan*, but all he could find were the stormy seas and the uncertainty of the situation. The *Baltic* was dangerously close to Rattlesnake Shoal, nearly running aground, but with quick maneuvering, the ship was freed. It was then that Fox spotted the *Harriet Lane*—the only ship currently in sight. However, its crew was already in a state of turmoil, having received orders that were out of the ordinary for a vessel that had previously only been used for diplomatic missions. Captain John Faunce, the captain of the *Harriet Lane*, had trouble keeping his crew under control, and only after a tense standoff were the orders accepted and the ship sent to Charleston, uncertain of what they would face there.

Meanwhile, at Fort Sumter, Captain Abner Doubleday and his men anxiously prepared for the inevitable bombardment. Having received an ultimatum from the Confederate forces, Doubleday understood that retaliation would be necessary, but the limited visibility caused by the early morning light made firing impractical. With patience, he waited for the light of day to guide the battle, knowing full well that the Confederate forces would not remain idle for long. On the other side, Charleston's civilians gathered on the Battery, anxiously watching the horizon, uncertain of what was coming. The weight of the moment was felt by many, especially by Captain Ferguson, who noted how silence hung thick in the air, almost as if the presence of death itself loomed over the city. For many, this marked the beginning of a new chapter in their lives, one that would be shaped by the fate of Fort Sumter.

As the day continued, the tension mounted until the early morning hours of April 13 when the long roll of drums signaled the Confederate troops to prepare for battle. The

rain fell softly on the soldiers as they gathered, and the quiet anticipation of the coming conflict settled over them. At 4:30 AM, the silence was broken by the first shell fired at Fort Sumter, and the war officially began. The blast illuminated the sky, and the Confederate forces, led by Edmund Ruffin, proudly fired back, while the Union forces on the fort remained eerily silent. This lack of immediate response raised questions among the Confederate officers as they waited for the Union to fight back, but their concerns were met with an eerie calm as the fort's guns remained dormant. This delay in action fueled the tension, and as the bombardment continued, the stakes of the conflict grew ever higher.

The sound of shells exploding against the fort's walls echoed across the harbor, and inside Fort Sumter, the defenders scrambled to respond. For two full hours, the Union forces held their fire, which only intensified the Confederate bombardment. Captain Doubleday, who had initially been woken by the first blasts, rose from his quarters to witness the onslaught and decided that action was necessary. Despite the chaos surrounding them, the defenders maintained their discipline, working to hold their position under a constant barrage of incoming fire. The fort was slowly being torn apart, and the morale of the Union forces was tested by the relentless assault, but their resolve to hold the fort remained unwavering.

In Charleston, the city's residents watched the spectacle from their rooftops, some filled with excitement and others with dread. Mary Chesnut, one of the boarders at Mrs. Gidiere's boarding house, noted the atmosphere of uncertainty as she and others observed the bombardment. At one point, she found herself nearly catching fire when an ember landed too close to her, but she was saved just in time by a fellow boarder. The tension was palpable, as the civilians in Charleston knew that their city was now at the heart of the conflict, their futures uncertain. The sounds of war echoed through the streets, and every person in the city could feel that a new era had begun. They were no longer mere spectators in the political debate about slavery and secession; they were participants in the chaos that was beginning to unfold.

By mid-morning, the cannons continued to roar, sending shockwaves through Fort Sumter as the Union forces did their best to defend the fort. Despite being outnumbered and outgunned, the defenders continued to fight with determination. The loss of structures within the fort was evident as walls crumbled under the weight of continuous bombardment. Outside, the Confederate soldiers showed no signs of slowing their attack, eager to drive the Union forces from their position. However, as the fort stood firm against the onslaught, the battle for control of Fort Sumter was just beginning. The conflict, which would soon engulf the nation, had its first moments of devastation and defiance as both sides prepared for the long road ahead. The battle for Fort Sumter would not only mark the start of the Civil War but also define the courage and resilience of those involved on both sides of the conflict.