



Thunder in the Harbor: Fort Sumter, Charleston, and the American Civil War (Emerging Civil War Series)

By Richard W. Hatcher

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Fort Sumter hunkered on the horizon like a low, squat line separating Charleston Harbor from the open ocean. The manmade fort sat poised on the border of more than South Carolina and the sea. Occupied in April 1861 by the United States government but under siege by secessionist storm clouds from across the South, it ran like a line between Federal authority and state control; between North and South; between peace and war. “In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war,” President Lincoln had warned secessionist firebrands during his first inaugural address. But South Carolina, the hottest of secessionist hotbeds, wasn’t listening. Southern political brinkmanship was pushing toward inevitable, calamitous war. Fort Sumter had become the flashpoint. At 4:30 a.m. on Friday, April 12, 1861, Confederate batteries opened fire. Thirty-four hours later, with their supplies running low but their honor satisfied, Federal forces lowered their tattered flag. The only casualty—an accidental death—came after the surrender. It was otherwise a bloodless first battle to the bloodiest four years in American history. But those fateful first shots of the Civil War—certainly the war’s most famous—marked only the first of many chapters for Sumter. Over the next four years, the fort and the harbor it protected weathered the storms of war: bombardments and blockades; the launch and loss of the Confederate submarine Hunley; the assault on Battery Wagner, on adjacent Morris Island, by the famed 54th Massachusetts Infantry; and Sherman’s march to the sea. Thunder in the Harbor recounts Fort Sumter’s storied history in the engaging prose that has become the hallmark of the Emerging Civil War Series. Supplemented with more than a hundred historical photos and illustrations, captivating contemporary photography, and detailed maps, Thunder in the Harbor gives readers a behind-the-scenes look inside one of America’s most iconic places.

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Editorial Review

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Chris Mackowski, Ph.D., is a professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at St. Bonaventure University in Allegany, New York, and also works with the National Park Service at Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, which includes the Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, Wilderness, and Spotsylvania battlefields. He has published extensively on the Civil War and is the co-founder of the blog Emerging Civil War (www.emergingcivilwar.com).

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