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Fort Sumter—situated on Sullivan's Island near Charleston, South Carolina—was the scene of early action during America's Civil War. Confederate troops attacked the Union garrison at the fort, during April of 1861, causing significant interior damage. This photo, by Osborn & Durbec, depicts the fort and its damaged interior. [Online via the Library of Congress.](#)

The military strategy of the North, during America's Civil War, was fourfold:

- To blockade Southern ports, thereby cutting-off supplies from Europe;
- To break the Confederacy in two at the Mississippi River;

- To destroy the transportation and communication systems of the Confederacy, thus crippling morale; and
- To attack the Confederate capital at Richmond (in the State of Virginia).

The Southern strategy was:

- To fight a defensive war, using supplies from Europe gained from the sale of cotton;
- Until Northern forces tired of the war.

Most of the fighting, during the Civil War, took place in northern Virginia and along the Mississippi River. The first shots of the war were fired by the Confederacy on Fort Sumter (to confiscate it) after northern attempts to re-supply the federally owned forts in Charleston Harbor were foiled (by the Confederates).

The first major setback, for the Confederate Army, occurred when Union troops captured the areas surrounding Port Royal Sound (along the coast near Hilton Head). These areas remained under Union control throughout the Civil War.

The Union's strategy was to prevent ships from importing or exporting goods from SC ports. The Confederacy initially withheld cotton, its chief cash crop, from the European markets in order to increase its demand and thus gain allies willing to assist in the war effort.

This strategy ultimately failed as:

- The Northern blockade became more effective;
- New international cotton markets were found; and
- The purpose of the war changed with Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.

The Northern blockade was effective in South Carolina despite the efforts of blockade runners and the use of a new technology, the submarine *Hunley*. The blockade was actually devastating to the South because it kept the Confederate Army from receiving supplies.

Union forces laid siege to Charleston, attacking from Port Royal and bombarding the city for over a year.

The 54th Massachusetts, a unit of African-American soldiers, led the charge on Fort Wagner at the mouth of Charleston.

Robert Smalls—a 23-year-old slave who was the pilot of a Confederate ship—together with his wife and children, escaped to a Union ship engaged in the blockade. While the white crew was ashore, Smalls navigated the harbor giving the appropriate signals to all of the Confederate forts he passed until he reached the Union blockade line where he surrendered the ship.

Smalls provided the Union with valuable information about the fortifications around Charleston. After the Civil War, Smalls served as an officer in the South Carolina militia and as a state legislator. Smalls also helped draft the Constitution of SC and served 5 terms as a Congressman from SC.

Union General William Sherman marched into South Carolina, after his capture of Atlanta, as part of his march-to-the-sea campaign. It is not necessary to know all the details of Smalls's life story, but he became the first black Captain of a vessel in the service of the United States and he was also instrumental in recruiting African-Americans troops to fight for the United States.

Sherman's goal was to make total war, bringing the war home to civilians to convince the South to surrender. This had a direct impact on South Carolinians by:

- Destroying their homes;
- Destroying their plantations;
- Destroying their railroads; and
- Destroying their towns all along the way.

Although there is some controversy over who started the fire, even the capital city of Columbia burned.

The current state house, at the time still under construction, was shelled. Sherman especially wanted to convince SC to surrender since it was the first state to secede from the Union.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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Media Stream



Fort Sumter in April of 1861

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