

LINCOLN LORE

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WASHINGTON AND CHARLESTON—APRIL 14, 1865

A strange coincident of national significance which presents a peculiar paradox occurred on Friday, April 14, 1865. Upon the victory of northern forces Washington, the capital of the Union, was dressed in gala attire while Charleston, the early center of the Confederacy, lay in ruins. By night, however, a different story was to be told. In Washington the president had been assassinated, and in Charleston the celebration of the raising of the flag at Fort Sumter was drawing to a close with a brilliant illumination in the harbor and the firing of cannon.

With the Union troops in possession of Charleston, people throughout the North felt that there should be some formal program for the raising of the flag again on Fort Sumter. It so happened that April 14, 1865, came on Good Friday, the same day of the week as April 14, 1861, when Sumter fell. This fact contributed much to the general feeling that a flag raising should be held at Charleston on the fourth anniversary of the day the flag was lowered.

Inasmuch as such a program would first appeal to the War Department, which would look upon the anniversary as an occasion to build up the morale of the troops and create enthusiasm throughout the North, it is quite likely that the idea originated in the office of the Secretary of War. Stanton's biographer, Fowler, implies this. The order follows:

General Order No. 50
War Department, Adjutant-General's Office
Washington, March 27, 1865

Ordered—1. That at the hour of noon, on the 14th day of April, 1865, Brevet Major-General Anderson will raise and plant upon the ruins of Fort Sumter, in Charleston Harbor, the same United States flag which floated over the battlements of that fort during the rebel assault, and which was lowered and saluted by him and the small force of his command when the works were evacuated on the 14th day of April, 1861.

2. That the flag, when raised, be saluted by one hundred guns from Fort Sumter, and by a national salute from every fort and rebel battery that fired upon Fort Sumter.

3. That suitable ceremonies be had upon the occasion, under the direction of Major-General William T. Sherman, whose military operations compelled the rebels to evacuate Charleston, or, in his absence, under the charge of Major-General Q. A. Gillmore, commanding the department. Among the ceremonies will be the delivery of a public address by the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher.

4. That the naval forces at Charleston and their commander at that station be invited to participate in the ceremonies of the occasion.

By order of the President of the United States,
Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War.

The supposition that the order for the celebration originated with Stanton is strengthened by Lincoln's communications with him about it. On March 27, Lincoln, who was then at City Point, received from Stanton the above order relating to the Charleston celebration. The President replied to Stanton the same day as follows:

March 27, 1865—Telegram to Secretary Stanton.
City Point, Virginia, March 27, 1865. 3:35 P. M.
Hon. Secretary of War, Washington, D. C.:

Yours inclosing Fort Sumter order received. I think of but one suggestion. I feel quite confident that Sumter fell on the 13th, and not on the 14th of April, as you have it. It fell on Saturday, the 13th; the first call for troops on our part was got up on Sunday, the 14th, and given date and issued on Monday, the 15th. Look up the old almanac and other data, and see if I am not right.

A. Lincoln.

The following day Lincoln sent another telegram to Stanton as follows: "After your explanation, I think it is little or no difference whether the Fort Sumter ceremony takes place on the 13th or 14th." It will be noted that Lincoln had little interest in the arranging of the details of the celebration and apparently it was entirely under the jurisdiction of Secretary Stanton.

Between the time the order was issued and the date set for the celebration, Richmond was captured and Lee had surrendered which brought the war to a close. Those who are unfriendly to Abraham Lincoln argue that he should have called off the celebration, inasmuch as the war was over. His failure to do so some people have declared was evidence that it was "Lincoln's purpose to rub salt into those wounds and put fear into the hearts of the southern people."

Those who were to take part in the celebration had already left Washington for Charleston, before the news of Lee's surrender was received, and the one hundred and eighty citizens of New York who had planned for nearly two weeks to attend the celebration left New York for Charleston by boat the very morning the papers announced Grant's victory.

Even if Lincoln had elected to call off the Fort Sumter program after learning of Lee's surrender, it would have been physically impossible for him to do so unless he had acted immediately. The announcement of the victory of the Union forces did not reach Charleston until the night before the memorable fourteenth of April.

Noon Program at Fort Sumter

1. Introductory Prayer by Rev. Matthias Harris, who had been with Major Anderson at the Fort in 1860.
2. Selection from the Psalms by Rev. R. S. Storrs, Jr., of Brooklyn.
3. Reading of Major Anderson's dispatch to the Government on the fall of Fort Sumter.
4. Raising of original flag upon the ruins of Fort Sumter by Brevet Major-General Robert Anderson.
5. National salute.
6. Address by the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher.
7. Singing of the Doxology.
8. Closing prayer and benediction by Rev. R. S. Storrs, Jr.

The program at night can best be told in the words of one of the eye witnesses:

"In the evening, at 8 o'clock, we were summoned to the decks, to witness a most unique and beautiful illumination, as the closing demonstration of the day. At a given signal from the flag-ship, every man-of-war, transport and monitor in the harbor, became a skeleton pyramid of flame. Lanterns thickly slung to the rigging and culminating at the top of the mainmast flashed out a starry light or line of lights, reduplicated by reflection in the water, while on the decks the most brilliant Gregorian fires of red, white, blue, green, pink, purple and gold, were lighted, whose columns of smoke, rolling lazily upward and illuminated respectively by their own peculiar flame, presented a spectacle of almost dazzling beauty. Rockets of great power and towering flight screamed skyward from every deck, and, bursting with a muffled sound, dissolved into various gorgeous tints, dropped gently downward, and quenched their splendor in the tide. . . . Thus ended the celebration of April 14, 1865, the day of the flag's resurrection."

The tragedy which occurred in Washington on the evening of April 14, 1865, is well known to all, and stands out in vivid contrast to the brilliant celebration which was originally planned to commemorate a single event but which proved to be the most significant demonstration associated with the close of the war.