

Beginning of the Civil War, March & April 1861

- Mar 4 Abraham Lincoln becomes 16th President of the United States
- Mar 15 Lincoln meets with his Cabinet to decide whether or not to provision Fort Sumter
- Apr 11 Confederates demand surrender of Fort Sumter
- Apr 12 Confederates in Charleston bombard Ft. Sumter



- Apr 13 Fort Sumter, South Carolina surrenders
- Apr 17 Virginia secedes from the Union
- Apr 19 Armory at Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia) taken
Lincoln declares blockade of ports from SC to TX. His plan, recommended by Army Chief of Staff Winfield Scott, was to cut off Southern trade with the outside world and prevent sale of the Confederacy's major crop, cotton. The task was daunting; the Southern coast measured over 2,500 miles and the Union navy numbered less than 40 usable ships. The Union also needed a "brown water navy" of gunboats to support army campaigns down the Mississippi River and in Northern Virginia.
The Southern states had few resources compared to the North: a handful of shipyards, a small merchant marine, and no navy at all. Yet the Confederates needed a navy to break the Union blockade and to defend the port cities. Confederate Secretary of the Navy, Stephen Mallory, scrambled to find ships and even took on an offensive task: attacking Union merchant shipping on the high seas.
- Pratt Street Riots in Baltimore, Maryland
- Apr 20 Federals evacuate Norfolk, Virginia and Gosport Navy Yard
- Apr 21 Slave ship Nightingale captured by USS Saratoga
- Apr 22 Robert E. Lee becomes commander of Virginia forces
- Apr 30 New York Yacht Club offers their vessels to the Federal government