

The U.S. Civil War began April 12, 1861, when Confederate forces bombarded Fort Sumter in Charleston harbour, South Carolina, after the U.S. army refused Confederate demands to evacuate the fort.

Reloading the cannons, 150 years later

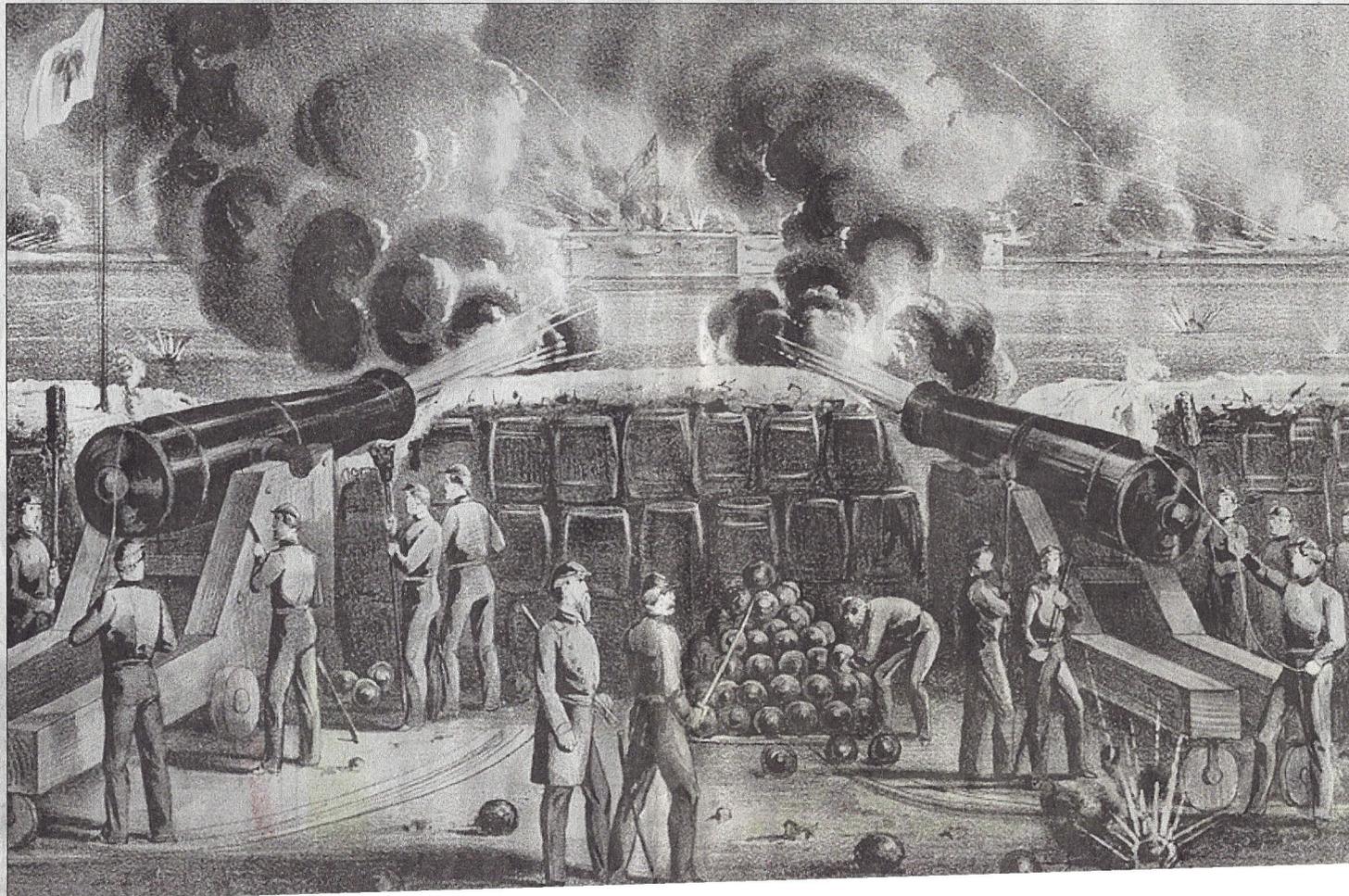
Americans — and Canadians — prepare to begin four years of U.S. Civil War re-enactments

BY ALLEN ABEL

CHARLESTON, S.C. — At 4:30 on Tuesday morning, on the sandy shore of the most tragically beautiful city on this or any continent, the gallant young ghosts of the American Civil War will be shaken from their graves by the thunder of cannon fire.

Mustered to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the first cannonballs and bullets of the long, awful conflict that sundered the Union, then forcibly restored it, ended human slavery in North America and — directly or indirectly — spawned the confederation of Canada, they will not sleep for the next four years.

From Charleston, 600,000 spectres will march to Gettysburg, Antietam and the Wilderness, to Shiloh and Manassas and the Crater, to Vicksburg and Appomattox, to surrender or victory. At each location, between now and the spring of 2015, descendants and dreamers in grey and blue will re-enact the heroic charges and the unspeakable carnage, and millions will try anew to com-



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JOE WHITLOCK
CONFEDERATE DESCENDANT
AND CHARLESTON, S.C. NATIVE

to make-believe battles and portray the Confederate soldiers of the 10th Louisiana regiment. ("I joined, and the rest is kismet," he says.) But he soon

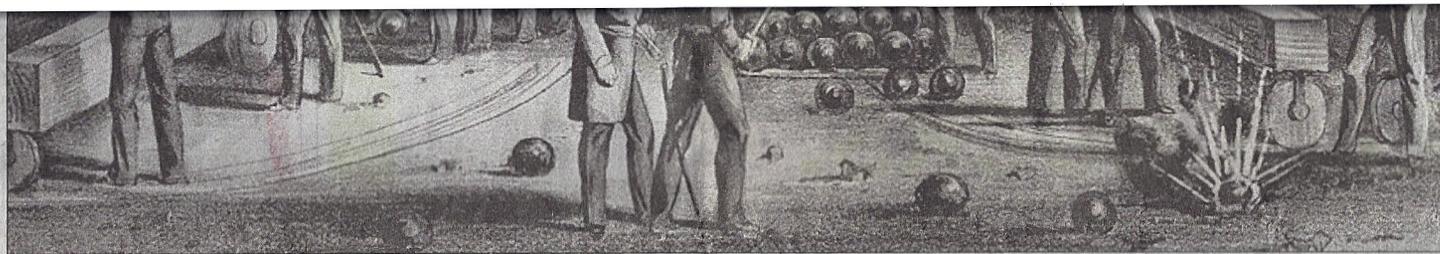
...the Crater, to Vicksburg and Appomattox, to surrender or victory. At each location, between now and the spring of 2015, descendants and dreamers in grey and blue will re-enact the heroic charges and the unspeakable carnage, and millions will try anew to comprehend the War Between the States, the war between unyielding concepts of humanity and liberty and, literally and most famously, the war between families, fathers and brothers.

Canadian involvement

That 50,000 Canadians — by rough estimate — fought for the North, with dozens of them winning the Medal of Honor for bravery, and that 10,000 Canadians went into battle for the South, is a truth that few Canadians have absorbed. And there is another lesson for Canadians in the U.S. Civil War: the fact that Canada, since 1759 at least, has settled its own existential division peacefully — by law and referendum and tolerance — stands as a miracle in a world of Sunnis and Shiites, Hutu and Tutsi, Croats and Serbs, Rebels and Yanks.

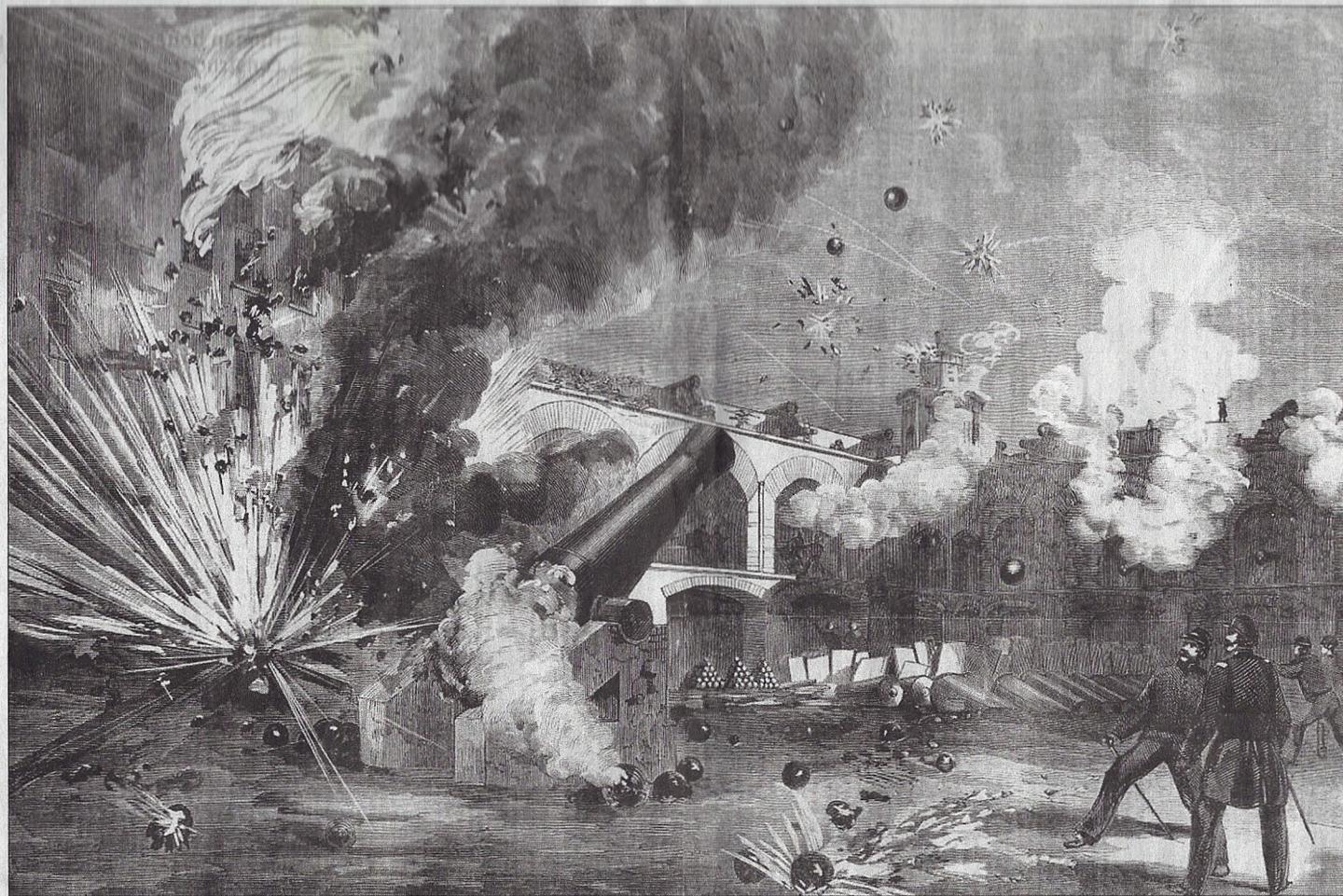
“Little did we think,” a New York newspaper — *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* — would write in mid-April of 1861, “that when we issued our last paper, that a bloody and fratricidal war was so close upon us ... a fearful, protracted, bitter and bloody struggle, the end of which would either be still disunion or a forced submission.”

Few prophecies ever have been so grim, or so accurate. So it was that before dawn on April 12, 1861, right here in elegant, wealthy, worldly, courtly, secessionist, racist Charleston — the same South Carolina city now overrun in every season by tourists in pursuit of flaming azaleas, *Porgy and Bess*, carriage tours, sweetgrass baskets, shrimp and grits, and she-crab



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Attacking: Confederate forces shell Fort Sumter. The bombardment lasted for a day and a half, after which a former U.S. senator who had been observing the attack, Confederate Col. Louis Wigfall, negotiated a Union surrender, which officially took effect on April 14.



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Defending: Shells rain on Fort Sumter. Despite 34 hours of bombardment by Confederate forces, amounting to more than 3,000 rounds, no lives were lost on either side, with the exception of two Union soldiers killed when a gun exploded during surrender ceremonies.

echoed by perhaps 2,000 eager, whooping rebel cannoneers — the lanyard for the first commemorative shot will be pulled by a lineal descendant of the rebel gunner who began the fateful barrage, so long ago.

As *Frank Leslie's* reported:

of sovereign, seceded South Carolina of troops of the “Black Republican” Abraham Lincoln, who had been inaugurated as president only 39 days before. So it would be precious in the extreme if, on April 12, 2011, the much-visited ruins of Sumter

Own Rifles, former re-enactor at Black Creek Pioneer Village in Toronto, graduate of Brock University, now a resident historian of African-American heritage at the flowery Magnolia Plantation near Charleston. Tucker is married to a pure-

were looking at hockey books, I'd go to the history section and just devour the books about the American Revolution and the Civil War.

“Reading about the slaves, I felt a real inner compassion. Not to say that I'm over-

to make-believe battles and portray the Confederate soldiers of the 10th Louisiana regiment. (“I joined, and the rest is kismet,” he says.) But he soon felt uncomfortable pretending to be defending slavery, and he changed sides — re-enactors call this “galvanizing” — and joined another group that dressed up as the Second Buffalo Regiment of the 49th New York.

It wasn't until much, much later that Tucker learned that his own great-grandfather had fought for the Confederacy somewhere down near Baton Rouge. He suspects that many, many Canadians have blue or grey in their blood.

With us at Sumter is Tucker's friend and fellow living-history devotee, Joe Whitlock, 27, a respiratory therapist, volunteer firefighter, native Charlestonian, and descendant of God-knows-how-many doomed volunteers who fought in what some of the monuments down here call The War for Southern Independence.

“Humble,” he says when I ask him how he feels to be at Fort Sumter. “Humble. My ancestor died of pneumonia right over there at Fort Moultrie on the beach.”

Like Tucker, Whitlock has tried to find a magic bullet of comprehension amid the muskets and the born-again machismo.

“I have dug the trenches,” he says. “I have slept in the freezing rain. I'm trying to understand the soldier, North and South. I'm not glad we stood up for slavery — that's just stupid. But I want to know what happened, and the men who died.”

We gaze across the choppy harbour to the ramparts where rebels sang and hoop-skirted ladies wept and prayed.

“It really puts Charleston on the map, historical-wise,” Whitlock says. “We're on a par with Paris and London as a cultural

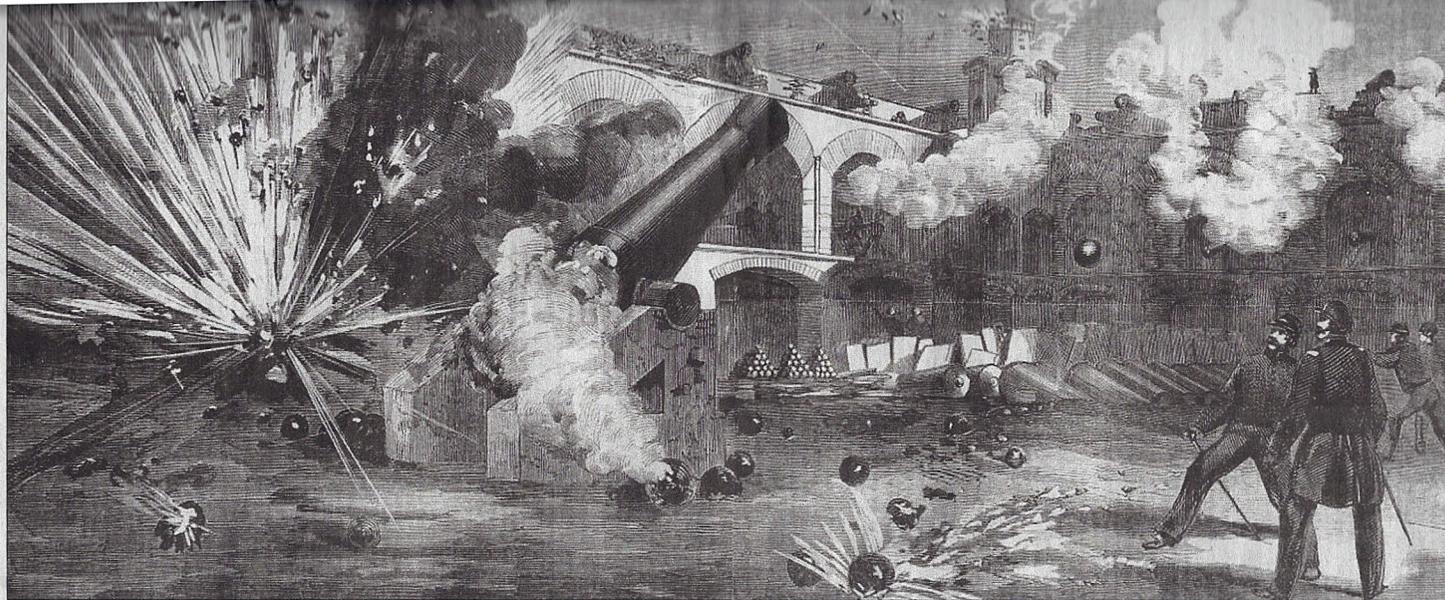
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There were 85 men in the Sumter garrison, commanded by Maj. Robert Anderson. Landward, opposing him, was Confederate Brig.-Gen. Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard. At West Point, Anderson had been Beauregard’s instructor; this would hardly be the last cruel irony of the War Between the States.

On Tuesday, in a re-enactment predicted to attract more than 100,000 spectators — and



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As *Frank Leslie’s* reported: “The Southern soldiers, officers and men, vied with each other in enthusiasm and daring. After every discharge, they leaped upon the ramparts to watch the effect of their missiles, then jumped back again, shouting triumphantly. They seemed perfectly reckless of their lives.”

‘Hallowed ground’

Anderson gave up on the second day and sailed northward. The jubilant Charlestonians did not yet know how painfully what they had started would end.

In 1861, the burning issue had been the presence in the waters

of sovereign, seceded South Carolina of troops of the “Black Republican” Abraham Lincoln, who had been inaugurated as president only 39 days before. So it would be precious in the extreme if, on April 12, 2011, the much-visited ruins of Sumter had to be closed because latter-day, petulant Republicans and their infantile Democratic enemies in Congress had failed to reach agreement on a new budget and had shut down the federal government instead.

Pending this cataclysm, the tour boats still are running from downtown Charleston to the lumpy little chocolate Bundt cake where the 33-star flag of the rived Union still — as in 1861 — defiantly flies.

“This is hallowed ground,” a man says when we disembark. “This is potent. This is mecca.”

This is 41-year-old D.J. Tucker from London, Ont., former member of the Queen’s

Own Rifles, former re-enactor at Black Creek Pioneer Village in Toronto, graduate of Brock University, now a resident historian of African-American heritage at the flowery Magnolia Plantation near Charleston. Tucker is married to a pure-wool Carolinian, and immersed up to his spectacles in the Civil War and the central issue that caused it: the African slavery of which low-country South Carolina was the principal beneficiary and for which Charleston was the pre-eminent port of entry and sale, the Nasdaq of human bondage.

“Growing up in London,” Tucker says, “hearing about Josiah Henson and Uncle Tom’s Cabin down in Chatham/Dresden, about Harriet Tubman living in St. Catharines, I always felt that in the background there was this thing that was not quite at rest. In the school library, while all the other kids

were looking at hockey books, I’d go to the history section and just devour the books about the American Revolution and the Civil War.

“Reading about the slaves, I felt a real inner compassion. Not to say that I’m overwhelmed by white guilt — absolutely not. But one of the things that hasn’t been adequately communicated, here or in Canada or in Britain, is that the enslaved Africans brought their genius, their knowledge and their skills, and it was those skills that proved to be the basis of the most successful economy in colonial America.

“I’ve always been a sucker for the underdog. That’s why I’m a Leafs fan.”

Confederates favoured

Tucker was 19 when he answered an ad in the *Toronto Star* seeking recruits to travel

respiratory therapist, volunteer firefighter, native Charlestonian, and descendant of God-knows-how-many doomed volunteers who fought in what some of the monuments down here call The War for Southern Independence.

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“It really puts Charleston on the map, historical-wise,” Whitlock says. “We’re on a par with Paris and London as a cultural capital. After the war, Charleston was reduced to crap, but look at us now. This was the defining moment in United States history, and it happened here.”

Come Tuesday, that moment will be repeated, the hands of the clock on St. Philip’s Church turned back 150 years. Then, as now, there will be no shortage of young Southerners eager to fire the guns.

“Everybody wants to be a Confederate,” Whitlock says, in the calm of Fort Sumter, before the storm. “We have to pay people to be Union.”

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