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# 1861

## Timeline

### 1. January 1861

#### The South Secedes

When Abraham Lincoln, a known opponent of slavery, was elected president, the South Carolina legislature perceived a threat. Calling a state convention, the delegates voted to remove the state of South Carolina from the union known as the United States of America. The secession of South Carolina was followed by the secession of six more states—Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas—and the threat of secession by four more—Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina. These eleven states eventually formed the Confederate States of America.

### 2. February 1861

#### The South Creates a Government

At a convention in Montgomery, Alabama, the seven seceding states created the Confederate Constitution, a document similar to the United States Constitution, but with greater stress on the autonomy of each state. Jefferson Davis was named provisional president of the Confederacy until elections could be held.

### 3. February 1861

#### The South Seizes Federal Forts

When President Buchanan—Lincoln's predecessor—refused to surrender southern federal forts to the seceding states, southern state troops seized them. At Fort Sumter, South Carolina troops repulsed a supply ship trying to reach federal forces based in the fort. The ship was forced to return to New York, its supplies undelivered.

### 4. March 1861

[Skip to main content](#) **Inauguration**

At Lincoln's inauguration on March 4, the new president said he had no plans to end slavery in those states where it already existed, but he also said he would not accept secession. He hoped to resolve the national crisis without warfare.

## 5. April 1861

### Attack on Fort Sumter

When President Lincoln planned to send supplies to Fort Sumter, he alerted the state in advance, in an attempt to avoid hostilities. South Carolina, however, feared a trick; the commander of the fort, Robert Anderson, was asked to surrender immediately. Anderson offered to surrender, but only after he had exhausted his supplies. His offer was rejected, and on April 12, the Civil War began with shots fired on the fort. Fort Sumter eventually was surrendered to South Carolina.

## 6. April 1861

### Four More States Join the Confederacy

The attack on Fort Sumter prompted four more states to join the Confederacy. With Virginia's secession, Richmond was named the Confederate capitol.

## 7. June 1861

### West Virginia Is Born

Residents of the western counties of Virginia did not wish to secede along with the rest of the state. This section of Virginia was admitted into the Union as the state of West Virginia on June 20, 1863.

## 8. June 1861

### Four Slave States Stay in the Union

Despite their acceptance of slavery, Delaware, Kentucky, Maryland, and Missouri did not join the Confederacy. Although divided in their loyalties, a combination of political maneuvering and Union military pressure kept these states from seceding.



[View of the battlefield, First Bull Run, Virginia, July 1861](#)

## 9. July 1861

### First Battle of Bull Run

Public demand pushed General-in-Chief Winfield Scott to advance on the South before adequately trained troops. Scott ordered General Irvin McDowell to advance on Confederate troops at Manassas Junction, Virginia. McDowell attacked on July 21, and was initially successful, but

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the introduction of Confederate reinforcements resulted in a Southern victory and a chaotic retreat toward Washington by federal troops.

None of the included photographs of First Bull Run were made at the time of battle (July 21); the photographers had to wait until the Confederate Army evacuated Centreville and Manassas in March 1862. Their views of various landmarks of the previous summer are arranged according to the direction of the federal advance, a long flanking movement by Sudley's Ford.

## 10. July 1861

### **General McDowell Is Replaced**

Suddenly aware of the threat of a protracted war and the army's need for organization and training, Lincoln replaced McDowell with General George B. McClellan.

## 11. July 1861

### **A Blockade of the South**

To blockade the coast of the Confederacy effectively, the federal navy had to be improved. By July, the effort at improvement had made a difference and an effective blockade had begun. The South responded by building small, fast ships that could outmaneuver Union vessels.

#### **Port Royal, South Carolina—1861-1862**

On November 7, 1861, Captain Samuel F. Dupont's warships silenced Confederate guns in Fort Walker and Fort Beauregard. This victory enabled General Thomas W. Sherman's troops to occupy first Port Royal and then all the famous Sea Islands of South Carolina, where Timothy H. O'Sullivan recorded them making themselves at home.

#### **Confederate Winter Quarters—1861-1862**

These photographs show Confederate winter quarters at Manassas, Centreville, Fairfax Court House, and Falls Church, Virginia.

This time line was compiled by Joanne Freeman and owes a special debt to the *Encyclopedia of American History* by Richard B. Morris.