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Did Civil War shooting begin in Florida?

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



DID CIVIL WAR SHOOTING BEGIN IN FLORIDA?

By HAMPTON DUNN

PENSACOLA BEACH --- Some historians will tell you the first shots of the Civil War were fired here at Fort Pickens, quite some time before the flareup at Fort Sumpter.

During the tense times between the time Florida seceded from the Union, Jan. 10, 1861, and the full-fledged war, there was considerable maneuvering going on. A young Lieutenant decided it would be better for the U.S. to take over and hold Fort Pickens, since it commands the whole Pensacola harbor and there were not enough Federals to save the Navy Yard, Fort Barrancas and other properties. The Confederates actually had a truce with the U.S., that they would not attack Pickens if the Union didn't try to reinforce it. The South felt Pickens "is not worth one drop of blood to us. Bloodshed may be fatal to our cause." Later the Federals violated the truce, President Lincoln not feeling bound by pledges of the former administration. In the meantime, there had been shots exchanged.

Fort Pickens was built in 1834 on orders of President Adams. It was constructed under the supervision of Capt. William H. Chase, army engineer who later, as a Confederate general, was ordered to capture the fort, but failed. The Battle of Santa Rosa Island was fought here in October; the Confederates lost, and later abandoned all of Pensacola area.

Pickens became a military prison. One of the most famous prisoners was Geronimo, the Apache Indian marauder, who was kept here from 1886 until 1888. He was so fierce-looking, Pensacola parents disciplined unruly children by threatening to put them in a cell with Geronimo.

