

A Little Treason

Edmund Ruffin was in Tallahassee observing Florida's secession convention when the news broke on January 9 that the **Star of the West** attempted to reinforce Fort Sumter. This event had a significant impact on the delegates; those previously opposed to secession began to support it fervently. The following morning, the convention voted overwhelmingly in favor of secession, with a tally of 62 to 7. Ruffin eagerly telegraphed the news to Governor Pickens in Charleston and editors of the **Richmond Enquirer**, expressing his discontent about the expense—six dollars and thirty cents for just six words, approximately two hundred dollars today.

Ruffin quickly received further encouraging news about Mississippi's secession and Southern states moving to occupy federal assets. He attributed this momentum to Major Anderson's continued presence at Fort Sumter and President Buchanan's inaction. Writing that if Fort Sumter had not been "treacherously garrisoned," no state would have preemptively seized a fort, he felt a sense of urgency to return to Charleston.

Ruffin departed Tallahassee at four p.m., enduring a grueling journey that involved a train to Monticello and a stagecoach ride to Quitman, Georgia. The rough, unpaved roads made the journey challenging for a sixty-seven-year-old man. After arriving at Quitman in the dark, he found the train waiting with no available seats, forcing him to stand by a fire for two hours before it departed at 3:30 a.m. The train journey to Savannah took nine and a half hours, where he received additional uplifting news about Alabama's recent vote to secede by a margin of 61 to 39.

Ruffin reached Charleston by one o'clock the next afternoon and the following day took a tour of the fortifications seized by state forces, accompanied by South Carolina Secretary of War Jamison. They were joined by engineers, volunteers, and even one hundred enslaved persons sent by their owners to assist. At Fort Moultrie, Ruffin observed activity and enthusiasm among the militia volunteers. Recognizing the optics of labor, he jokingly asked a soldier if he could take his place briefly "to commit a little treason to the northern government," before shoveling sand and filling a wheelbarrow, a symbolic act reflecting his commitment to the Southern cause.