

Crisis

In the chapter titled "Crisis," set during January 1-8, Edmund Ruffin embarks on a significant journey from a plantation near Gainesville, Florida, to Tallahassee to attend the state secession convention. On his way, he learns of Major Anderson's maneuvers at Fort Sumter and the potential for conflict, stirring his belief that the war's advent could accelerate decisions within the convention. Florida remained cautious, with Ruffin insisting that immediate action was imperative, as they awaited responses from other states.

Reaching Tallahassee on January 3, Ruffin discovers a delay in the convention's start due to the late arrival of delegates, coinciding with his sixty-seventh birthday. Despite being elderly compared to the general population, Ruffin was notably vigorous. The convention eventually convened, allowing him the honor of taking a seat amongst the delegates amid significant fanfare, which he claimed he did not desire, despite his fondness for public attention.

In parallel, President Buchanan reconvened his cabinet on January 2 to address whether to fortify Major Anderson at Fort Sumter. The reading of a contentious letter from South Carolina escalated tensions and led to a majority in the cabinet supporting reinforcements, despite Interior Secretary Thompson's dissent. Buchanan conceded to the pressure to dispatch troops.

Meanwhile, the War Department faced logistical challenges on how to reinforce Anderson. General Scott reconsidered previously planned missions for troop deployment, ultimately deciding to charter the commercial vessel, "Star of the West," to undertake the mission under strict confidentiality. The vessel left New York on January 5, with plans to transport soldiers to Fort Sumter while maintaining utmost secrecy to avoid interception.

On the same day, Anderson expressed satisfaction in a letter written on New Year's Eve, indicating he felt secure in his position at Fort Sumter and that reinforcement was not urgent. This sentiment contradicted earlier pressures, prompting Buchanan to cancel the mission of "Star of the West," but notifications were delayed, leaving Anderson unaware of both the earlier mission and the subsequent cancellation orders.

During this time, Anderson received an unexpected visit from his wife, Eba, who traveled to Charleston for support. Their reunion provided temporary relief to his isolated situation at the fort and lifted the spirits of the garrison, which was busy fortifying defenses in anticipation of conflict.