

# Lethal Secrets

## \*\*Chapter Summary: Lethal Secrets\*\*

In January, Lieutenant Talbot returned from Washington, bringing news and a letter from Secretary of War Joseph Holt, who had just been confirmed in office. The situation surrounding Fort Sumter was tense, with local civilians expressing their anger toward Captain Doubleday, known for his abolitionist views. Doubleday learned he was viewed as a target, reputedly warned of plans to harm him should he venture into Charleston. Despite Major Anderson hoping for clear directives on how to handle the mounting tensions, Holt's letter provided little guidance, merely conveying that the War Department was pleased with Anderson's conduct.

As threats surrounding the fort escalated, South Carolina forces, bolstered by over a thousand enslaved individuals, worked diligently to fortify the area with supplies seized from other forts. Doubleday observed the construction of the "Iron Battery" at Morris Island, which posed a significant threat to Sumter. As time passed, South Carolina received additional, powerful artillery that further jeopardized Anderson's position.

High winds and rain disrupted operations at the fort, leading Anderson to implement strategic defenses, including the removal of flagstone pavement to mitigate damage from potential artillery. Amidst these preparations, a surprising act of conciliation emerged from Governor Pickens, who sent provisions to the fort, leading to an amusing scene where the meat was returned while vegetables were hidden away by the soldiers. Anderson, maintaining his stern stance, rejected the provisions to uphold their dignity, even as they faced the reality of dwindling supplies.

In a broader context, the political landscape in Washington was tumultuous. Buchanan's administration was experiencing instability, marked by the resignation of his treasury secretary just weeks into office. As tensions mounted, secession discussions intensified across the South. Edmund Ruffin, returning to Virginia, grew increasingly frustrated with the state's indecision regarding secession. However, news of Louisiana's secession filled him with hope as he envisioned a strong confederacy forming among the Southern states.

Throughout this period of high tension, families at Sumter faced their own crises. As the storm persisted, arrangements were made for evacuating families to safety in Charleston. This event left the fort quieter but also allowed a sense of relief regarding their safety. The chapter captures the escalating conflict and emotional strain surrounding Fort Sumter, blending military, social, and political narratives as tensions teetered on the brink of war.