

Rumor and Cannon Fire

On April 9, Mary Chesnut, despite suffering from a bad cold, was getting ready to head back to Mulberry plantation. Initially reluctant to leave her home, a visit from her friend Robert Gourdin prompted her to change her mind. During their conversation, John Manning entered dramatically, proclaiming, “Madam your country is invaded.” He claimed that six warships were lurking outside the bar, while messengers Talbot and Chew brought news of imminent war. However, this alarming announcement regarding the warships was based on a misunderstanding, mainly fueled by poor visibility due to a storm.

Mary quickly shared the news with Mr. C, who confirmed it, adding to the atmosphere of unrest. The situation was further heightened when Wigfall arrived quoting Byron's work, adding a poetic touch to the chaotic atmosphere. Mary observed the growing confusion, her heart racing, as she and Mrs. W retreated to her room, where they lamented the horrors of a potential Civil War. Their anxious discussion was cut short as cannon fire echoed in the distance, accompanied by shouts.

By 11 p.m., heavy rain fell, and the sound of six cannon blasts pierced through the town, causing fear to grip the citizens. Mary encountered Mrs. Allen Green, who appeared visibly shaken. Former governor John Means approached Mary, informing her that Governor Pickens had ordered seven cannon blasts to summon the 17th regiment, of which he was a colonel. This thunderous communication was intended to mobilize the regiment for boarding steamers that would take them to Morris Island in anticipation of a presumed Union assault.

The situation was tense, with seven cannon announcing the soldiers' resilience amidst the threats of Union ships rumored to be waiting to strike. “Of course no sleep for me last night,” Mary noted, reflecting on the chaos of shouting and marching soldiers in the streets. Meanwhile, Edmund Ruffin, stationed in a tent on Morris Island, remarked on the heightened excitement among the city's inhabitants, contemplating the impending conflict that loomed over them all.