

Under Fire

In the chapter "Under Fire" from *Star of the West*, the tension surrounding the ship's approach to Fort Sumter escalates as it comes under fire from a hidden battery. Captain McGowan documents the precarious situation, noting how cannonballs ricochet around the vessel, with one narrowly missing the pilot-house and another striking the ship's hull. The *Star of the West*, being a large target, is an easy mark for the inexperience of the fifty cadets manning the cannons, who seem to fire wildly during the attack.

As the *Star of the West* attempts to signal Fort Sumter for help by raising and lowering its flag, Lieutenant Doubleday at the fort is alerted to the ship's distress. He scrambles the garrison to prepare for action, while Anderson, the fort's commander, struggles with his obligations. He contemplates firing back in response to the aggression against the U.S. flag, yet he is acutely aware of the potential ramifications of igniting a civil war.

With calls for action from his officers, including Lieutenant Jefferson Davis, Anderson is torn between loyalty to the U.S. Army and his troubled feelings regarding the conflict with the South. In the midst of this, Lieutenant Woods aboard the *Star of the West* debates the ship's retreat. As cannonballs continue to threaten the ship, he decides that retreat is necessary to avoid capture or grounding in hostile waters.

Despite the tension, the *Star of the West* manages to withdraw from the harbor, although Lieutenant Woods acknowledges the potential for disaster if they fell behind in the tide. Ultimately, he concludes that the locals were aware of their approach, undermining any chance of a surprise entry into the harbor.

The chapter paints a vivid picture of the precariousness of the situation for both the defenders of Fort Sumter and the crew aboard the *Star of the West*, highlighting the complexities of loyalty, duty, and the growing conflict that would soon engulf the nation. The looming threat of civil war hangs heavily over the actions and decisions of the protagonists as they navigate this fraught moment in American history.