

# Acclaim

Acclaim for the Confederacy echoed loudly in the southern states as the news of the bombardment and fall of Fort Sumter reached Norfolk. Russell, a journalist traveling aboard the steamer *Georgiana*, initially failed to grasp the enormity of the event. The previous night had been restless for him, as he struggled with distractions and discomfort, watching other passengers indulge in early morning cocktails. The atmosphere on the ship contrasted sharply with the gravity of what was unfolding, highlighting the different reactions to the Union's retreat from Fort Sumter. The overwhelming sense of hospitality and casual indifference aboard the ship stood in stark contrast to the seriousness of the situation. Upon arriving in Norfolk, he was greeted by joyous cheers but also saw the division in the faces of some individuals. Their reactions were a subtle reminder of the larger, deeply ingrained tensions that divided the country at the time.

As Russell stepped off the boat, he found Norfolk's ambiance to be far from celebratory. Although the city's residents were exultant, the surroundings spoke a different story. The Atlantic Hotel, where he was taken, was filled with neglect, plagued by mosquitoes, and staffed with slaves working as waiters. The sense of decay and underlying societal imbalance struck Russell, who noted how the euphoria of the moment stood in stark contrast to the reality of life in the city. The news of the Union's retreat had given birth to celebrations, but the actual condition of Norfolk, with its unkempt spaces and oppressive environment, painted a much bleaker picture. In this setting, Russell's personal discomfort heightened his sense of alienation, as he became acutely aware of the different ways in which people in the South were experiencing this pivotal moment in American history.

Russell's visit to a local newspaper office in Norfolk exposed him further to the celebratory tone surrounding the Union defeat. The telegraphic bulletin proclaiming,

"The Yankees are whipped," echoed through the office, and yet, Russell could not join in the jubilation. He felt detached from the excitement and foresaw that the conflict, now officially ignited, would only deepen divisions and lead to greater bloodshed. Though he did not personally share the fervor of those around him, Russell resolved to continue his journey southward. His anticipation grew as he approached Charleston, a city that represented the heart of the South's stance on secession and slavery. The mounting fervor and sense of pride he witnessed along his route highlighted the deep commitment to the Confederate cause and the region's staunch defense of their perceived rights, particularly regarding slavery.

As Russell traveled further south, the fervor of the Southern response intensified. In Charleston, the palpable hostility towards the North became even more apparent, and the Confederate flag, known as the "Stars and Bars," waved proudly as a symbol of Southern unity. Russell's journey through the South revealed an increasingly impassioned people who were not just fighting for political autonomy, but for a way of life they felt was under direct threat. The energy and revolutionary zeal of those he encountered were reflected in the loud music, spirited crowds, and displays of defiance. The South, having just witnessed its first major military victory, now had an emboldened sense of identity and purpose. Russell reflected on the symbolism of Fort Sumter's fall, comparing it to other historical turning points, such as the storming of the Bastille, acknowledging that this was not just a military conflict—it was a moment of profound cultural transformation.

As he neared Charleston, the culmination of his journey was on the horizon, and he could feel the weight of the events about to unfold. The train ride toward Charleston marked the final leg of his journey, but it was also the beginning of an inevitable reckoning. Russell anticipated that the South's celebrations would soon face the reality of war, and that the consequences of Fort Sumter's fall would resonate deeply for both sides. The moment that began as an act of defiance would soon spiral into a war that would define the nation's future and reshape its very identity. Through Russell's eyes, the chapter conveyed not only the fervor of a divided country but also the uncertain path ahead as the country's fate hung in the balance.