

# Crisis

Crisis unfolded as Edmund Ruffin embarked on a critical journey from his plantation near Gainesville, Florida, to Tallahassee to attend the state secession convention in early January 1861. During his travels, Ruffin was made aware of Major Anderson's actions at Fort Sumter, which hinted at the potential for imminent conflict. This news fueled Ruffin's belief that the war could hasten the secession decisions within the convention. Despite Florida's hesitance, Ruffin strongly advocated for swift action, feeling that delays would only prolong the inevitable. The state's cautious approach reflected its hesitation, but Ruffin's urgency in calling for immediate action underscored the growing tensions across the South, where the possibility of war now seemed closer than ever.

Upon arriving in Tallahassee on January 3, Ruffin found that the convention's proceedings were delayed, primarily due to the late arrival of delegates, coincidentally marking his sixty-seventh birthday. Though he was elderly by comparison to most of the convention's members, Ruffin exhibited remarkable vigor and enthusiasm. Once the convention finally began, Ruffin was afforded the honor of taking a seat among the delegates, a moment he claimed to appreciate, despite his usual aversion to public attention. Despite this acknowledgment, his passion for the cause was clear, and his presence among the delegates marked a pivotal moment in Florida's decision-making process during the secession crisis. His energy and resolve proved critical in pushing the secessionist agenda, as tensions escalated across the country.

Parallel to the unfolding events in Florida, President Buchanan reconvened his cabinet on January 2 to discuss the critical issue of whether to reinforce Major Anderson at Fort Sumter. During this meeting, a contentious letter from South Carolina heightened the stakes, leading the majority of the cabinet to favor sending reinforcements to Anderson's position. Interior Secretary Thompson, however, was opposed to the idea,

arguing that such a move could inflame the already volatile situation. Despite Thompson's dissent, Buchanan ultimately yielded to the majority, agreeing to dispatch troops to reinforce Fort Sumter in response to the escalating crisis. This decision marked another significant step in the chain of events that would soon culminate in open conflict, further deepening the divide between the North and South.

The War Department was also dealing with its own logistical challenges, trying to figure out how best to execute the plan to reinforce Anderson at Fort Sumter. General Scott reconsidered earlier plans for troop deployment and decided to charter the commercial vessel *Star of the West* for the mission, emphasizing that the operation should be carried out under strict confidentiality. This vessel left New York on January 5, carrying soldiers who were to be transported to Fort Sumter under the guise of secrecy, to prevent any Southern forces from intercepting the mission. The decision to use a commercial vessel was seen as a calculated risk, aiming to avoid direct confrontation with Confederate forces while ensuring that the Union's interests were safeguarded in Charleston Harbor.

On the same day that the *Star of the West* departed, Anderson expressed a sense of reassurance in a letter written on New Year's Eve. In the letter, Anderson conveyed that he felt secure in his position at Fort Sumter and that the reinforcement of his garrison was not an urgent matter. His sentiments, however, contradicted the growing pressure from Washington to send reinforcements. This disconnect led to the cancellation of the *Star of the West* mission, though the notification of this change was delayed. As a result, Anderson remained unaware of both the earlier mission and the cancellation orders, leaving him uncertain about the plans that had been put in place to support him.

Meanwhile, Anderson received an unexpected visit from his wife, Eba, who traveled to Charleston to offer him support during his time of isolation at Fort Sumter. Their reunion brought a brief moment of relief to Anderson, and it lifted the spirits of the garrison, who were hard at work fortifying their defenses in anticipation of the inevitable conflict. Eba's presence provided Anderson with much-needed comfort,

allowing him to momentarily focus on personal matters amidst the growing threat of war. The fort's preparations continued with increasing urgency as the garrison worked tirelessly to ensure the fort's readiness for whatever might come. This brief respite, however, was only temporary, and the shadow of war loomed ever closer as both sides prepared for the upcoming battle.

The crisis continued to build, with each day bringing the nation closer to a point of no return. Ruffin's call for immediate action and the decisions made in Washington reflected the larger uncertainties and anxieties that plagued both the North and the South. The looming conflict was no longer a distant possibility, but a reality that everyone could sense, yet few could stop. The political maneuvers, logistical challenges, and personal struggles faced by those involved in the decision-making process underscored the profound challenges of navigating a nation on the brink of civil war. As the country stood divided, the consequences of the decisions made during these critical moments would resonate throughout history, shaping the future of the United States.