

# Practice Makes Perfect

Practice makes perfect, especially when it comes to the precise and dangerous task of artillery firing at Fort Sumter during the Civil War. The air is thick with the sound of cannon fire as Confederate artillery crews engage in practice sessions, essential for honing their skills. These practice drills are crucial, as firing heavy guns demands both precision and coordination among the crew. Typically composed of seven men, the crew, known as cannoneers, operates a single cannon, referred to as a "piece." The gunner, often the chief, directs the actions of the crew. Each step of the process, from positioning the cannon to firing the shot, must be executed with absolute care, as even a small mistake can result in disaster. Historical records from the Civil War are filled with accounts of artillery accidents, such as the tragic event aboard the U.S.S. *Ticonderoga*, where a misfire led to fatal consequences. This emphasizes the dangers involved in artillery operations, where every action counts.

To ensure a successful shot, the crew follows a strict sequence of actions. They first pull the cannon away from the wall, sponge out any remnants of the previous shot, and then load the cannonball into the barrel. After this, the crew aims the cannon and prepares for firing, following a series of commands to maintain timing and coordination. The artillery drills, despite their seeming simplicity, are far from easy and demand skill, practice, and precision. Each misstep or error during the process could lead to a failure, and the risks associated with handling these heavy weapons are ever-present. The chapter highlights how artillery practice is not just a military necessity but also a crucial part of preparing for conflict, where even the slightest mistake can lead to devastating results. Through these drills, the Confederate forces aim to improve their artillery capabilities, vital to their war efforts.

March 12 brings an event at Fort Moultrie where Confederate artillery demonstrates significant progress in their skill. They fire hundreds of blank rounds, their accuracy in

hitting a buoy becoming a testament to their growing proficiency. This event starkly contrasts with the situation at Fort Sumter, where Major Anderson struggles with limited resources and ammunition shortages. Faced with these constraints, Anderson resorts to repurposing flannel shirts as cartridge bags, a creative solution to the lack of proper supplies. Despite these efforts, Anderson is frustrated by his inability to demonstrate the artillery proficiency he knows is necessary, especially when compared to the Confederate forces, who are better prepared and more practiced. He communicates this challenge to Washington, expressing the difficulties in displaying artillery expertise under such dire conditions. The chapter emphasizes the disparity in resources and the strain it places on Anderson and his men, who are trying to maintain the fort under increasingly difficult circumstances.

Beyond the battlefield, tensions also arise from administrative challenges and social issues at Fort Sumter. A young Black servant, Thomas Moore Lynch, becomes embroiled in a controversy when his correspondence with his mother suggests potential insurrection. The South Carolina government claims that Lynch, allegedly a slave, cannot return to Fort Sumter due to suspicions about his loyalty. This issue adds a layer of complexity to the already tense situation, as Anderson is forced to navigate between military duty and social obligations. He expresses his disapproval of the accusations against Lynch, feeling that the young man's character and status are being unjustly questioned. This debate over honor and duty brings to light the broader social and political dynamics at play, as Union soldiers must contend with the deeply ingrained societal structures of the South. The situation becomes emblematic of the personal and political tensions that permeate the period leading up to the Civil War.

As the chapter concludes, the underlying conflict between Union forces and the South Carolina authorities becomes increasingly evident. The Union soldiers at Fort Sumter are not only facing military challenges but are also caught in a web of social and political disputes. This sets the stage for the larger conflict that is brewing, with personal honor, duty, and the looming threat of war all playing significant roles in shaping the events. The complexities of military preparations, coupled with the personal struggles of those involved, illustrate the difficult and multifaceted nature of

the period. The narrative thus provides a glimpse into the tensions that would soon explode into full-scale conflict, with both sides preparing for a war that would reshape the nation.