

# Some Good Thing in the Wind

Some good thing in the wind seemed to drift through the air in late March 1861, as President Lincoln took steps to assess the pro-Union sentiment in South Carolina, particularly in Charleston. He sent two emissaries, Stephen A. Hurlbut and Ward Lamon, to gauge the local mood following Captain Fox's recent evaluation of Fort Sumter. Hurlbut, a former South Carolina resident with a less-than-clear past, used his visit under the guise of family matters but quickly reported back to Lincoln on the rising war preparations he witnessed. These included armed shipments and mortars being stored at the rail depot, signaling that the South was gearing up for possible conflict. Through these clandestine interactions, Lincoln hoped to understand just how strongly the Southern state still held on to its loyalty to the Union, or if it had already fully embraced the idea of separation.

During his brief time in Charleston, Hurlbut met with several influential locals, including Judge James Petigru, South Carolina's most prominent Unionist. Petigru confirmed that the Unionist sentiment in the state had drastically declined, overtaken by a strong allegiance to South Carolina. This news was sobering for Lincoln, as Hurlbut's report clearly stated that the idea of national patriotism had been replaced by a growing attachment to the state's independence. Hurlbut also warned Lincoln that any federal action, such as sending troops or reinforcements to Fort Sumter, could provoke an immediate and violent response, potentially igniting a war. This was a pivotal moment, as it signaled to Lincoln the escalating tensions and the inevitability of a larger conflict if steps weren't taken carefully. The consequences of missteps seemed to loom large as Lincoln tried to navigate the intricacies of the national and regional allegiances.

Meanwhile, Ward Lamon, Lincoln's other envoy, ventured into Charleston with an alternative approach. He met with Governor Pickens to discuss the status of Fort Sumter, though he did so without any formal authority to speak on behalf of the federal government. Lamon hinted at the possibility of a federal withdrawal from Fort Sumter, trying to prevent an outright conflict by suggesting that an evacuation might be in the works. However, Lamon's conversations with Major Anderson at Fort Sumter revealed much deeper concerns. Anderson, a man of honor and duty, viewed any formal surrender of the fort as a dishonorable act, which created a rift between his sense of duty and the political reality he was facing. Lamon's message was seen by Anderson as more than a suggestion—it was perceived as an unwanted pressure to capitulate without a clear directive from Washington.

Tensions reached new heights when General Beauregard, the Confederate general, sent a note to Major Anderson to clarify the Confederacy's position. Beauregard made it clear that no surrender was expected, but he also hinted at the possibility of an explosion occurring if the fort were to be abandoned. This reference to a potential explosion deeply angered Anderson, who vehemently rejected any suggestion of dishonor or cowardice. He saw the implication of a catastrophic event as an unfair tactic to force his hand, further complicating the emotional and military dynamics of the situation. The pressures on Anderson mounted, with the Union's military strategy being questioned by both the Confederate leadership and Washington, as General Winfield Scott in the capital reprimanded Anderson for the supposed intentions of surrender. This complicated mix of military strategy and political expectations set the stage for future confrontations, leaving both sides of the conflict at a standstill, unsure of what the next step should be.

Back in Washington, Secretary Seward met with William Russell from the London Times, acknowledging the significant role that the press would play in shaping public opinion as the government confronted the looming secession crisis. Their discussions reflected the uncertainty that surrounded the fate of Fort Sumter and the Union's approach to the situation. Seward's comments indicated that the administration's stance on the fort was still ambiguous, revealing hesitation in the federal government's strategy. Meanwhile, President Lincoln, fully aware of the mounting pressure from both his cabinet and the public, continued his preparations for his first official state dinner. Despite the growing political storm, Lincoln remained composed, maintaining a level of distance from the emotional and military chaos surrounding him. His ability to navigate this complex political moment while carrying the heavy burden of leadership highlighted the contrast between public appearances and the private struggles of decision-making during a national crisis. The interplay of political maneuvering and military concerns underscored the fragile state of the Union as it faced the reality of an impending civil conflict.