

# Strange News

Strange News reached Edmund Ruffin as his steamer neared Fernandina, Florida, in late December 1860. Ruffin, eager to influence Florida's legislature toward secession, planned to travel by train to Gainesville and then visit his friend William Owens' plantation in Marion County before attending the secession convention in Tallahassee on January 3. While en route, Ruffin received several telegrams, one of which informed him that the garrison at Fort Moultrie had been moved to Fort Sumter. This startling news caused Ruffin to pause and question the reliability of the report, leading him to consider abandoning his trip back to Charleston. He suspected that Southern authorities might have been misled by misinformation from the federal government, particularly President Buchanan and Secretary of War Floyd, but ultimately, Ruffin chose to continue his journey, uncertain of the report's validity.

Ruffin's arrival at Owens' plantation, near Fort Drane, left him disconnected from the rapidly developing situation. The remote location of the plantation made it difficult for Ruffin to access up-to-date news, and the newspapers he found were already days old, offering little reassurance about the escalating situation in Charleston. With growing anxiety, Ruffin was left in the dark, unsure about what had transpired at Fort Moultrie and the significance of Major Anderson's movements. His concerns about the fort's status were compounded by the increasing sense of urgency surrounding Charleston, as he couldn't shake the feeling that major events were unfolding that would soon reshape the region's future. The inability to confirm the truth of the telegrams weighed heavily on him, leaving him uneasy about his role in the wider secessionist movement.

Meanwhile, in Washington, three commissioners from South Carolina arrived, fully expecting to engage President Buchanan in negotiations as representatives of a newly-formed nation. Their confidence in securing a diplomatic resolution was evident as they made themselves comfortable in their well-appointed lodging, hoping to initiate

productive discussions. However, their optimism was abruptly shaken when, on December 27, a senator burst into their room with urgent news about Anderson's move, casting doubt on the success of their mission. The unexpected turn of events prompted heated speculation among the commissioners, as they tried to understand the potential military ramifications of Anderson's actions and the larger implications for Southern secession. The news intensified the political uncertainty, and the commissioners were left wondering whether their efforts to negotiate a peaceful exit for South Carolina were about to be undermined by military decisions.

In response to the growing uncertainty, Secretary of War John B. Floyd reacted skeptically, initially denying the reports about Anderson's movements. His response highlighted the tension between the federal government's reluctance to acknowledge the brewing conflict and the escalating situation on the ground in Charleston. Floyd dismissed the news as potentially exaggerated, but the arrival of more reliable telegrams soon confirmed that Anderson had indeed moved from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter. This confirmation forced Floyd to reconsider his position and take immediate action. He sent his own telegram to Anderson, expressing disbelief at the abandonment of Fort Moultrie and seeking clarification on the situation. Anderson quickly responded, justifying his decision to move to Fort Sumter in an effort to protect his garrison from potential attacks and casualties.

As news spread about the status of Fort Sumter, Anderson found himself at the center of a growing crisis. With the fort's position now known, Anderson faced the monumental task of preparing the fort for the impending conflict. The realization that his actions had significant military and political ramifications was not lost on him. He understood the weight of his decisions, knowing that his leadership could influence the course of events leading up to the Civil War. His role in the defense of Fort Sumter was crucial, as both sides of the conflict were now positioning themselves for a larger confrontation. Anderson's strategic choices in this volatile period would ultimately play a critical part in the history of the United States, as the nation teetered on the edge of civil war.

The unfolding events in Charleston and Washington reflected the broader instability that was sweeping through the South in the winter of 1860-61. As states like South Carolina pushed for secession, each action—whether a telegram, a military maneuver, or a diplomatic conversation—became part of a delicate and tense political landscape. Ruffin's sense of isolation and uncertainty, coupled with the rapidly changing military and political dynamics, illustrated the difficulties faced by those involved in the secessionist movement. The actions of figures like Anderson and the South Carolina commissioners were pivotal in shaping the course of history, and the responses from Washington, including Floyd's delayed actions, only added to the chaos of this critical period. The Southern push for independence was met with firm resistance from the federal government, creating an increasingly polarized environment that would soon erupt into open conflict.