

Suspicion

Suspicion was palpable on Tuesday, April 9, as Edmund Ruffin prepared to leave his hotel and make his way to the Charleston wharf. With a small carpet bag and a borrowed musket from the Citadel Military Academy in hand, Ruffin boarded a steamer bound for Morris Island, where he intended to take part in its defense. Known for his strong pro-secessionist views, Ruffin enjoyed the attention he received upon arrival, which ranged from admiration to praise. Though the recognition seemed excessive for what he considered a small contribution, it left him with mixed feelings of pride and discomfort. His involvement, though minor, had drawn significant attention, and he had become a symbol of Southern determination, even if he wasn't fully satisfied with the manner in which his role was perceived.

Upon his arrival at Morris Island, Ruffin was greeted warmly by a rifle company captain, who encouraged volunteers to cheer for him. While he accepted the accolades modestly, some soldiers privately found his eagerness to be slightly amusing. It was clear to them that although Ruffin was keen to participate, his primary motivation seemed to stem from a desire for recognition, rather than from a deep commitment to the war effort. Despite this, Ruffin maintained a friendly and approachable demeanor, interacting easily with those around him and enjoying the comforts provided by Charleston's wealthy families. He indulged in the luxuries offered by the elite but remained moderate in his indulgences, avoiding any excessive display of his newfound status. His presence was a source of pride for many, though some questioned the extent of his actual involvement in the military operations.

Ruffin's decision-making on Morris Island reflected his desire to stay connected to the action. He turned down offers to serve at distant artillery batteries, preferring instead a position where he could engage more directly in the conflict. He opted to sleep on a pallet in a tent shared with fellow volunteers, enjoying the cool, breezy nights that

brought rest and comfort. As part of his attempt to solidify his place within the Confederate ranks, Ruffin accepted an invitation to join the prestigious Palmetto Guard. He insisted, however, that his role would be limited to active military operations, and he emphasized the necessity of a formal agreement that would elevate his status as a heroic figure. This decision further underscored his desire for recognition, as he worked to create a narrative of valor and commitment that would be acknowledged by his peers and the larger Southern cause.

Meanwhile, in Montgomery, President Jefferson Davis convened his cabinet to address the increasingly tense situation surrounding Fort Sumter. The fort, flying the U.S. flag, had become a constant symbol of Union presence in Charleston Harbor, a presence that Confederate leaders could no longer ignore. An impending naval expedition to deliver supplies to Fort Sumter was raising concerns within the Confederacy. While the mission to provide food could be seen as a gesture of benevolence, it also risked prolonging the Union's hold on the fort and could potentially be a pretext for military reinforcement or even an attempt to seize control of Charleston. This created a conflict within the Confederate leadership, as some members were torn between the values of chivalric honor and the strategic importance of removing the threat posed by the fort.

Davis voiced his skepticism about President Lincoln's notice regarding the expedition, deeming it lacking in sincerity. He argued that while Major Anderson's bravery was commendable, the continued presence of the fort in Confederate territory required an immediate response. The cabinet leaned toward demanding that Anderson surrender the fort, and General Beauregard was prepared to take action if necessary, even if it meant dismantling the fort by force. In the midst of these discussions, Secretary of State Robert Toombs raised a cautionary note, warning that any attack on the fort could escalate tensions and ignite a violent civil conflict. He predicted that such an action would only worsen the already strained relations between the North and South, leading to an inevitable clash that would consume the nation in war. Despite these warnings, the cabinet ultimately moved toward a decision that would set the stage for a confrontation that could no longer be avoided.

The decisions made during this cabinet meeting highlighted the tension between preserving Southern honor and responding pragmatically to the growing threat from the Union. While some within the Confederacy wanted to take a more diplomatic approach, others saw the situation as one of survival and strategic necessity. The possibility of an attack on Fort Sumter seemed imminent, and as the cabinet continued to deliberate, it became clear that war was becoming a foregone conclusion. The military preparations were underway, and the debate within the Confederate leadership reflected the urgency and anxiety of a nation on the brink of war. This chapter encapsulates the delicate balance of political maneuvering, military strategy, and personal ambition as both sides prepared for the inevitable conflict that would soon engulf the nation.