

Trust

Trust played a pivotal role during the early spring of 1861, as the fate of Fort Sumter teetered between two warring sides. Secretary of State Seward had assured Confederate commissioners that Fort Sumter would be evacuated within five days, yet as March 20 arrived—the day the fort was supposed to be vacated—it remained firmly under federal control. In the midst of these tensions, Washington faced an unexpected cold snap, intensifying the urgency for a resolution. The Confederate commissioners, growing increasingly anxious, faced the dilemma of trusting the promises made by Seward or preparing for further escalation. Their dilemma was compounded by the fact that no concrete action had yet been taken regarding the fort, leaving them in a state of heightened uncertainty and awaiting any indication that the Union would live up to its assurances.

As time passed, Confederate Secretary of State Toombs expressed growing concern, sending a telegram to the Washington commissioners in which he demanded clarity. Their unease was palpable, and despite Seward's assurances, they found themselves questioning whether the Union could be trusted to follow through on its commitments. The commissioners, however, remained hopeful, trying to maintain their faith in Seward's word and in the eventual resolution of the crisis. They sought further updates from General Beauregard in Charleston, who confirmed that Fort Sumter had not been evacuated, and Union troops were continuing to fortify its defenses. The lack of progress further strained the commissioners' patience, as they had hoped that the initial assurances would lead to swift action. With no word on evacuation, they grew increasingly frustrated and uncertain about their next steps.

Tension escalated when Justice Campbell, acting as an intermediary, met with Seward, who remained confident in the situation's control. Seward's optimism about the evacuation was clear, but he suggested Campbell return the following day for a more

thorough discussion, further raising doubts in the minds of the Confederate commissioners. While Seward's assurances were meant to provide comfort, the increasing uncertainty about Fort Sumter's status only deepened concerns. The commissioners discovered, after further inquiry, that Seward's statements did not fully align with the realities at Fort Sumter, adding more layers of doubt to the already precarious situation. The lack of communication about the fort's status, coupled with Seward's ambiguous reassurances, created an environment where trust was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain, as both sides awaited further developments.

On March 21, Captain Gustavus Fox arrived in Charleston, tasked by President Lincoln to assess the conditions at Fort Sumter. Seeking permission from Governor Pickens to visit the fort, Fox faced several delays before finally meeting Major Anderson within the fort's walls. During their meeting, the dire supply situation was made clear, with Anderson stating that the fort could only hold out until April 15 without the necessary resupply. This grim report contradicted the earlier optimistic assessments, adding weight to the concerns about the fort's survival. The realization that the fort was in a precarious position was a sobering moment, and the urgency of resupplying it was becoming evident, as time was quickly running out for any potential solution. Anderson's report highlighted the logistical challenges involved and added another layer of complexity to an already tense and volatile situation.

In the aftermath of Fox's visit, Captain Hartstene met with General Beauregard, raising alarms about the brief, unmonitored time Fox had spent with Anderson. This sparked further concerns regarding the information being relayed between the two parties, adding to the already heightened suspicions surrounding the fort's future. Anderson, in a report to Washington, disputed Fox's optimistic assessment, citing the significant logistical challenges that would make reinforcements difficult. He also pointed out that Fox's assessment may have been influenced by Southern sympathies, which added further tension regarding the loyalty and decisions of Union officers stationed at Fort Sumter. The mistrust and political complexity surrounding the fort's fate were evident in the interactions and reports that followed Fox's visit, making it clear that the

situation was far more delicate than initially anticipated.

The chapter closes with the palpable tension that surrounded the fate of Fort Sumter. Fox's successful persuasion of President Lincoln to authorize the resupply mission marked a significant development, but it also signaled the growing complexities in both the political and military landscape. With the Union and Confederate forces at odds, the stakes were rising, and the trust—or lack thereof—between the two sides was becoming more critical than ever. As the situation at Fort Sumter reached a boiling point, it was clear that the decisions made in the coming days would have lasting consequences on the trajectory of the Civil War. The fate of the fort hung in the balance, and the outcome of the resupply mission would play a pivotal role in shaping the course of the conflict.