

## Chapter 261 - South Carolina Delivers An Ultimatum

Time: December 9, 1860

### South Carolina Has Scheduled A Convention To Debate Secession

The next blow comes from South Carolina Governor William Gist, whose term is about to expire in five days.

Gist is a fierce supporter of secession, and has already scheduled a state convention for December 17 to debate the move.

But he fears that the federal government may attempt to delay or even stop the event before it can take place.

To prevent that possibility, he formulates an ultimatum directed at Buchanan and sends a delegation of South Carolina congressmen to meet with the President in Washington.

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Time: December 10, 1860

### Gist Tells Buchanan To Keep His Hands Off The Charleston Forts

Gist's main concern is that the firepower residing in four federal forts in Charleston harbor may be used to upset his plans.

To prevent that, his messengers tell Buchanan that "amicable arrangements" are still possible, but only if the administration makes no moves to reinforce the forts.

*(South Carolina will) negotiate for an amicable arrangement of all matters between the State and the Federal Government, provided that no reinforcements shall be sent into those forts, and their relative military status shall remain as at present.*

After that carrot comes the stick: if the status of the forts changes, Gist will send his State Militia troops in to seize them by force.

The South Carolinians walk away believing they have reached a "gentlemen's agreement" with Buchanan on their demand.

But soon enough the exact meaning of the phrase "relative military status" will come back into play.

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Time: Mid-December 1860

## **Lincoln And Scott Also Begin To Focus On The Charleston Forts**

While Buchanan dithers along, both Abraham Lincoln and General Winfield Scott ponder the proper response to the South Carolina demands.

Scott, at 74 years of age, remains the most famous soldier in America at the time.

He is a Virginian who joins the army as a Captain in 1808 and fights heroically in all the nation's conflicts from the War of 1812 through the Mexican War of 1846-47. After losing his presidential bid in 1852, he resumes his role as Commanding General of the U.S. Army.

In 1855, by a special act of Congress, he becomes the second 3-star Lieutenant General in history, after George Washington.

Scott does not yet know the President-elect, but says after assurances from his friend, Illinois congressman Elihu Washburn, that:

*I wish to God that Mr. Lincoln was in office.*

That's because he questions the "backbone" of Buchanan and the military competence and loyalty of Secretary of War, John Floyd.

For his part, Lincoln is crystal clear about the forts. He writes to Francis Blair, Sr.:

*If the forts shall be given up before the inauguration, the General must retake them afterwards.*

But both Scott and Lincoln recognize that the clock is ticking on the fate of Major Anderson, as he awaits concrete orders from Washington on how to defend his position and his troops.

Soon enough the decision will rest on Lincoln's shoulders.