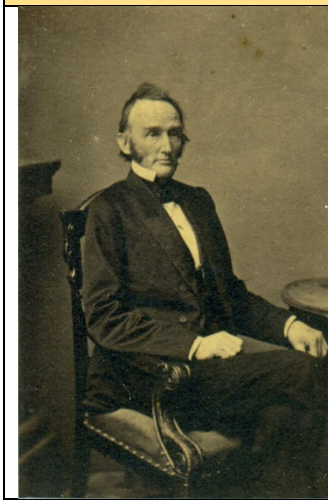


Chapter 316 – The New Cabinet Focuses First On A Ft. Sumter Strategy



Dates:
March 7-14, 1860

Sections:

- Lincoln's Military Men Rule Out Reinforcing Ft. Sumter
- Lincoln Queries His Cabinet

Date: March 7-9, 1861

Lincoln's Military Men Rule Out Reinforcing Ft. Sumter

After fending off a steady stream of “patronage seeker,” the new president plows into discovering the latest news and thinking about Ft. Sumter.

On March 7 he discusses the situation with Lt. General Scott, in command of the Army, Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, and Rear Admiral Silas Stringham, who begins his service at age eleven in 1809.

All three tell him that the enemy firepower already concentrated in Charleston harbor make it impossible to reinforce Major Anderson.

Two days Lincoln returns to the matter, asking for Scott's beliefs on three questions:

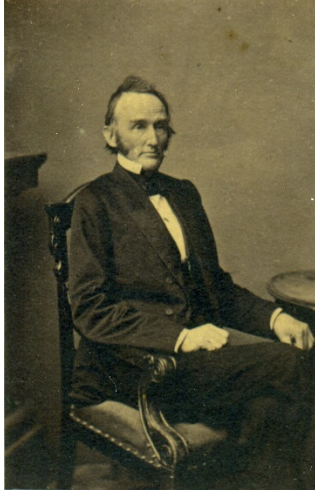
1. How long can Anderson hold out? Scott says a month for sure and maybe more.
2. If a decision was made to try to reinforce the fort, are the resources available? The answer is “no.”
3. If not, what would be required and how long would that take?

This third question has been discussed during Buchanan's time, and Anderson himself has been asked then for his opinion. While no one knows for sure, what Lincoln hears seems to be the latest consensus, and it is sobering.

Scott explains the formidable forces arrayed against Sumter and says that a fleet of warships will be needed, along with 5,000 regular army troops and another 20,000 volunteers – and that it will take about six months to prepare for such an assault!

Date: March 14, 1861

Lincoln Queries His Cabinet



Montgomery Blair (1813-1883)

Lincoln is not happy with Scott's assessment and decides to put a question on the table to discuss with his full cabinet on March 14, 1861.

Assuming it to be possible to now provision Ft. Sumter under all the circumstances, is it wise to attempt it?

Secretary of State Henry Seward leaps to asserting his opposition to any such action.

The people of the other slave states, divided and balancing between sympathy with the seceding states and loyalty to the Union, have been intensely excited, but at the present moment indicate a disposition to adhere to the Union if nothing extraordinary shall occur...to produce popular exasperation....I would not initiate a war to regain a useless and unnecessary position...I would not provoke war in any way now.

This is what Seward has been saying all along to Lincoln and to anyone else he encounters. It is the rosy-colored glasses version of the situation. The South will soon return to its senses and come back to the Union if only the administration shows patience, avoids all forms of forceful coercion, and gives them time to reconsider the costs of their actions.

Other members of the cabinet *want* to believe Seward's outlook, and end up agreeing with what he says in this meeting.

The only exception being the West Point graduate, Montgomery Blair, who mirrors the opinion Lincoln has heard three days earlier from his father, who storms into his office, recounts Andrew Jackson's threats against the "nullifiers," and says that abandoning Sumter would be an act of treason.

Blair argues that the duty of the government lies in defending federal property, and that any show of weakness on Ft. Sumter will only embolden the South to try to occupy more outposts, especially Ft. Pickens in Florida.