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President's Notes: Challenge!

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CHALLENGE!

Thomas Carlyle said, "What is all knowledge but recorded experience?"

The past is not dead. It survives in many forms taken for granted—in laws, customs, institutions, and beliefs. Though often intangible, these provide an environment real as the physical world. If the past were dead, a simple post-mortem presented at the "Bar of History" could obtain a final verdict on any disputed point. How simple—and how impossible.

Review the state of naval affairs at the opening of the Civil War. Excerpts from a lecture on Naval Administration by Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce best sketch in the situation.

"At the very outset of the Secession movement the relief of Fort Sumter was the cause of much anxious thought. Councils were divided. The several members of the Cabinet were compara-

tive strangers to each other, and the whole country was in a state of ferment."

President Lincoln had been in office for the brief period of one month. The most powerful member of his cabinet, Secretary of State Seward, had definite and devious ideas of his own concerning both foreign and domestic policy. Mr. Seward believed that Fort Sumter should be evacuated and he had assured the Border States and the Confederate Commissioners that this would be done. He called for emphasis on the preservation of the Union and urged that the slavery question should be put in the background. He also believed that Fort Pickens at Pensacola and certain forts on the Gulf of Mexico should be reinforced and could be held.

The President, after giving the subject much careful consideration, finally

decided that it was his duty to make the attempt to succor the beleaguered garrison in Sumter despite the strong representation by the Secretary of State to the contrary.

A small force consisting of *Powhatan*, *Pawnee*, *Pocahontas* and *Harriet Lane*, under the command of Captain Samuel Mercer, a past captain of the old school, was ordered to rendezvous on the 5th day of April 1861, 10 miles due east of Charleston Light in utmost secrecy.

Mr. Seward persisted in his opposition to the relief of Fort Sumter. Without reference to the Secretary of War or the Secretary of the Navy and with the assistance of Captain Meigs of the Army and Lieutenant Porter of the Navy he prepared a classified order for the President's signature diverting *Powhatan* from the Sumter effort to a separate expedition for the reinforcement and defense of Fort Pickens. This same order relieved Captain Mercer and placed Lieutenant Porter in command of *Powhatan* and specified that the Navy Department was, in no circumstances, to be informed of the new action taken. Mr. Lincoln signed the order in the confusion of the moment, and the failure of the Sumter relief was assured.

Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles appealed to the President once the action became known to him, but it was too late. The senior officer of the Fort Sumter expeditionary force had been relieved and the heaviest ship diverted. Mr. Lincoln recognized that to abandon the fort, even under the existing circumstances, would be "utterly ruinous" for the necessity for doing so "would not be fully understood." He was determined to send supplies to the garrison and, if the Secessionists forcibly resisted, on them would be the responsi-

bility of initiating hostilities. This was the overriding political consideration. Preparations continued for sending an expedition to Fort Sumter and notice was given to the Governor of South Carolina to this effect. Whereupon the Fort was attacked and fell into Confederate hands. Relief ships appeared off Charleston but were ineffective.

The dire confusion the conflicting orders gave rise to may be better imagined than described. Making every allowance for a state bordering on chaos, the method of procedure in this case brings out in the strongest light the utter lack of coordination existing in Mr. Lincoln's new Government at a time of great national crisis. The individuals of the President's Cabinet involved in this case eventually proved to be able and effective members of the team which prosecuted the long war to a successful conclusion, but we can see that they had much to learn at this point.

We can profit from their experience without repeating it. In peace as in war it is essential that coordinated policies involving the conduct of political, economic, psychological, and, as necessary, military operations must combine to meet the challenge we face in reaching our national objectives. There is little margin for error at the pace we must set today in discharging our worldwide responsibilities.

Mr. Lincoln and his Government preserved democracy and the Federal Union in the great national crisis of more than a hundred years ago. As the most powerful nation in the world today, the United States must preserve freedom and provide leadership in the quest for global peace and security.

