

Analyzing Telegrams

Snapshot: In this activity, students will use the SCIM-C model to analyze a Civil War telegram. This activity provides students with an opportunity to examine Civil War telegrams using a disciplinary scaffold to help them make inferences and corroborate across the sources. The activity can be completed in one class period (about 50 minutes).

Materials:

- Five telegrams from March, 1862 related to the events surrounding the infamous encounter between the Merrimac and Monitor ironclads (Battle of Hampton Roads)
- The SCIM-C scaffold and a related graphic organizer

Activity overview for teachers

This activity uses the SCIM-C disciplinary scaffold to support students as they analyze historical sources related to a framing question. More about the SCIM-C model is available online at <http://www.historicalinquiry.com/>. Students will analyze these telegrams to answer the framing question - *Why do we still study this battle from the Civil War?* The question takes seriously a thought that may be in the minds of many students. In the student section of this activity, we provide students with some background in the form of an excerpt from Anna Gibson Holloway, former curator of the USS *Monitor* Center - <http://www.monitorcenter.org/the-battle-of-hampton-roads/>. The idea is to give students some general content knowledge before they analyze the telegrams. Students will not be able to learn about the purposes, outcomes, or even details of the actual battle from the telegrams. Instead, they will zoom into very specific actions and activities taken by a handful of leaders in the Union army. Our hope is that by examining these telegrams, students will find some lesson or glimmer of significance that can be used in answering the framing question.

The SCIM-C model is a five phase scaffold (summarizing, contextualizing, inferring, monitoring, and corroborating) that takes students through the process of analyzing historical sources. Scaffolds are important when students work with historical sources because they are engaging in complex work, something with which they will have little experience. Students begin the activity by engaging in the first phase of SCIM-C, summarizing the source. Summarizing is where students determine the overall meaning of the source and ideas within by answering questions about content of the source (e.g., What happened? What does it say?). The SCIM-C Guide (page 3) includes specific questions students may answer for each phase. A graphic organizer is also included in this activity and can be used by students to keep track of their SCIM-C analysis. In the second phase, students gather contextual information such as who wrote or produced the source, when, and why it was produced. Phase three is where students use their understanding of the literal meaning and context of the source to make inferences that are not explicitly stated in the source. In the fourth phase, students monitor their own thinking by reconsidering the information they have already produced, making sure to glean as much meaning as possible from the source. This will include asking new questions that arise during the analysis. Since students are working with multiple sources, as an additional task, they will

corroborate or compare the SCIM information gathered from each source with other sources to determine whether their inferences hold up.

In this activity, students will read the excerpt from Anna Gibson Holloway, then work with the telegrams to deepen their knowledge of the battle. As a final task, students should answer the framing question - *Why do we still study this battle from the Civil War?*

Students can fill out the SCIM-C Graphic Organizer individually or in groups. You may want to model how to use the SCIM-C by filling out a SCIM-C chart as a class using one of the five telegrams in this activity.

Suggested extension activity: Have students write a newspaper article describing the battle, using the telegrams as evidence.

Directions for students

Description: The five telegrams in this activity describe events related to the infamous encounter between the Merrimac and Monitor ironclad ship. The two ships, the Merrimac from the Confederacy and the Monitor from the Union, were among the most advanced warships in the world. They were both completely covered in metal armor and could thus withstand direct artillery fire. The showdown between these two battleships was the one of the most important naval battles in the Civil War.

In this activity, you will examine the telegrams to figure out what happened in the battle and, more importantly, to answer the age old question, who cares? After all, that might be on your mind. Why would we even bother remembering the details of a naval battle from 150 years ago? It turns out that a lot of people do care and you might want to figure out why.

In order to understand why we still study this event, you'll need to know something about the battle. To help you with the background, read this overview of the battle written by Anna Gibson Holloway, former curator of the USS *Monitor* Center.

<http://www.monitorcenter.org/the-battle-of-hampton-roads/>

In early March 1862, construction crews in Brooklyn, New York and Portsmouth, Virginia were rushing to complete two vessels of radically different designs. In Brooklyn, the Union ironclad *Monitor* was completing her sea trials before heading south to Hampton Roads to counter the threat of the Confederate ironclad *Virginia* (formerly *Merrimack*). The *Virginia*'s first mission was to break the Union blockade of Hampton Roads and protect the waterways to Richmond from Union advances. Yet Stephen Russell Mallory, Secretary of the Confederate Navy, had even grander plans for the ironclad. He hoped that the *Virginia* could then continue on and ravage the coastal cities of the Union. Washington, New York, and Boston were desired targets. In contrast, the *Monitor*'s mission was very focused; destroy the *Virginia* at her

moorings if possible, but more importantly, protect the fleet at Hampton Roads as well as the city of Washington D.C. from attack by the “rebel monster.”

Both ironclads achieved certain elements of their objectives. The *Virginia* destroyed key Union vessels in Hampton Roads and kept the James River closed to Union advances for a time. The *Monitor* saved the fleet from further destruction and kept the *Virginia* trapped in Hampton Roads. However, the significance of March 8 and 9, 1862 went far beyond the immediate needs in Hampton Roads. The *Virginia* demonstrated the power of iron over wood on March 8, and the *Monitor* and *Virginia* showed the world's navies the future of warship construction when the two clashed on March 9. This first meeting of two ironclad warships in battle forever changed naval architecture, battle tactics, and the very psychology of the men who served within them.

This overview is just one source of information on the battle. There are lots of others. Some of the best sources were produced at the time it happened. Sources like these five telegrams. Historians think that's the best way to learn about the past - go right to the source from the time and the place. That's what you'll be doing. You're going to read five sources from 1862 in the days of the battle. But, beware, this is super complex work! You're going to need help. That's where scaffolds (and teachers) come in. You are going to use an historical thinking scaffold to support you as you read and analyze the telegrams. Scaffolds are systems of support for helping people do really hard things. If you're building a skyscraper, it helps to have a scaffold to hold things up until the building is finished. It's the same idea here. You need some support, something to hold up your thinking while you analyze these sources. As you work with these source, keep the Framing Question in mind. You'll return to that at the end of your telegram analysis.

Framing Question: *Why do we still study this battle from the Civil War?*

Note: The telegram text has a been edited for readability

SIMC-C Guide

The five phases and analyzing questions of the SCIM-C strategy for historical inquiry *Examining single source. Squeezing it/ringing it out.*

Summarizing- Facts/Details/Observation

1. What type of historical document is the source? (goes to primary/secondary/ record or relic)
2. What specific information, details, and/or perspectives does the source provide?
3. What are the subject and purpose of the source? (goes to intention)
4. What are the author and audience of the source?

Contextualizing- Placing the source in time and space- It comes from the past

1. When and where was the source produced?
2. Why was the source produced? (goes to intention)
3. What was happening within the immediate and broader context at the time the source was produced?
(goes to context)
4. What summarizing information can place the source in time and space?

Inferring- What is suggested? Making educated guesses and ideas

1. What is suggested by the source?
2. What interpretations may be drawn from the source?
3. What perspectives are indicated in the source?
4. What inferences may be drawn from absences or omissions in the source?

Monitoring- What is the question again? Have I lingered with the source - squeezed it?

1. What additional evidence beyond the source is necessary?
2. What ideas, images, or terms need further defining from the source?
3. How useful or significant is the source for its intended purpose in answering the historical question?
4. What questions from the previous stages need to be revisited in order to analyze the source satisfactorily?

Corroborating- Think across the sources to answer the historical question and create an account

1. What similarities and differences exist between the sources?
2. What factors could account for the similarities and differences?
3. What conclusions can be drawn from the accumulated interpretations?
4. What additional information or sources are necessary to answer more fully the guiding historical questions?

SCIM-C Graphic Organizer

Title of your source:

<p>S-----Summarizing What does the source tell us? Just the details.. facts..</p>	<p>C-----Contextualizing When, why, how, where was the source produced?</p>	<p>I--Inferring / Inferencing What does the source suggest? Insights, thoughts..</p>	<p>M-----Monitoring What else would I like to find out? What questions do I now have?</p>
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Telegram 1 - John E. Wool to Edward M. Stanton

March 8, 1862

Fortress Monroe

Sent March 8th

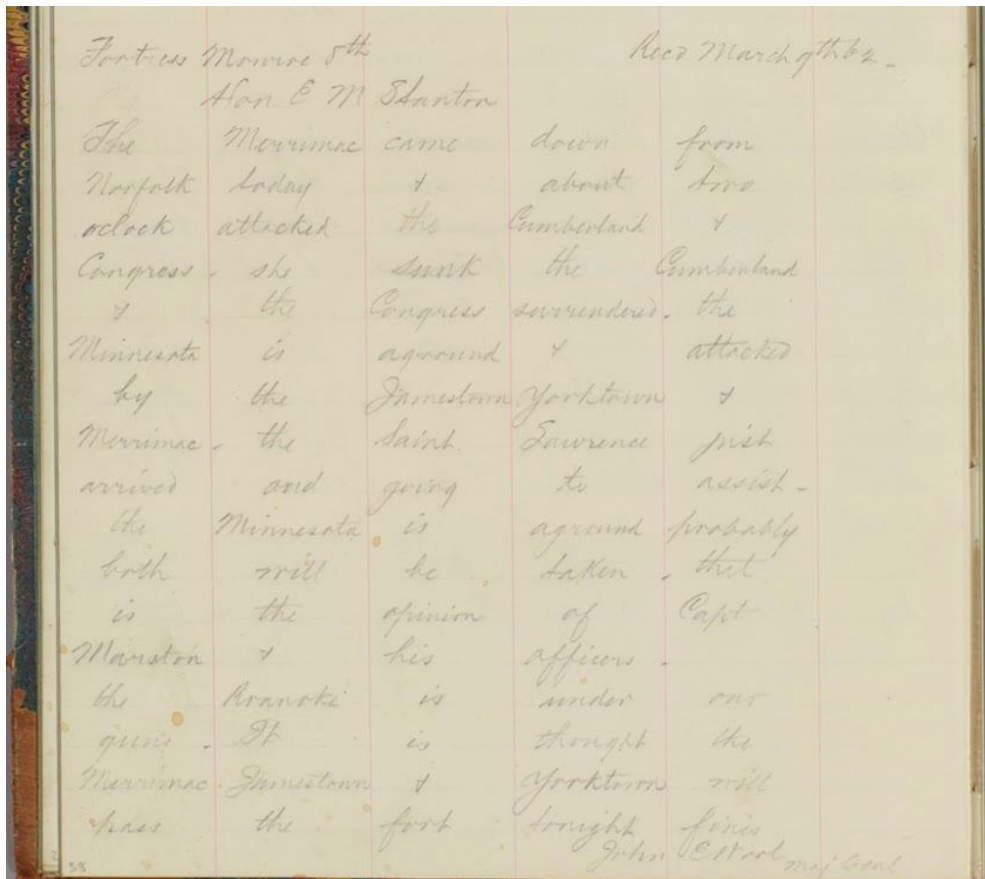
Received March 9th 1862

Hon E. M. Stanton

The Merrimac came down from Norfolk today & about two o'clock attacked the Cumberland & Congress. She sunk the Cumberland & the Congress surrendered. The Minnesota is aground & attacked by the Jamestown, Yorktown, & Merrimac. The Saint Lawrence just arrived and going to assist - the Minnesota is aground probably both will be taken. That is the opinion of Capt Marston & his officers. The Roanoke is under our guns. It is thought the Merrimac, Jamestown, & Yorktown will pass the fort tonight.

John E Wool

Maj Genl



Fortress Monroe 5th Recd March 9th 62 -
Hon E M Stanton
The Merrimac came down from
Norfolk today & about two
o'clock attacked the Cumberland &
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Merrimac the Saint Lawrence just
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the Minnesota is aground probably
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the Roanoke is under our
guns It is thought the
Merrimac Jamestown & Yorktown will
pass the fort tonight
John E Wool Maj Genl

Telegram 2 - G.V. Fox to General McClellan

March 9, 1862

Fortress Monroe

Sent and received March 9th

Your telegram to Major Genl Wool received. The performance of the Monitor today against the Merrimac shows a slight superiority in favor of the Monitor as the Merrimac was forced to retreat to Norfolk after a four hour engagement, at times the vessels touching each other. The damage to the Merrimac can not be ascertained. She retreated under steam without assistance. The Monitor is all ready for her tomorrow, but I think the Merrimac may be obliged to lay up for a few days. She is an ugly customer & it is too good luck to believe we are yet clear of her. Our hopes are upon the Monitor & this day's work shows that the Merrimac must attend to her alone. Have ordered the large frigates to leave.

G V Fox

Asst Secy

Gen McClellan -
Fortress Monroe
Mar 9th

Your telegram to Major Genl Wool received. The performance of the Monitor today against the Merrimac shows a slight superiority in favor of the Monitor as the Merrimac was forced to retreat to Norfolk after a four hours engagement at times the vessels touching each other. The damage to the Merrimac can not be ascertained - she retreated under steam without assistance. The Monitor is all ready for her tomorrow but I think the Merrimac may be obliged to lay up for a few days. She is an ugly customer & it is too good luck to believe we are yet clear of her. Our hopes are upon the Monitor & this days work shows that the Merrimac must attend to her alone. Have ordered the large frigates to leave.

G V Fox
Asst Secy

Telegram 3 - John E. Wool to Edward M. Stanton

March 14, 1862

Ft. Monroe

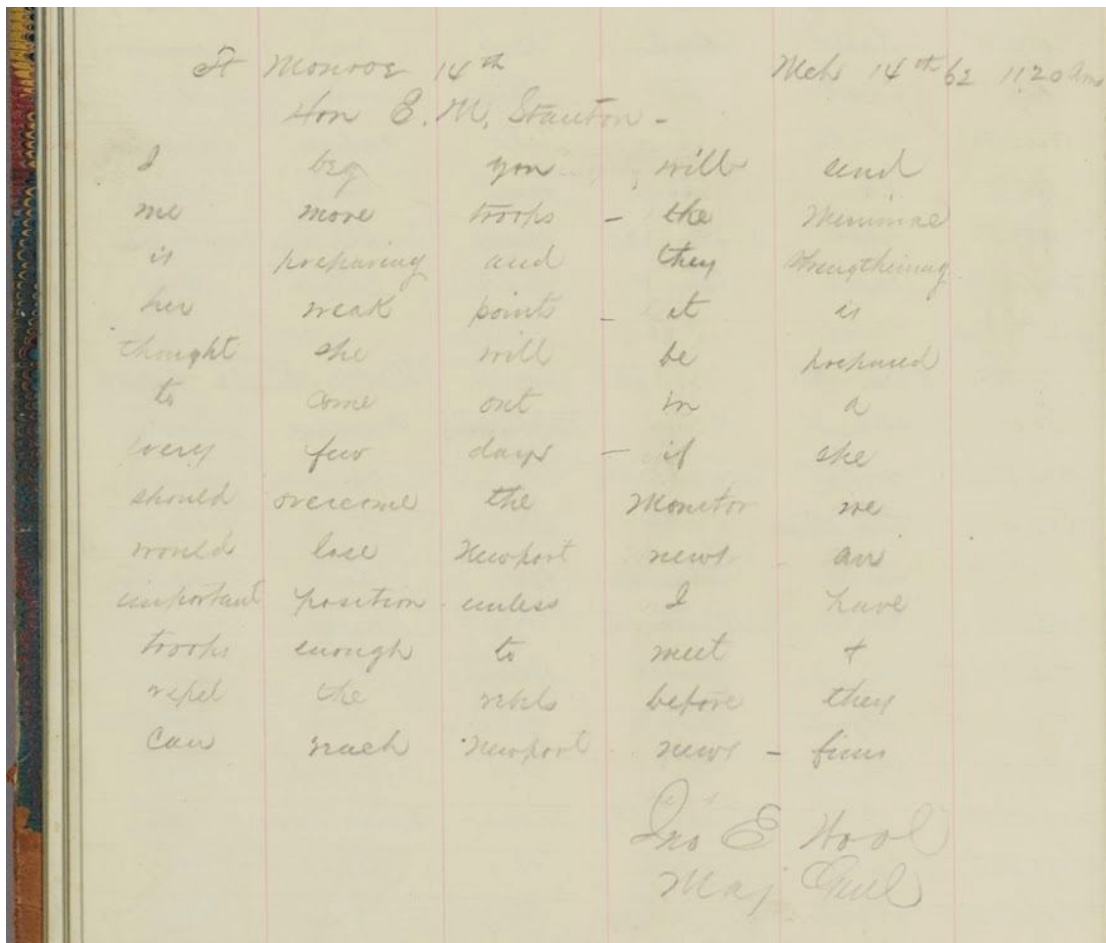
Sent and received on March 14th 1862, 11:20 a.m.

Hon E. M. Stanton -

I beg you will send me more troops - the Merrimac is preparing and they strengthening her weak points - it is thought she will be prepared to come out in a very few days - if she should overcome the Monitor we would lose Newport News an important position unless I have troops enough to meet & repel the rebels before they can reach Newport News - finis

John E Wool

Maj Genl



Telegram 4 - Anton Stage to W. B. Dinsmore

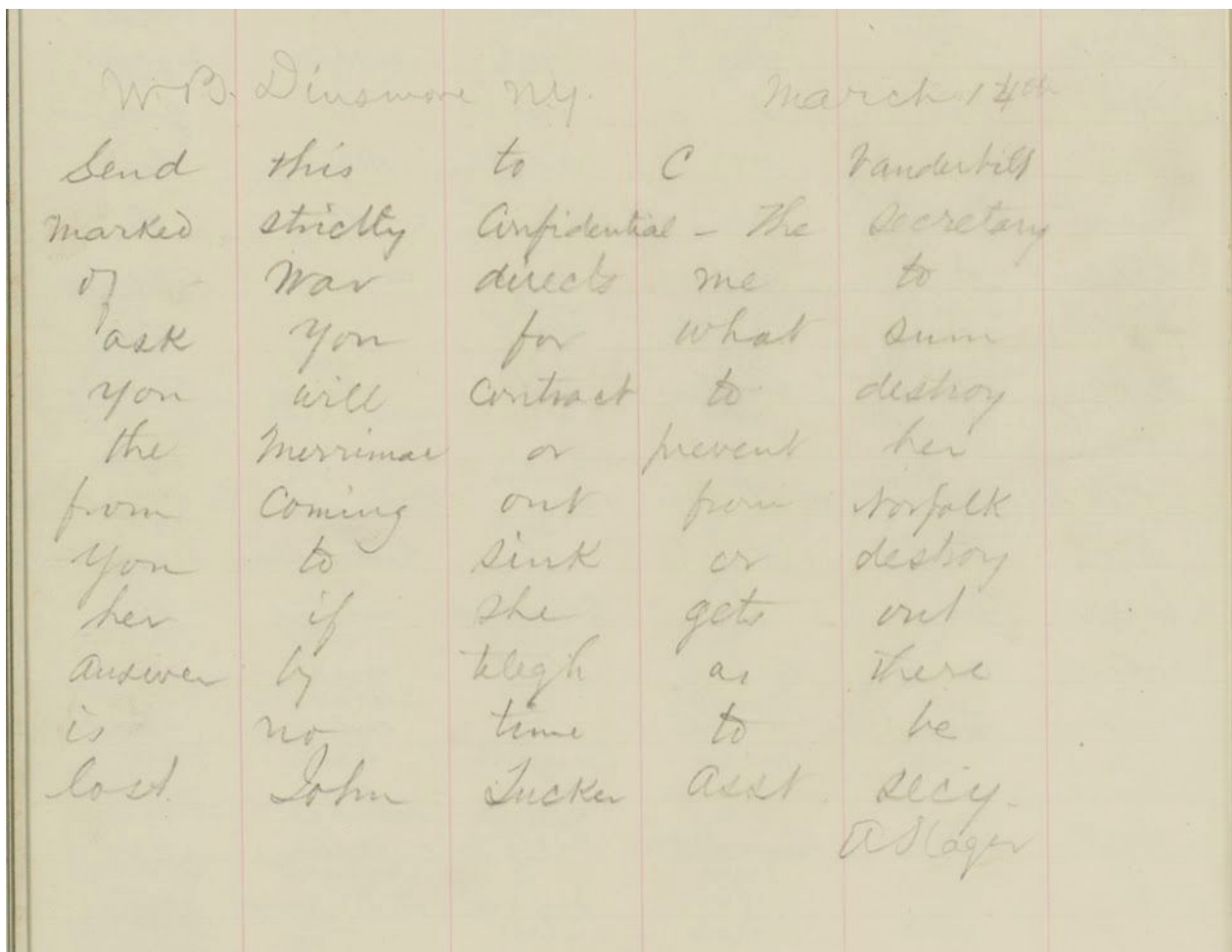
March 14, 1862

New York

W. B. Dinsmore

Send this to C Vanderbilt marked strictly Confidential. The Secretary of War directs me to ask you for what sum you will contract to destroy the Merrimac or prevent her from coming out from Norfolk .You to sink or destroy her if she gets out. Answer by telegraph as there is no time to be lost.

John Tucker
Asst Secy



W.B. Dinsmore N.Y. March 14th
Send this to C Vanderbilt
marked strictly Confidential - The Secretary
of War directs me to
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from coming out from Norfolk
you to sink or destroy
her if she gets out
answer by telegraph as there
is no time to be
lost. John Tucker Asst Secy.
A Stage

Telegram 5 - W. B. Dinsmore to Anton Stage

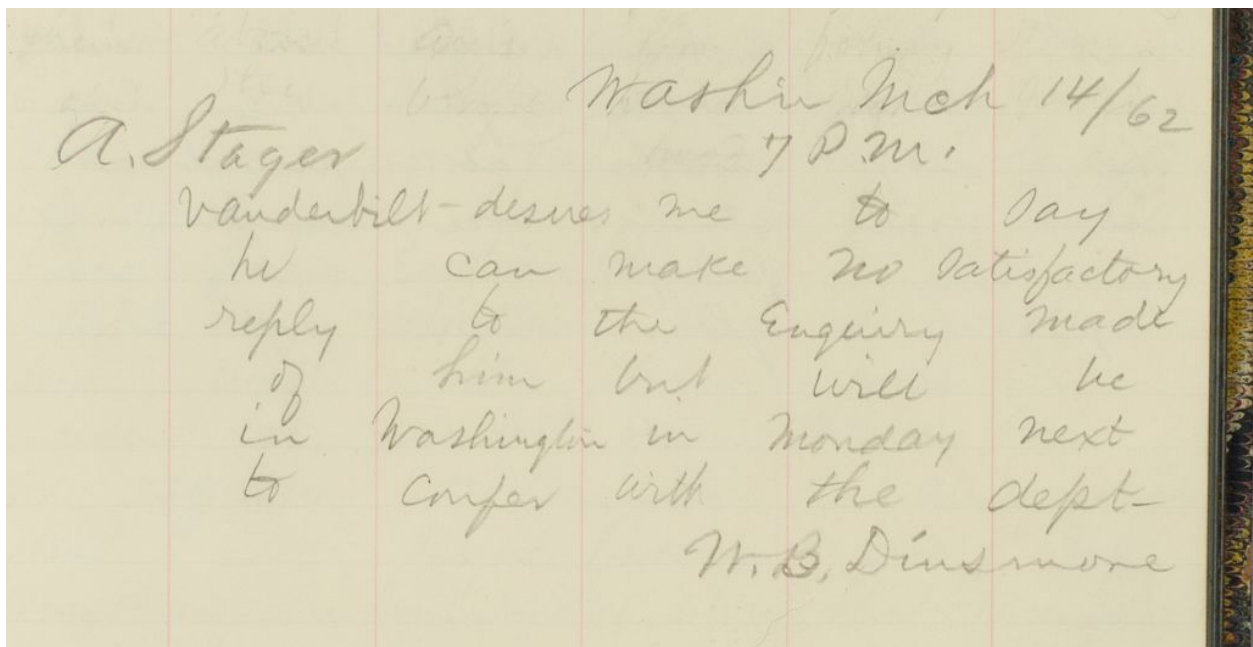
March 14, 1862

Washington

7:00 p.m.

Vanderbilt desires me to say he can make no satisfactory reply to the Enquiry made of him but will be in Washington in Monday next to confer with the dept.

W.B. Dinsmore



Washin Mch 14/62
7 P.M.
A. Stager
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of him but will be
in Washington in Monday next
to confer with the dept-
W. B. Dinsmore