

Abraham Lincoln papers

From Samuel P. Lee to Gideon Welles¹, July 4, 1863

1 Admiral Samuel P. Lee was commander of the North Atlantic blockading squadron from 1862 until 1864.

The following Telegram received at Washington, 5.10 P. M. July 4. 1863.

From Ft. Monroe Va 4.30 P. M.

U. S. S. Minnesota 230 PM

Dated, July 4. 1863.

The following Communication is just received from Mr Stephens² who is on the flag of truce boat anchored above. I shall inform Mr Stephens that I await your instructions before giving him an answer.

2 Alexander Stephens was vice president of the Confederate States.

"Confederate States Str. "Torpedo"

In James' River July 4. 1863

Sir;

As military Commissioner, I am the bearer of a communication in writing from Jefferson Davis Commander-in-chief of the land and naval forces of the Confederate States to Abraham Lincoln Comd'r-in-Chief of the land & Naval forces of the United States.

"Hon Robert Ould, Confederate States' Agent of Exchange, accompanies me as Secretary.

For the purpose of delivering the communication in person and conferring upon the subjects to which it relates, I desire to proceed directly to Washington in the Steamer 'Torpedo' commanded by Lieut. Hunter Davidson of the Confederate States' Navy. No person being on board but the Hon. Mr Ould, myself & the boat's officers & crew.³

3 Lincoln met with his cabinet on the 5th and 6th of July in order to discuss how to respond to the message from Stephens. Lincoln drafted a message to Admiral Lee, but on July 6, Secretary of State Seward was given the responsibility of telegraphing instructions to the U. S. military authorities. Stephens was denied permission to pass through the blockade and was informed that any messages should be forwarded through the proper military channels. For the complete correspondence concerning this episode, see *Official Records*, Series II, Volume 6, 74-85 and 94-95. For documents in this collection, see Lincoln to Samuel P. Lee, July [4], 1863 and William H. Ludlow to Edwin M. Stanton, July 4, 1863. For a firsthand account of the July 5-6 cabinet meetings, see Howard K. Beale, ed., *The Diary of Gideon Welles* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1960) I, 358-63.

Yours Most Respectfully

Alexander H. Stephens"

S. P. Lee

Act'g. Rr Adml.