

**THE RELEVANCE OF CRISES:
THE TONKIN GULF INCIDENTS**

by

Kim Weitzman

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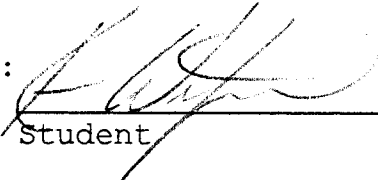
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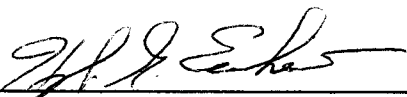
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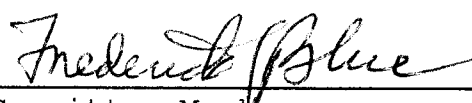
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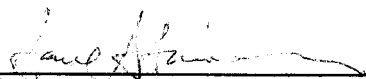
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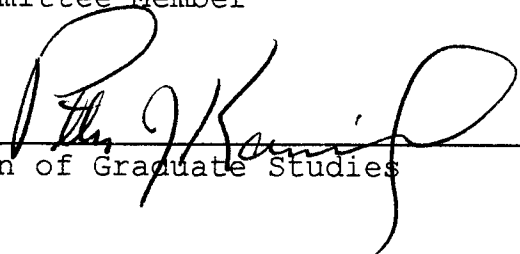
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ABSTRACT

The United States went to war in Vietnam on 7 August 1964. Although involved in Vietnam much earlier, it was not until the Tonkin Gulf Resolution passed both the Congress and Senate that the United States could legally wage war in Southeast Asia. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution resulted from the Tonkin Gulf incidents, in which American ships were attacked by North Vietnam. While these attacks are the basis for the Resolution, they have never been fully and clearly explained. Many questions remain as to what actually transpired in the Tonkin Gulf on 2 and 4 August 1964. Due to the nagging questions surrounding these incidents, a thorough chronology is necessary. The following history of the Tonkin Gulf incidents incorporates new information that will better detail the questionable incidents. Furthermore, this study exposes some of the more blatant misrepresentations made by government officials as they tried to persuade Congress to pass the Tonkin Gulf Resolution.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many who's names should appear in this list. Without their support and guidance this account would not have been possible. If I do not include them herein, it is because of my memory lapse and not their lack of participation in this work. Foremost I want to thank God for bestowing on me the gifts needed to undertake the duty of writing this piece. The sacrifices of Sam and Scott, my husband and son, were many.

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A chance telephone call to Sedgwick Tourison began a professional friendship I will always be grateful for. Wick's knowledge of the war, the participants, and the policies is great. This knowledge is made greater by his willingness to support efforts such as mine. He and his wife Ping invited me into their home without hesitation each time I visited Washington, DC on research trips.

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All those at the Naval Historical Center who helped in my acquisition of documents relevant to this work. Special thanks to Cathy Lloyd, Mike Walker, and also Dr. Edward Marolda.

Terry Sheban must take full responsibility for hammering home the idea that all conclusions must be supported. He played the devils advocate with each important idea I tried to introduce. I thank him for improving the quality of this work.

Lastly, and by far most importantly, the men and women who served during the Vietnam war. WELCOME HOME!!! And to those I can not thank who number 58,000.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>A</i> | Alpha |
| <i>ACINT</i> | Acoustic Intelligence |
| <i>ASAP</i> | As soon as possible |
| <i>BRG</i> | Bearing |
| <i>CAP</i> | Combat Air Patrol |
| <i>CI</i> | Circuit |
| <i>CINCPAC</i> | Commander in Chief, Pacific |
| <i>CINCPACFLT</i> | Commander in Chief, Pacific Fleet |
| <i>COMINT</i> | Communications Intelligence |
| <i>COM7FLT</i> | Commander, 7th Fleet |
| <i>COMUSMACV</i> | Commander United States Military Assistance Vietnam |
| <i>COMVAN</i> | Communications Van |
| <i>CPA</i> | Closest Point of Approach |
| <i>CTG</i> | Commander Task Group |
| <i>DD</i> | Destroyer; Destroyer Division |
| <i>DOD</i> | Department of Defense |
| <i>DRV</i> | Democratic Republic of Vietnam; North Vietnam |
| <i>ECM</i> | Electronic Countermeasures |
| <i>ECCM</i> | Electronic Counter-countermeasures |
| <i>ELINT</i> | Electronic Intelligence |
| <i>ESM</i> | Electronic Warfare Support Measures |
| <i>GQ</i> | General Quarters |

| | |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>H</i> | Hotel time zone |
| <i>IFF</i> | Identify Friend or Foe |
| <i>JCS</i> | Joint Chief of Staff; Joint Chiefs of Staff |
| <i>KN</i> | Knots |
| <i>MACSOG</i> | Military Assistance Command, Special Operations Group. The command center which controlled all operations out of Da Nang, including the Marops. |
| <i>MACV</i> | Military Assistance Command, Vietnam |
| <i>MAROPS</i> | Maritime operations |
| <i>MIA</i> | Missing in Action |
| <i>MM</i> | Millimeters |
| <i>NAD</i> | Naval Advisory Detachment |
| <i>NAVSECGRU</i> | Naval Security Group |
| <i>NM</i> | Nautical miles |
| <i>NSA</i> | National Security Agency |
| <i>NVN</i> | North Vietnam |
| <i>Oplan</i> | Operational Plan |
| <i>P-G; P-6</i> | Patrol craft; Russian or Chinese Swatow |
| <i>PT; PTF</i> | Patrol boat; Nasty; Fast Patrol boat |
| <i>RVN</i> | Republic of Vietnam; South Vietnam |
| <i>SEATO</i> | Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty; Southeast Asia Treaty Organization |
| <i>SHP</i> | Ship horse power |
| <i>SIGINT</i> | Signals Intelligence |
| <i>SOG</i> | Special Operations Group |

| | |
|----------------|------------------------|
| <i>SVN</i> | South Vietnam |
| <i>TDY</i> | Temporaty Duty |
| <i>TG</i> | Task Group |
| <i>UNREP</i> | Underway Replenishment |
| <i>USN</i> | United States Navy |
| <i>USS</i> | United States Ship |
| <i>VN</i> | Vietnam |
| <i>WESTPAC</i> | Western Pacific Fleet |

GLOSSARY

| | |
|------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| AN/SPS-10 | A radar system utilized by the US Navy during the Vietnam War. |
| AN/UQL-5/6 | A radar system utilized by the US Navy during the Vietnam War. |
| COMVAN | A small, mobile van used to hold military equipment used for communications and or to gather communications intelligence. |
| DRV | Democratic Republic of Vietnam. North Vietnam. The name coined by Ho Chi Minh during the independence celebration in 1945. |
| Deck Log | The daily diary of United States ships at sea. Every ship keeps a record of the events of its cruise. These records are sent to the National Archives or the Naval Historical Center for permanent storage. |
| Desoto Patrol | The naval operations conducted by the United States which sent US ships into Communist bloc areas. These ships gathered intelligence by way of electronic equipment on board. |
| ECM; ECCM | Electronic activity to gather information from enemy forces. Radar is utilized usually as a means to collect and then subsequently make the enemy transmissions inoperable. |
| General Quarters | Maritime action on US ships during dangerous periods while at sea. All hands aboard ship must go to assigned areas aboard ship for military action. |
| Hainen island | The Chinese held island located in the middle of the Gulf of Tonkin, also referred to as Hai Nen Dao. |
| IFF | Identify Friendly or Foe. A system of recognition used by the United States in all areas of military operations. Usually using radar a signal is sent to the approaching vehicle and that vehicle must respond or be identified as a friend or foe. Also |

utilizing radar, US vessels are able to determine the nationality of approaching vessels by the radar identification.

ICC International Control Commission. An international body formed after the Geneva Accords to monitor activities in Southeast Asia.

Infiltration The movement of men and supplies into enemy areas for guerilla type military actions.

Knots Maritime measure of speed. One knot equals one nautical mile of speed.

MACSOG Military Assistance Command, Special Operations Group. The authority and unit which trained South Vietnamese for the Oplan Operations.

Nautical mile Maritime measure of distance. One nautical mile equals 1.1 land miles.

Oplan 34-A The US maritime operations conducted in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War. These Operations included spying, attack, and and landing duties.

P-G; P-6 A Soviet or Chinese built patrol boat. Also similar to the Swatow class boats used by communist countries during this period.

Patrol boat A vessel which is usually smaller then the average ships used for ocean travel. The PT boat is fast and sleek and can cover large distances relatively quickly. The boats can be fitted with many kinds of weapons or torpedoes.

RVN Republic of South Vietnam.

Radar Electronic transmission of signals. Radar can be used to send a message or intercept a message.

SEATO The treaty that gave the United States the international support to fight in Vietnam.

Task Group Naval term used to delineate between groups of ships that are stationed together and undertake similar duties.

Tonkin Gulf Gulf of Tonkin, Vinh Bac Viet.

Watchdog Term used to describe a vessel serving in a front line area on guard for the protection of other ships.

Yankee Station The main area of naval operations located in the Gulf of Tonkin. The United States ships patrolled the waters of Vietnam from this area.

INTRODUCTION

*. . . that is going to be the attitude long after the present occupant of the chair and I cease walking on this earth, and historians get through writing the record of what happened in the Tonkin Gulf incident . . . I am perfectly willing to let history be the judge . . . we need to know the full truth . . . we have an obligation in the Senate to make a complete investigation of the Tonkin Gulf incident, and write the chapter of American history in regard to it for the knowledge of future generations of Americans . . .*¹

*Senator Wayne Morse
1964*

In a tiny body of water in Southeast Asia, during the summer of 1964, the United States Navy involved itself in several events of immense historical importance. In the thirty years that have elapsed since those events, the Tonkin Gulf incidents, questions remain unanswered as to what actually transpired in the Gulf of Tonkin (Vin Bac Viet). Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara's statements at the United States Senate Hearings of 1964 and 1968 are just part of a group of declassified documents detailing the events in the Gulf. While much of the record of the Tonkin Gulf incidents remains classified, that part of the record that is declassified offers some interesting facts. The explanation of events, as offered by McNamara, the Defense

Department, the United States Navy, and the records of Executive branch personnel all join together in what has commonly been termed the chronology of events in Tonkin Gulf history. This study challenges the released version of events offered by government officials and pertinent records and explores many of the points of confusion concerning the Gulf of Tonkin incidents.

The Tonkin Gulf incidents and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution are vital components of recent American history. These incidents legitimized United States involvement in Vietnam both in America and around the world. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution allowed Washington leaders to wage war in Southeast Asia with the security of constitutional legality. Although having the resolution in place allowed American soldiers to fight in Vietnam, no large units of military ground forces were sent to Vietnam until March 1965. However, United States involvement grew to massive proportions over the next ten years as America tried to defeat the unseen enemy.² North Vietnam played a game of attrition in its battle for South Vietnam. Led by Ho Chi Minh, the North Vietnamese pulled America deeper and deeper into a war that was unwinnable only because America's leaders were unwilling to fight the war to win.

Few Americans, at the time of the Tonkin Gulf incidents, questioned the policies taken by the United

States in Vietnam.³ More immediate to the daily interest of America, during the midsummer of July and August 1964, were the Ranger 7 photographs of the moon. The press inundated newspaper headlines with some of the four thousand pictures sent to Earth from the Ranger 7 satellite.⁴ The ingenuity of America's space program shattered the man in the moon myth. Americans enjoyed the scientific superiority gained by the Ranger 7 flight. Manned lunar flights were no longer considered science fiction. Not comprehending the close relationship between space travel and military technology, many Americans did not realize that the space program's scientific discoveries were also beneficial to America's military forces around the world.⁵ The development of lenses fitted aboard the Ranger 7 had great impact on the technology used by the military in Southeast Asia. The technological similarities of lunar exploration and military efforts in Southeast Asia were not the only comparisons. Within twenty-four hours the apocalyptic headline photographs of United States ships attacked at sea by North Vietnamese forces would replace the magnificent pictures of the moon.

Before that twenty-four-hour period passed, America witnessed the release of a new Hollywood movie, *Ensign Pulver*.⁶ As the Ranger 7 technology was comparable to the

military advances in Vietnam, this movie illustrated the kinship between the United States Navy in the Gulf of Tonkin and what Secretary McNamara reported to the United States Senate during the Hearings of 1964 and 1968. Eugene Archer, a *New York Times* film critic, explains the film's plot, "all American boys cavorting about the decks in bumptious disarray."⁷ Once explained, McNamara's version of the incidents exposed the Navy as, at best, in disarray, during the first week of August 1964. After careful scrutiny of McNamara's account, the decision makers in Washington, at the time of the events, were in disarray, rather than the United States Navy. Just as Ensign Pulver was involved in events far beyond his control, so too the United States Navy was catapulted into events that once taken over by Washington officials in the Defense Department and Executive office left the Navy powerless and at the mercy of the North Vietnamese and the political and military leaders in Washington.

Under the terms of the 1954 *Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty*, (SEATO)⁸, the United States Navy patrolled the waters of the Tonkin Gulf. The treaty, signed by countries located in or near Southeast Asia, or with an interest in the area, provided international legal grounds for participation in the area.⁹ The United States, as a

party to the treaty, was obliged to support and defend the country of South Vietnam from the aggressive northern regime commanded by President Ho Chi Minh.¹⁰

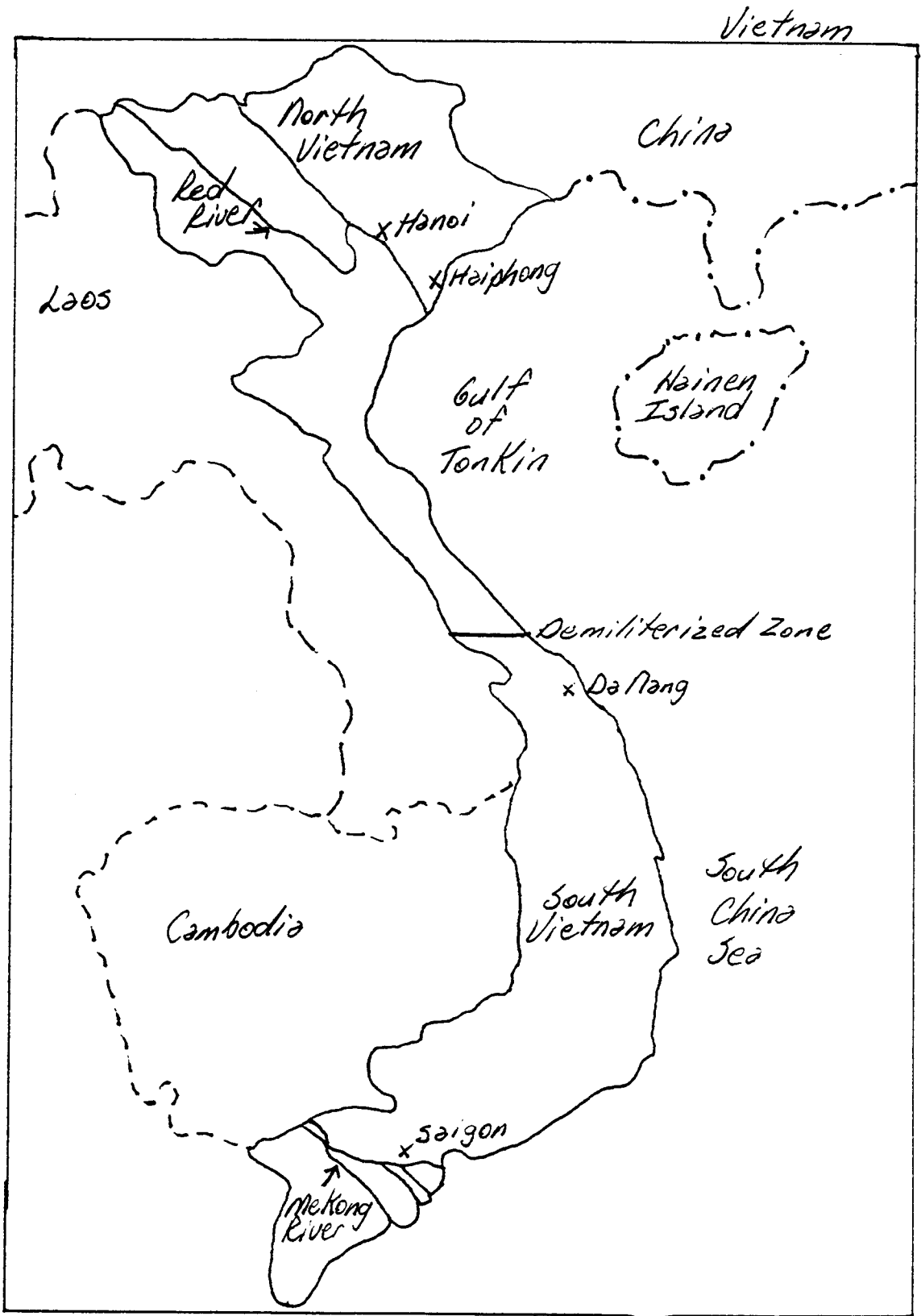
To most Americans Vietnam was an obscure place. While many were aware that United States military and diplomatic officials had been involved in Vietnam, on the surface the military efforts in Vietnam were unimportant to the average citizen. The daily doses of news articles about Vietnam inoculated a few Americans to the tiny country in Southeast Asia. For those Americans who read past the lunar marvel stories, Vietnam was familiar. To the average American, the stories detailing actions taken in Vietnam were unfamiliar and uninteresting. The events of 2 and 4 August 1964 changed that disinterest and replaced the lunar photos with amazing headlines of war actions in Vietnam.

Some citizens of the United States became even more familiar with the country of Vietnam, and a number of citizens learned of the unknown body of water called the Vinh Bac Viet (Gulf of Tonkin.)¹¹ The geographical information offered by newspapers such as the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* allowed Americans to recognize Vietnam and its location. Vietnam commands an important geographic position in Southeast Asia. Her eastern and southern coasts end at the waters of the South

China Sea. To the west of Vietnam are Cambodia and Laos, each involved in the Vietnam war to some degree, and to the north lies the communist giant China. Vietnam is an elongated, narrow strip of land. The Annamitique mountains border the country to the northwest and the Red and Mekong River Deltas edge the northern and southern landscape respectively.¹²

Located between the 17th and 21st parallels, Vietnam's Tonkin Gulf is a warm water body. It is fed by the Mekong and Red Rivers to the west and the Equatorial currents to the east.¹³ The Tonkin Gulf sits atop the Vietnamese Continental shelf that protrudes into the South China Sea past the Chinese held island of Hai Nen Dao (Hainan island).¹⁴ During the months of July and August the Gulf weather could be classified as "always hot."¹⁵ Maritime traffic, during August of 1964 in the Gulf was just as hot when reduced to numbers. When one includes the naval vessels operated by South Vietnam and North Vietnam, China and other nationality ships, and the huge force of Vietnamese fishing junks, the Gulf of Tonkin was a metropolis of seafaring activity in 1964.

Within this idyllic scene of maritime trade and junks lazily traversing coastal waters in August 1964, the United States Navy stationed warships in the Gulf of Tonkin. Many times larger than the fishing junks or trade ships, the



massive naval force of the United States Navy edged closer and closer to the coastal lands of North Vietnam. Once inside the North Vietnamese safety zone, United States actions awakened and commanded the attention of the North Vietnamese. Those actions are part of the Tonkin Gulf incidents. What happened as United States ships patrolled the coastal waters reverberated around the world for the next ten years. As America and her allies fought in the steamy jungles and the blue and the brown waters of Vietnam¹⁶, nations around the world watched as the mighty giant of United States military forces became entangled in the Vietnam War. Fifty-eight thousand Americans lost their lives in Vietnam. Countless others were wounded; an estimated two thousand were reported as Missing in Action (MIA). Although the American government and military had been involved in Vietnam since the Franklin D. Roosevelt presidency, the Tonkin Gulf incidents and the resulting resolution set the legal stage for the escalation of war in Vietnam.

On 2 August 1964 North Vietnamese naval forces attacked United States ships in the Gulf of Tonkin. President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration told the American public that "Three North Vietnamese PT boats fired torpedoes and 37mm shells at a United States destroyer in international waters about 30 miles off North Vietnam . . . the destroyer was on

a routine patrol when an unprovoked attack took place in the Gulf of Tonkin."¹⁷ President Johnson pushed aside the 2 August attack as a mistake and offered no retaliatory actions against communist North Vietnam. Then on 4 August 1964 the scenario was repeated. This time the actions taken by the United States were far different. With a draft copy of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in hand, President Johnson reported to the American people that they would meet this second attack with retaliatory air strikes against selected targets in North Vietnam. Two days after the air strikes, Johnson presented the Tonkin Gulf Resolution to the United States Senate and within hours received almost unanimous consent to wage war in Vietnam. The resolution, in part, stated that the United States, in assisting South Vietnam in her attempts to secure her borders against North Vietnam infiltration, was legally bound to "take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression."¹⁸

Based on the information disclosed by Secretary McNamara, the House and Senate's blanket support of United States actions helped to send the resolution through both houses without debate. Only Oregon Senator Wayne Morse voted against the measure, offering little to dissuade the ground-swell of support President Johnson's resolution received in the Senate. Shortly thereafter that support

changed drastically, as Senate leader J. William Fulbright, of Arkansas, admitted he had not been given the full account of what happened. Fulbright remained a bitter enemy of Johnson after feeling hoodwinked into supporting a measure that was based on what he thought was either fraudulent or uncertain evidence. After the furor of the incidents subsided, questions about the attack began to surface.

Many aspects of McNamara's story were sketchy at best, misleading at worst. Since the Senate hearings of 1964 and 1968, concerning the events of 2 and 4 August 1964, little has changed in the official account of the Tonkin Gulf incidents. The Defense Department, along with the Executive branch have yet to give a full accounting of the incidents. What happened those fateful days in August of 1964 has greatly affected the United States.

CHAPTER ONE
THE CHRONOLOGY

To understand the Tonkin Gulf incidents, a thorough chronology is necessary. What follows is based on the records detailing the incidents and incorporates relevant military information that helps to more fully explain the actions taken by the United States Navy during the incidents. Since the information available detailing the 2 August incident is more inclusive, this incident will be dealt with alone. It is imperative to remember that the North Vietnamese admitted to attacking the *USS Maddox* on 2 August 1964. However, the complete scenario of that attack has never been thoroughly recounted. The following chronology, while not including every detail, will explore the most relevant information of that attack.

Leaving Keelung, Taiwan at 0800 Saigon time on the morning of 28 July 1964, the *USS Maddox* began her Desoto Patrol.¹ Although it appears that the journey from Keelung to the Gulf of Tonkin was uneventful, it was not. Closer inspection of all declassified records reveals many discrepancies as to time and location. Reported to have left Keelung at 0800 Saigon time, and averaging speeds of fifteen knots for the entire journey, the *Maddox* could not

have arrived at Yankee Station until at least 1600 Saigon time 31 July.² The *Maddox* did not report the time of her arrival on Yankee Station; what was reported was the time she began to receive fuel from the *USS Ashtabula*, which was located in the area of Yankee Station. At 8:15 in the morning of 31 August the refueling began.³ Each ship reported the beginning of the refueling at approximately the same time. However, there is evidence to suggest that the *Maddox* cruised in the Gulf of Tonkin long before the refueling began.

The *Maddox* was located about four hundred nautical miles from Yankee Station at 1800 Saigon time 30 July, based on the location given in reference to Typhoon Helen.⁴ Averaging speeds of only fifteen knots, it would have been impossible for the *Maddox* to have arrived in the Gulf at any time sooner than 1600 Saigon time 31 July. Yet according to the North Vietnamese the ship arrived in the Gulf much earlier than the time indicated by the *Maddox*:

At 0530 local time on July 31, it [*Maddox*] was sailing five miles off Vietnamese coast...From the coast its registration number 731 could already be seen clearly through binoculars.⁵

Early morning of 31/7/64, the American Government gave order to the South VN's Navy Forces to attack Hon Me island Hon Ngie island. These islands are located 4-12 KN to the mainland. Concurrently the *Maddox* destroyer entered the Gulf of Tonkin.⁶

The South Vietnamese forces, indicated above, attacked these

islands between 0021 and 0037 Saigon time on 31 July.⁷ As these sources suggest, the *Maddox* was in the Gulf prior to the time reported in her records and the time she could have arrived there when considering her prior location and speed. These sources, along with the following evidence suggests that the ship was in the Gulf long before the times reported in the Tonkin Gulf records. These sources, noted below, also indicate that the *Maddox* sailed in the company of the *USS Turner Joy* long before other records suggest she did.

An important group of radar intercepts clearly support the conclusion that the *Maddox* cruised in the Gulf as early as 28 July 1964. This conclusion is based on the knowledge that the *USS Turner Joy* was attached to a naval group that operated in the Yankee Station area:

1915 Saigon time 29 July, *Maddox* radar picks up contact
1929 Saigon time 29 July, *Turner Joy* emits radar for short duration

1354 Saigon time 30 July, *Turner Joy* emits radar for short duration
1400 Saigon time 30 July, *Maddox* radar picks up contact

0010 Saigon time 31 July, *Maddox* radar picks up contact
0025 Saigon time 31 July, *Turner Joy* emits radar for short duration

0447 Saigon time 31 July, *Turner Joy* emits radar for short duration
0450 Saigon time 31 July, *Maddox* radar picks up contact⁸

As indicated, the *Maddox*, supposedly cruising toward the

Gulf of Tonkin, picked up every radar emission of the *Turner Joy*. Also, the North Vietnamese firmly contend that the *Maddox* was in the Gulf prior to those times indicated in some of her records.

To understand the significance of the radar contacts and emissions a few explanations are necessary. As the *Turner Joy* maneuvered to change station her "Surface Search Radar (AN/SPS-10) was tuned for a short range search to facilitate station keeping."⁹ AN/SPS-10 radar, when tuned for short range searches had a range of thirty miles or less. The *Maddox* had to be within this thirty-mile range to pick up all of the emissions. The few minutes lag between emission of the signal and contact could be due to record keeping differences. Each ship utilized its own time pieces and these time pieces were not synchronized between ships. Also, the reports detailing daily operations, the *Deck Log*, were written in four hour intervals. This would account for the slight differences in times.

Considering that the North Vietnamese sources, mentioned above, indicate the *Maddox* was in the Gulf at 0530 Saigon time 31 July, and that the radar intercept information supports the North Vietnamese sources, it is correct to assume that the ship sailed into the Gulf by at least 0030 Saigon time 31 July 1964. Given the time

indicated by the North Vietnamese and adding to it the time needed to travel from Yankee Station to the NVN islands, the ship must have arrived in the Gulf very early on 31 July 1964, if not before. According to other *Maddox* records, the ship was located at the mouth of the Gulf at 0030 Saigon time 31 July 1964. At this time *Maddox* records indicate another United States destroyer was sighted, although the ship's name and designation numbers were never identified in the record.¹⁰

That part of the *Maddox* records which report the ship's arrival at one time, and other of her records that indicate a different arrival time, can only be explained in light of other events taking place in the Gulf. The events of 30 and 31 July are equally important in regard to the overall account of the *Maddox's* patrol.

At 2125 Saigon time 30 July, *Maddox* reported the "heavy odor of low grade fuel oil, or kerosene either from UNREP or ship with leaking tanks."¹¹ UNREP is the Navy acronym for underway replenishment or refueling at sea. Supposedly cruising toward the Gulf at this time, there is no indication that the *Maddox* underwent refueling at this time. The *Maddox* was carrying at least ninety percent fuel capacity on 30 July, making an UNREP rather unnecessary.¹² The first scheduled refueling was to take place at 0800

Saigon time 31 July. What is more revealing is the idea that the *Maddox* crew smelled oil and that the record reports it came from a ship leaking fuel. The record does not say the leaking fuel was coming from the *Maddox*, but rather from another ship. If the *Maddox* was on her journey to the Gulf at this time, and not already in the Gulf, the chances that she was close to another ship were minimal. The importance of this detail is vital. It supports the likelihood that the *Maddox* was in the Gulf prior to 30 July. There are important reasons why the *Maddox* would have been in the Gulf prior to 31 July.

During her refueling with the *Ashtabula* at 0835 Saigon time 31 July, the *Maddox* sighted "Two patrol type boats bearing 340°."¹³ Prior to beginning the UNREP (Underway Replenishment) the *Maddox* was scheduled to "listen UNREP circuits; 2340, 2096, 277.8" but "do not transmit."¹⁴ There is no indication that *Maddox* followed this directive. The only contact with the UNREP ship *Ashtabula* was at 0030 Saigon time when the *Ashtabula* "called SINBAD (USS MADDOX) on alternate CI circuit. [The] Call was not answered."¹⁵ In the scope of what was occurring in the Gulf at 0030 Saigon time, it is vital to remember that at this time the *Maddox* was on total radio silence. Not until 0729 Saigon time did the ship lift her radio silence.

As reported in the *Maddox* records the ship commenced her refueling from *Ashtabula* at 0815 Saigon time. At 0820 Saigon time she "Sighted two PT boats bearing 010° relative on the horizon."¹⁶ The ship finished her UNREP and sailed northwest toward North Vietnam. After close scrutiny of the *Deck Log* from that day, it would appear that the ship sighted two PT boats. The identification made by the crew was definite; the record unequivocally states the vessels sighted were two PT boats. It was not until reports written days and weeks after the event that information was introduced concerning the number and kind of ships sighted as being different from the original identification recorded in the *Deck Log*.

What follows is an extensive list of the diverse information concerning the sighted vessel's numbers, locations, and kinds:

Maddox Narrative- Sighted 2 patrol craft bearing 270° on course 180°. 0822 Saigon time.

Sighted 2 patrol craft bearing 336°, 5 miles. One contact identified as Patrol Craft type P-6. 0844 Saigon time.

Maddox Photographic Summary- Two patrol type boats Brg 340°. 0835 Saigon time.

Two patrol type boats Brg 065°. 0844 Saigon time.

Maddox Surface Search Radar Contact Sheet- Two patrol type craft. Maneuvered to station astern of MADDOX. 0910 Saigon time.

Maddox Visual Contact Log- 2 patrol type craft.
Approached from direction of Hainan island,
bearing 270°. 0833 Saigon time.

2 Patrol type boats. One identified as type
"P-G". Boats maneuvered to pass astern of
MADDOX. Boats left to follow USS ASHTABULA.
0844 Saigon time.

Marolda, US Navy in Vietnam- Maddox sighted two
unidentified craft, similar to Nasty class
PT boats, passing five miles ahead on a
southern course. 0820 Saigon time.

Two more vessels passed astern, also heading
south. 0850 Saigon time.¹⁷

As is evident in this list, the conflicting accounts of what
actually appeared and subsequently transpired makes
identifying the number and kinds of ships sighted difficult.
Yet there is interesting information available which both
supports and contradicts what McNamara related to the Senate
during the 1964 and 1968 Hearings.

The original identification of two PT vessels was made
and recorded into the *Deck Log* shortly after the sighting.
In the reports such as the *After Action Report* and the
Narrative, written weeks after the event, the identification
changes to a P-G or a P-6 vessel. In 1964 neither North
Vietnam nor South Vietnam navies sailed P-Gs and or P-6s¹⁸.
China was the only country in that part of Southeast Asia
that had those kinds of vessels in her navy arsenal.¹⁹
Also, given the bearings reported above, the sighted ships
came from the northwest and the northeast. One report even

indicated that the ships were traveling from the direction of Hainan island, a Chinese island in the middle of the gulf. The evidence strongly suggests that at least one of the vessels was of Chinese origin. This conclusion is further supported by the information that South Vietnamese Oplan 34A (Operational Plan 34 Alpha) ships "could not approach the island of Hainan closer than 40nm."²⁰ These Oplan vessels, as will be explained later, were returning to Da Nang, South Vietnam, and were manned by South Vietnamese naval forces.

Whether or not the sighted vessels were the Oplan ships remains a mystery. While Edward Marolda, in his book *The United States Navy and the Vietnam War*, does explain that the ships were the Oplan vessels, his supporting evidence remains classified. Given the information contained in the declassified record, the assumption does have some support. It is interesting to note that McNamara has maintained that the patrol operation of the *Maddox* had "nothing to do with, and was not aware of" the operations being undertaken by the Oplan ships. This detail can be easily contradicted.

The Oplan boats "passed astern of the *Maddox* and maneuvered around the *Ashtabula*."²¹ If, as McNamara steadfastly denied, there was no knowledge of the Oplan operations by the *Maddox* patrol, then it is bewildering how

the identification of PT boats was made so quickly by the *Maddox*. It is also unusual that a ship would not identify another craft with its IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) radars. The *Maddox* did not do this when confronted with the approaching PTs. The PT vessels were less than ten minutes distance from the *Maddox*, clearly visible, and traveling at speeds of forty five knots.²² The *Maddox*, located at 17.01.5°N-108.26°E, and still taking on fuel, viewed the passing vessels who were en route back to Da Nang. How the ships could have covered this distance and circled the *Maddox* is unexplainable to a point. As stated by Marolda, one of the PTs had engine problems. Marolda does not draw conclusions as to what this vessel did, but utilizing information in the *MACSOG* study, one could conclude that the PT tried to get assistance from the United States ships located near Yankee Station, where the *Maddox* was located at this time.²³

The evidence suggests that the American ships knew of the operations of the PT boats, and offered some assistance to them. Another explanation for the quick identification, and the close proximity of the vessels returning from the north, was that the United States ships had direct knowledge of the South Vietnamese operations. Although this has repeatedly been denied by McNamara, it is highly unlikely

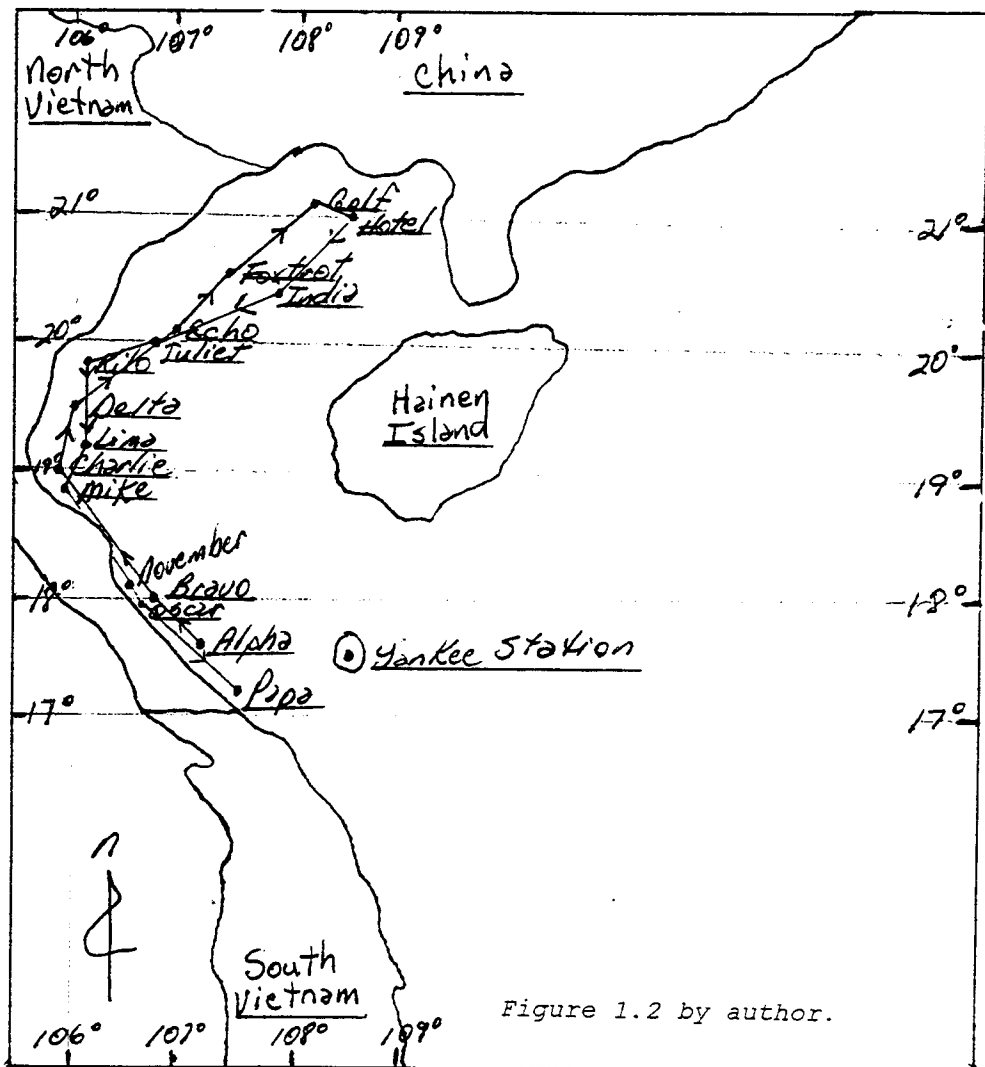
that the returning PTs were not aware of the United States patrols of the *Maddox* and that the *Maddox* was not aware of the Oplan vessels. The evidence suggests that the *Maddox* at least had the knowledge of where the ships were coming from, what kind of ships they were, who controlled and operated them, and what they were doing in North Vietnamese territory.

After completing the scheduled refueling the *Maddox* proceeded on her patrol of North Vietnamese coastal areas. Designated a Desoto Patrol ship, the *Maddox* was to gather intelligence of the ELINT (Electronic Intelligence) and SIGINT (Signal Intelligence) variety. This meant the ship was trying to gain knowledge of North Vietnamese radar posts and radio communications. Traveling from Point Alpha to Point Papa, the ship cruised along the coast of North Vietnam, stopping at each point to patrol and orbit in the respective area for a pre-determined amount of time. The points and their locations were:

| | |
|---------|----------------|
| Alpha | 17.05N-107.18E |
| Bravo | 18N-106.42E |
| Charlie | 19N-105.53E |
| Delta | 19.47N-106.08E |
| Echo | 20.22N-107E |
| Foxtrot | 20.42N-107.47E |
| Golf | 21.19N-108.24E |
| Hotel | 21.17N-108.49E |
| India | 20.47N-107.40E |
| Juliet | 20.08N-106.45E |
| Kilo | 19.37N-106.01E |
| Lima | 19.09N-106.19E |

Mike
November
Oscar
Papa

18.41N-105.58E
18N-106.50E
17.22N-106.45E
17.15N-107.20E²⁴



By 0846 Saigon time 31 July the *Maddox* cruised toward the northwest at 17 knots.²⁵ Arriving at Point Alpha at 1320 Saigon time, the ship began a ten-hour orbit of the area.²⁶

At 2000 Saigon time a TG (Task Group) 77.5 Picket Destroyer was to arrive on station at 17.20°-108.°E, and sail in a twenty nautical mile circle around the *Maddox* from Point Alpha on.²⁷ On 31 July 1964 there were three TG 77.5 DD (Destroyer) ships in the general vicinity of the *Maddox*. The *USS Edson* (DD-946), *USS Harry Hubbard* (DD-748), and the *Turner Joy*.²⁸ The *Edson* and *Harry Hubbard* were detached from TG 77.5 and assigned picket duty elsewhere; only the *Turner Joy* remained in TG 77.5.²⁹ At 1017 Saigon time, the *Turner Joy* changed duty, "proceeding to watchdog station within a 20 mile radius of Point HH (17.30°N-108.°E)."³⁰ At this point the *Turner Joy* cruised toward Point HH, stopping at 1443 Saigon time to inspect an object floating in the water.³¹ While on her patrol of Point Alpha, the *Maddox*, at 1530 Saigon time, also stopped to inspect an object floating in the water.³² At 2000 Saigon time, the *Turner Joy* arrived at her station. The likelihood that both ships found a floating object in the same area, within minutes, is plausible, as well as curious. What the information strongly suggests is that the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy* sailed together as of mid-day 31 July 1964.

Although released versions of the incidents such as McNamara's testimony and Marolda's work repeatedly state that the *Turner Joy* did not accompany the *Maddox*, the above information contradicts that detail. Whether or not the two ships were sailing together can not be proven; yet other information suggests that they were.

After completing her patrol around Point Alpha, the *Maddox* turned northwest and sailed to Point Bravo. For the crew aboard the *Maddox*, 1 August 1964 was to be the last day of calm sailing. At 0439 Saigon time the ship sailed near Han Dio island, "reached CPA [closest point of approach], bearing 240, 4.1 miles."³³ While Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara repeatedly stated during the 1964 and 1968 Senate hearings looking into the Tonkin Gulf incidents, that United States ships did not approach North Vietnamese land areas closer than five miles, declassified information reports otherwise. Also, Marolda states, "At 2115H, the vessel reached a position five miles southeast of Hon Vat."³⁴ This, in direct contradiction to the *Maddox* deck logs.

The Defense Department report, *United States-Vietnam Relations*, compiled in 1971, states, "the U.S.S. Maddox was restricted to a track not closer than 8 n.m. off the North Vietnamese mainland."³⁵ The report also states that the

previous Desoto Patrol, conducted in February, was authorized to sail as close as four nautical miles of the North Vietnamese coast.³⁶ Taking the information from the *Navigational Sheet* of the *Maddox After Action Report* and charting it on the *Defense Mapping Agency* map, the closest point of approach to the North Vietnamese coast is well within ten nautical miles. Although the closest point to which the *Maddox* approached North Vietnam is difficult to ascertain, it is necessary to realize that the North Vietnamese were quite uneasy about the islands attacked by South Vietnamese forces. This information clearly indicates that the North Vietnamese connected the Oplan operations with the Desoto Patrol.

Arriving at Point Bravo by 0539 Saigon time 1 August 1964, the ship proceeded to orbit the area.³⁷ Relative calm prevailed in the Gulf for most of the day. Leaving Point Bravo at 1200 Saigon time, the ship then proceeded to Point Charlie, where again, no major events transpired. The ship sighted numerous radar installations along the coast and on the islands of North Vietnam. The ship's personnel documented the locations and described these installations. While the *Maddox* patrolled around the point area, COMUSMACV (Commander, United States Military Assistance, Vietnam), General William Westmoreland sent a message requesting "ASAP

policy reading on stand off bombardment of DRV coastal targets," and "added that unless he was directed otherwise, the maritime forces would bombard the Vinh Son radar station and the enemy security post on the south bank of the Ron River on 3 August."³⁸ Arriving at Point Charlie 1900 Saigon time, the ship was scheduled to orbit the area for fourteen hours. While the *Maddox* maneuvered around the large junk force in the areas of Bravo and Charlie, 1 August ended without mishap.

Although the *Maddox* patrolled North Vietnam coastal areas in relative calm, information supposedly unknown to her during 31 July and 1 and 2 August, suggested otherwise. On the afternoon of 30 July, four United States Nasty class Patrol Boats (PT) left Da Nang, South Vietnam.³⁹ Sailing into North Vietnam waters, the four PT boats separated; PT-3 and PT-6 traveled to Hon Me island and PT-5 and PT-2 headed for Hon Nieu island. Originally intending to drop commandoes on North Vietnamese beaches, the PT operations were organized to include shelling raids if the beach operations failed.⁴⁰ These shelling raids were the same raids Westmoreland requested information about the previous day. Realizing they were unable to undertake beach operations on Hon Me, PT-3 and PT-6 shelled Hon Me island at 0021 Saigon time.⁴¹ Also unable to continue beach

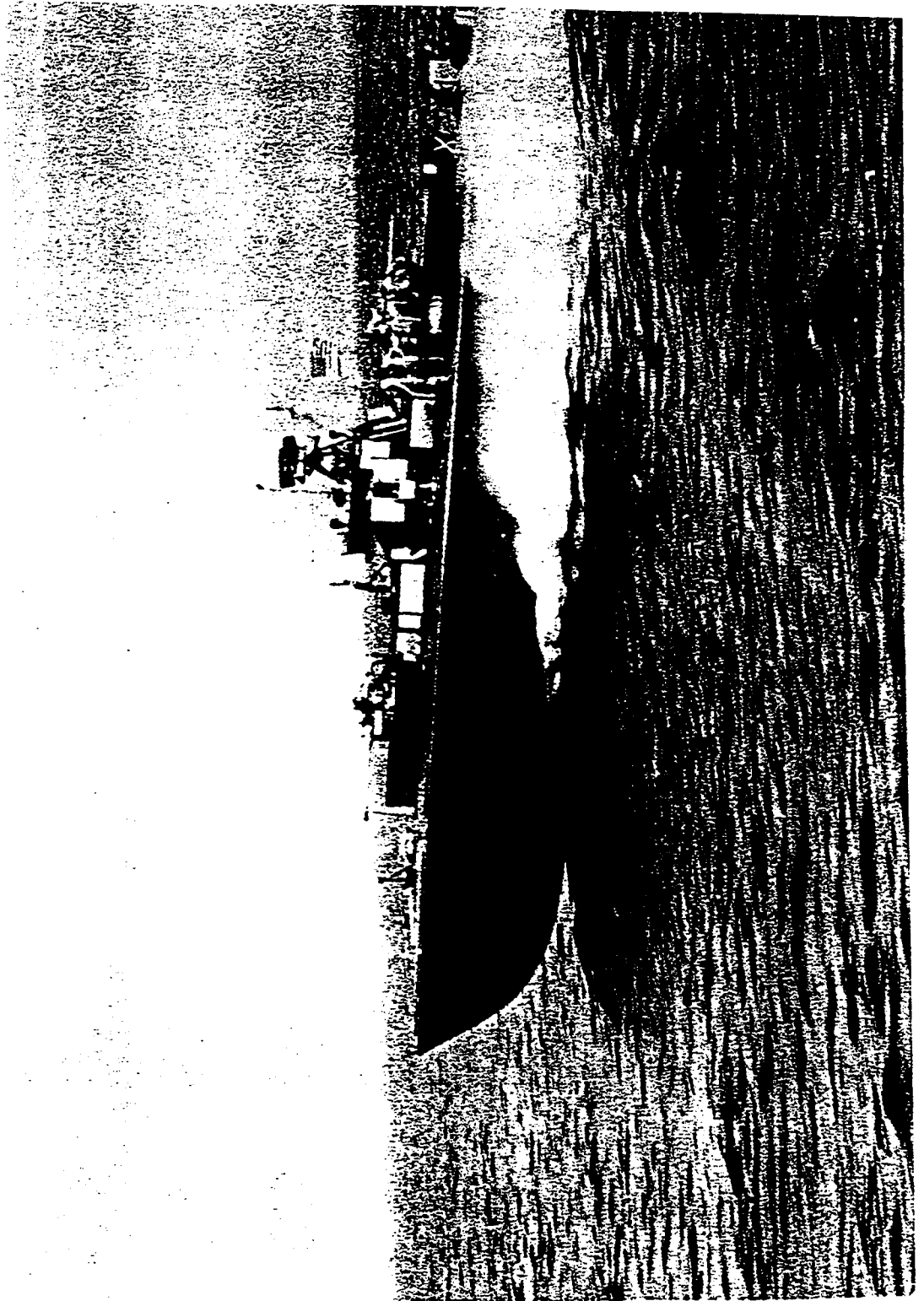


Figure 1.3 courtesy of Reske

operations, PT-5 and PT-2 conducted shelling raids on Hon Nieu island at 0037 Saigon time.⁴² Information concerning the PT boats operations remains classified, making it difficult to ascertain why the beach operations were shelved. Returning to Da Nang, the PT vessels "closed the port of Da Nang"⁴³ at 1120 Saigon time 31 July.⁴⁴ These are the vessels that Marolda states were seen by *Maddox* prior to beginning her patrol of North Vietnam.

Captain John Herrick, Desoto Patrol commander, and traveling aboard the *Maddox*, was just beginning to understand the importance of his August 1964 Desoto Patrol. Not only did Herrick have to contend with numerous vessels sailing in his area of operations, he soon realized that the nature of his Desoto Patrol was different from previous Desoto Patrols. A 1943 graduate of the Naval Academy, Herrick came aboard the *Maddox* well prepared. During World War II and Korea, Herrick commanded surface ships and had wartime experience.⁴⁵ This experience would come in handy as the Desoto Patrol began her approach to the communist coast of North Vietnam. Whether or not Captain Herrick knew it, his ship was tracked by North Vietnam military units for her entire cruise.⁴⁶ On 2 August 1964, at 0324 Saigon time, Herrick received information that his ship was in "imminent danger."⁴⁷ Herrick, by now well aware of the atmosphere in

the Gulf decided to sail east and spend the night of 2 August in the middle of the Gulf, feeling that area was somewhat safer than the coastal areas. It is surprising that Herrick sent the message about where he would spend the night at 0448 Saigon time 2 August 1964, a short time before daybreak in the Gulf.⁴⁸

By 0645 Saigon time, Herrick directed the ship to continue her patrol along the pre-scheduled route.⁴⁹ It was at this point that the captain decided that continuing the patrol presented an "unacceptable risk."⁵⁰ Herrick, wanted to end the patrol at this time but his commanders told him to continue the patrol. After returning to the patrol location, the ship left Point Charlie and traveled toward Point Delta. It was not until 0900 Saigon time, more than two hours after his message, that Herrick was instructed to continue the patrol but was allowed to "deviate from itinerary at any time you consider unacceptable risk to exist."⁵¹ Cruising in the vicinity of Point Delta, the *Maddox* received no more messages or information that her patrol was causing hostile reaction by the North Vietnamese. This soon changed as CINCPAC (Commander in Chief, Pacific) and COM7FLT (Commander, 7th Fleet) received information that the North Vietnamese might attack the *Maddox*.⁵²

As the *Maddox* moved slowly north along her patrol

route, North Vietnamese naval boats were visible on her radars. Mid-day 2 August 1964, North Vietnam's naval forces, including Swatow vessels, proceeded towards an attack on the *Maddox*.⁵³ The North Vietnamese, upset by the patrol of the *Maddox* and the shelling of coastal islands, unequivocally stated that:

The American again advised the *Maddox* and the *Turnerjoy* deep into North VN's water about 6 nautical miles from shore. Their activities were provocative, and they were chased away by three torpedo gun boats of Viet-nam ('s navy)⁵⁴

Further supporting the conclusion that the *Turner Joy* was accompanying the *Maddox* along her patrol, the above information also demonstrates that the North Vietnamese took full responsibility for the 2 August attacks. Without hesitation, the North Vietnamese admitted to attacking the United States ships on 2 August 1964.

Since the North Vietnamese took responsibility for the 2 August attack immediately thereafter, it appears that a chronology of events appears unimportant. This is not true. It is necessary to understand the detail of the 2 August record in order to question the lack of detail that surrounds the 4 August attack. A short recap of the 2 August incident will suffice for continuing the chronological study:

1500 Saigon time: Three contacts, 30 mile distance approaching from the southwest. Evaluated as

PT's.

1530 Saigon time: General quarters sounded aboard the Maddox.

1533 Saigon time: Radar contacts 19 miles distance approaching from the southwest.

1538 Saigon time: Maddox being approached by three patrol boats.

1540 Saigon time: Maddox fire control designates target. Herrick sends message-being approached by high speed craft with apparent intention of torpedo attack. Intend to open fire if necessary self defense.

1542 Saigon time: General quarters sounded aboard the Turner Joy.

1547 Saigon time: Maddox request air support from Ticondaroga.

1605 Saigon time: Maddox opens fire on approaching PT's.

1605 Saigon time: boats aggressive, not aborting after being fired upon.

1608 Saigon time: Photos of PT's approaching for attack, Ogier holding bullet fired at Maddox.

1620 Saigon time: Maddox hit by 12.7 mm projectile in MK56 pedestal.

1630 Saigon time: three North Vietnamese PT's sortied from the coastline.

1630 Saigon time: Stockdale flew over Maddox for first time. Attack and destroy PT's.

1630 Saigon time: Action over.

1659 Saigon time: Message from COM7FLT...don't pursue enemy craft, fire in self defense only.

1830 Saigon time: Stockdale landed on Ticonderoga.

1904 Saigon time: Fleet commander ...In view of Maddox incident consider it in our best interest that we assert right of freedom of the seas and resume Gulf of Tonkin patrol earliest.

1915 Saigon time: Turner Joy sights Maddox, 15 miles

1944 Saigon time: Turner Joy sights aircraft overhead.

1846 Saigon time: Turner Joy identifies aircraft as those from the Ticonderoga.⁵⁵

The description of the 2 August 1964 attack, while not including every detail, offers a general reappraisal of the events that transpired. Within the list, some major discrepancies can be seen.

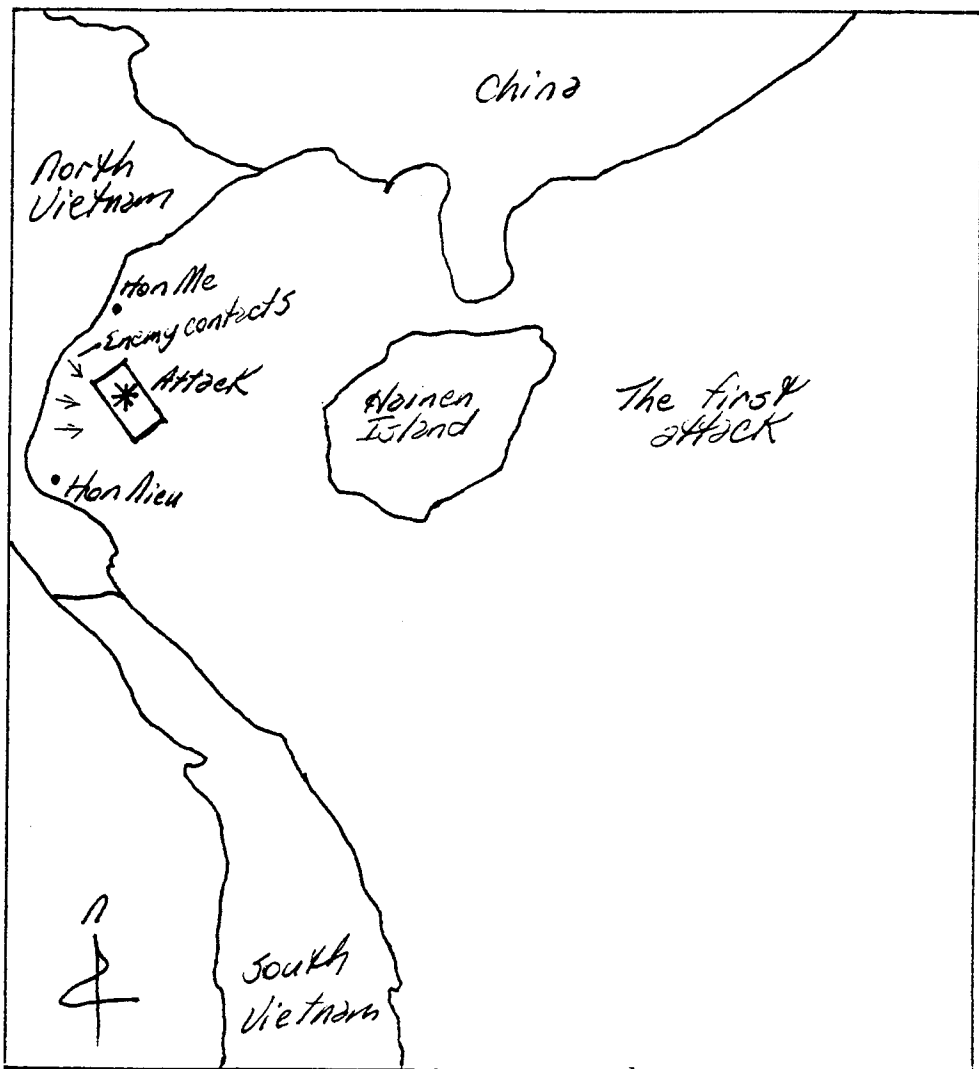


Figure 1.4 rendered by author

As noted previously, the evidence suggests that the *Turner Joy* was sailing in tandem with the *Maddox*. This assumption is further supported by the dual announcement of "General Quarters" on both ships within two minutes. Without being in close proximity, or at least direct knowledge of the atmosphere surrounding the *Maddox*, the *Turner Joy* would have no need to go on heightened alert. The *USS Samuel N. Moore*, in the Gulf and within range of the operational area of the Desoto ships at this particular time did not go to general quarters, nor did the *Ashtabula* and the *USS Ticonderoga*.⁵⁶ The calling of general quarters by the *Turner Joy* is important because the ship must have been very close to the *Maddox*, and felt endangered. This is realized in that the *Ashtabula* sighted the two ships together at 2329 Saigon time.⁵⁷ If the *Turner Joy* sounded her alarm, she must have been close to the *Maddox*.

Two of the most revealing discrepancies found in the above record are the photographs taken of the bullet in the *Maddox* prior to the *Maddox* being fired upon. The other discrepancy is in conjunction with the sighting of the overhead United States aircraft, flying on patrol from the *Ticonderoga*. The *Turner Joy* sighted the aircraft after the aircraft had already landed back on the *Ticonderoga*. While both discrepancies can be attributed to record keeping and

time errors, it is inconceivable that the errors would be hours instead of minutes. The aircraft landed on the home ship at 1830 Saigon time, the *Turner Joy* spotted them overhead at 1944 Saigon time, and identified them as *Ticonderoga* aircraft at 1946 Saigon time. As with the aircraft issue, the photographic summary of the bullet hole does not include the time each frame was shot, but rather the time the roll was shot. In such an important sea action, this lack of record keeping is a problem.

Not to underscore the importance of the discrepancies from the 2 August attack reports, it is paramount to understand that there is a large amount of information detailing the first attack. Message traffic to and from the *Maddox*, while not included, describes many important events and adds to the foundation of support for the attack. However, as will be noted, the 4 August attack does not enjoy the same level of support. The records and reports from the 4 August attack lack the detail and volume of the 2 August records. This lack of support is imperative when it is realized that the 2 August attack did not lead to the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, nor the retaliatory air strikes. That the United States used the 4 August attack as a basis for escalating the war raises concerns. These concerns stem from the unsupported evidence used to confirm the actuality

of the second incident. Even a thorough study, as will follow, of the 4 August attack does not support the decisions made based on the events in the Tonkin Gulf.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CHRONOLOGY PART II

With all of its inaccuracies and discrepancies, the record of events of 2 August 1964 is generally good in comparison to the chronology of 4 August 1964. Most, if not all of the confusion concerning the Tonkin Gulf incidents

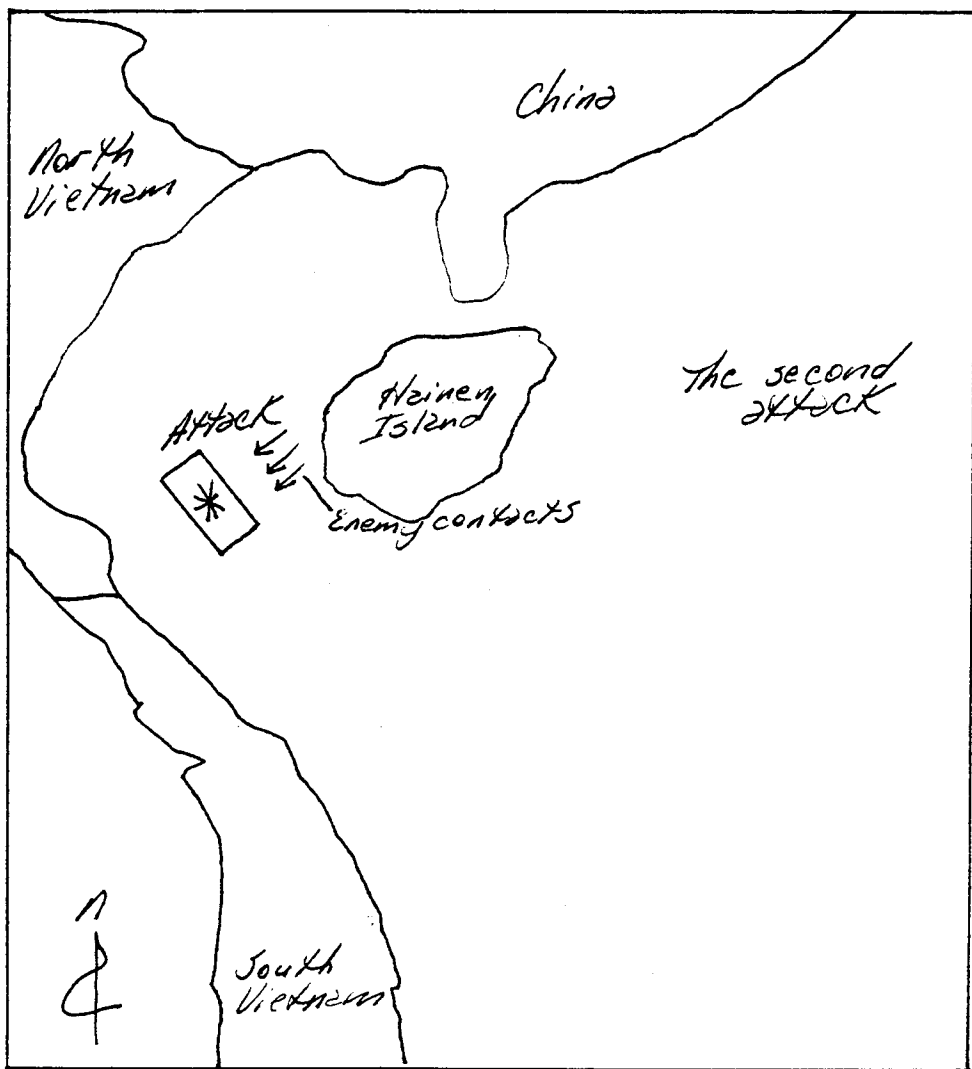


Figure 2.1 by author

arises from the 4 August events. Here, the lack of conclusive evidence causes much dispute as to the actuality of an attack. The declassified record does not support the conclusion that an attack took place; rather the record suggests the probability of no attack. Lacking the detail of the first incident, the chronology of the second attack is both sketchy and inconclusive.

According to deck logs, the following schedule of events includes first hand accounts of what transpired:

4 August 1964-

1100 Saigon time: *Maddox* went to General Quarters
1130 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* went to General Quarters
1313 Saigon time: *Maddox* Two American Aircraft passed overhead
1328 Saigon time: *Maddox* Two high speed surface contacts bearing 134° were reported by aircraft
1345 Saigon time: *Maddox* Contacts evaluated as non-threat
1413 Saigon time: *Maddox* American aircraft pass over
1520 Saigon time: *Maddox* Two contacts on radar, 10 miles, believed to be PT boats
1717 Saigon time: *Maddox* relieved from General Quarters
1846 Saigon time: *Maddox* "Surface Search Radar" Evaluated 1 Patrol Craft
1848 Saigon time: *Maddox* "Surface Search Radar" Evaluated 1 Patrol Craft
1850 Saigon time: *Maddox* "Surface Search Radar" Evaluated 1 Patrol Craft
2004 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* went to General Quarters
2008 Saigon time: *Maddox* "Surface Search Radar" 4 PT boats taken under fire
2013 Saigon time: *Maddox* Maneuvered to avoid 3 high speed contacts believed to be Pts
2059 Saigon time: *Maddox* 4 surface contacts bearing 093°
2108 Saigon time: *Maddox* "Surface Search Radar"

Taken under fire

2109 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* turned on red truck lights

2110 Saigon time: *Maddox* turns on red truck lights for overhead CAP

2135 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* opens fire

2137 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* cease fire

2139 Saigon time: *Maddox* main battery director opens fire on contacts

2140 Saigon time: *Maddox* Cease fire

2141 Saigon time: *Maddox* Open fire

2144 Saigon time: PT fires torpedo, *Maddox* maneuvers to avoid torpedo

2210 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* open fire

2211 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* cease fire

2211 Saigon time: *Maddox* Open fire

2213 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* open fire

2214 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* cease fire

2220 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* cease fire

2247 Saigon time: *Tuner Joy* open fire

2300 Saigon time: *Tuner Joy* cease fire

2302 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* turns on red truck lights

2304 Saigon time: *Maddox* Open fire

2305 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* depth charge

2306 Saigon time: *Maddox* Depth charge

2329 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* open fire

2344 Saigon time: *Turner Joy* cease fire

2348 Saigon time: *Maddox* Commenced fire to unload guns

2353 Saigon time: *Maddox* Depth charge

0001-2400 Saigon time: *Maddox* "Visual Contact Sheet"
No significant sightings¹

Notwithstanding the large amount of fire power used by the two ships in the above chronology, the evidence suggests that an ominous sea battle had occurred. Yet, nowhere in the chronology is there reference to enemy ships sighted, or locations of enemy ships. All that is detailed are radar contacts and the bearings of those contacts.

Information obtained from sources written at the time

of the incident differs greatly from reports written days and weeks after the events of 4 August 1964. *Visual, Radar, and Photographic Summary Sheets*, used in the above chronology, were, like the *Deck Log*, prepared within hours of the incidents. Other reports included in the *After Action Report* of both ships were transcribed long after the events in the Gulf. Therefore, it is paramount to this study to conclude that those reports were written without firsthand accounts. Although there are on file testimonies of eye-witnesses who declared they had sighted enemy vessels on the night of 4 August, these accounts are contradicted by a multitude of statements made by men aboard the *Maddox* and in the air over the sea battle.

Admiral James Stockdale, who flew command position of the air groups above the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy*, recounts, "I did not see anything that night, I was over the area during the battle and never saw an enemy ship anywhere."² In his statement, Stockdale does concede that it was a dark night but states that he is familiar with PT boats at night and his experience suggests that the lack of visible wakes supports the conclusion that no PT boats were in the area. Stockdale also suggested that the signed testimonies were less than valid since he remembers specifically that all the pilots, after their return to the *Ticondaroga* that night,

stated they had not seen any enemy ships in the water.

Stockdale questions the 4 August incident chronology in an important episode. He recounts hearing a story from a friend about the incident:

His friend said he heard the story that the Chinese asked the NVN if they were ok, they were looking west and saw heavy gunfire. The NVN said they were ok but that they could see flashes also and they were wondering if the Chinese were ok.³

Stockdale reported that the conversation took place between the North Vietnamese and the Chinese by telephone the night of the incidents. Also, Stockdale reported that he was never asked to make a statement about the incident, and strangely enough, did not even know statements were being taken until his release from a North Vietnamese prison many years later.⁴ He stated that he ran across this information while reading a book about Vietnam and was upset to learn that no one bothered to take his statement the night or days following the incident.⁵

While the testimonies of those men who sighted ships is some of the strongest evidence to support an attack, the official record does not include the statements of those men who said they saw nothing. Special operations men, who manned the COMVAN aboard the *Maddox* during the incident, report the same experiences as Stockdale, but from the deck of the ship. Jack Bahm, USN, denied the possibility of an

attack, "I was sitting on the deck that night, after duty in the van, I didn't see any boats in the water except the *Turner Joy* that night."⁶ He repeatedly stated that there were no boats around the *Maddox* during the incident.

Charles DeCourley, another member of the COMVAN team, concurs with Bahm's assessment of the 4 August attack. He also stated that the attack was questionable. DeCourley's response to whether or not his statement was taken correlates with all those witnesses who did not see anything. Their statements were never taken nor were their accounts ever forwarded to Washington officials who were making the decisions to bomb North Vietnam in retaliation.⁷

Another member of the COMVAN team offers interesting information as to the true nature of the intercepted communications that McNamara states "unequivocally support" the truth that a second incident occurred. Gerrell D. Moore, the commander of the COMVAN team reported that he knew of the intercept, that the COMVAN decrypted the text of the intercept and that the basic information contained in that intercept simply implied that "the NVN naval forces were to be alert and aware."⁸ Moore stated that is what the intercept implied and that he does not remember it stating anything about a command to the NVN forces to attack the *Maddox*.⁹

It is unfortunate that the Navy, as it stated in 1996, destroys radar and sonar reading transcripts after three years.¹⁰ These transcripts contained vital information detailing the position and bearings of all the contacts that night. A careful comparison with other transcripts of contacts would have supported the conclusion that PT boats were in the waters around the United States ships that night.

Although the reports written after the incident include information that suggest an attack transpired, this information is questionable since it contains a complete record of the event with detailed facts that dispel the confusion evident in the reports written immediately following the questioned attack. This is problematic in that during the course of conversations between Washington, Hawaii and the Gulf on 4 and 5 August all evidence suggests that no one really knew what happened. Then within a month or so there was information detailing a scenario that completely supported the conclusion that an attack had occurred.

Since there is confusion between the reports written immediately following the incidents and the reports written weeks after the incidents, a study of all ships in the Gulf during the covered period is necessary. The knowledge gained from the identification of all participants reveals

interesting facts previously unknown about the actions and activities of not only the United States Navy, but also South Vietnamese units, North Vietnamese units, and Chinese and Soviet naval vessels.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PLAYERS, THE PROGRAMS, THE POLICIES

While the previous chronology introduces some of the participants in the Gulf of Tonkin Incidents it does not explore the nature of the United States presence in the Gulf during the summer of 1964. The ships, the personnel, and the programs of the period are equally important components of the overall history of the period. In 1964, America continued to build up her presence in Vietnam. This buildup included her naval presence in the Gulf.¹ The center of United States naval operations in the Gulf was an area called Yankee Station. Here, numerous American ships plied the waters of the Gulf on a routine basis.² Located at 17.30°N-108.30°E, Yankee Station was the center of United States Navy participation in a multitude of maritime operations in conjunction with South Vietnam.³ It was from Yankee Station that the *Maddox* began her Desoto Patrol.

During the summer of 1964 many aircraft carrier units were assigned to Yankee Station.⁴ The following units operated in and around the station, participating in a diverse range of duties:

| | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| <i>USS Bon Homme Richard</i> | 28 Jan. 1964-21 Nov. 1964 |
| <i>USS Bennington</i> | 20 Feb. 1964-11 Aug. 1964 |
| <i>USS Ticonderoga</i> | 14 Apr. 1964-15 Dec. 1964 |
| <i>USS Constellation</i> | 5 May 1964-1 Feb. 1965 |
| <i>USS Kearsarge</i> | 19 June 1964-16 Dec. 1964 ⁵ |

Assigned to Yankee Station, these carriers served in different capacities and at different locations in and around the station. As some of the vessels stayed in a thirty mile radius of Yankee Station, others patrolled the Gulf and waters around Southeast Asia. Normally, in the summer of 1964, at least three carrier units were positioned on Yankee Station. At times anchoring in other United States Naval installations in that part of the world, the ships attached to Yankee Station were all part of the Western Pacific fleet.

The carrier vessels patrolling on Yankee Station were supplied and tended by other United States ships. These vessels were numerous; they supplied fuel, armament, and other necessities to the carriers and other United States ships in the area. The list of tender ships assigned to the Tonkin Gulf area is extensive. For the purpose of this study the following list includes those tender ships that participated in Yankee Station operations during the covered period:

| | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>USS Ashtabula</i> | <i>USS Kennebec</i> |
| <i>USS Samuel N. Moore</i> | <i>USS Edson</i> |
| <i>USS Harry E. Hubbard</i> | <i>USS Berkeley⁶</i> |

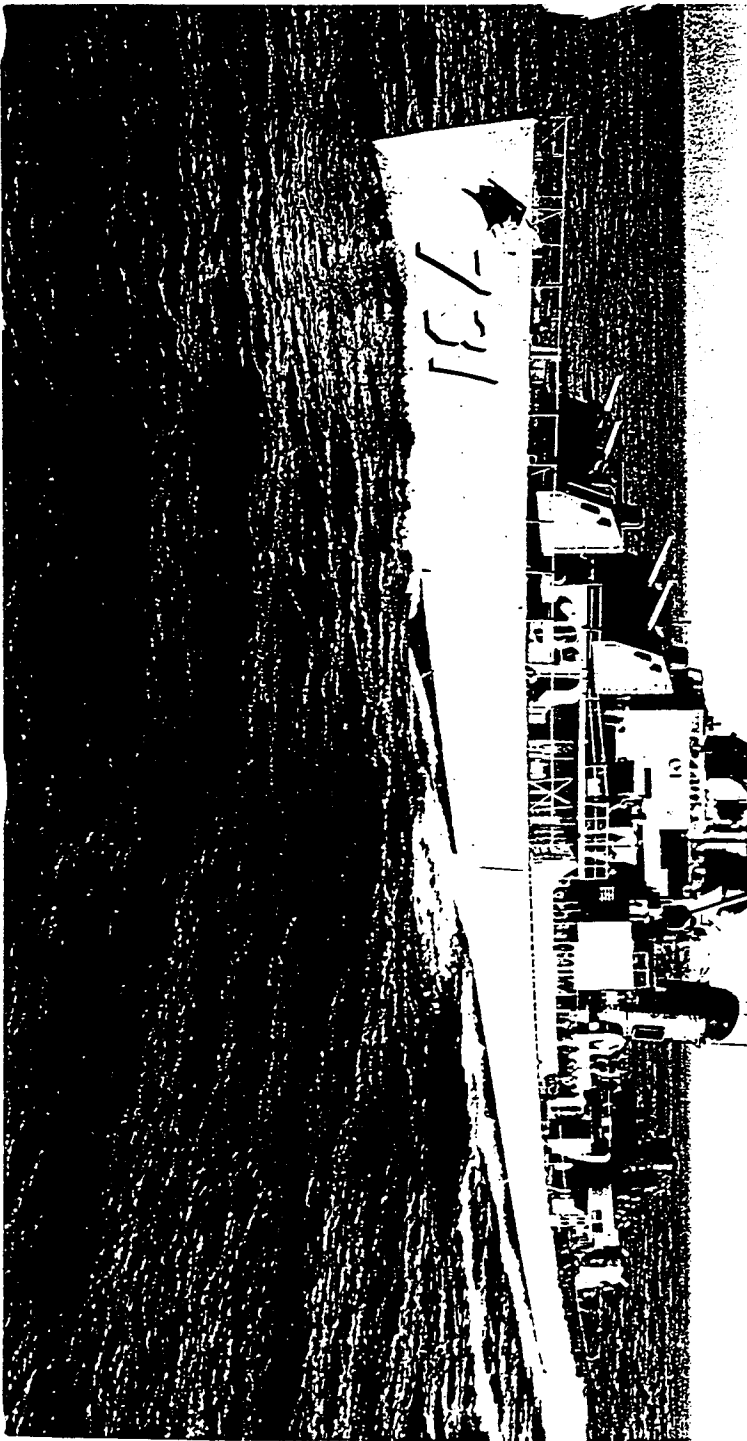
Day and night, these ships kept the United States naval forces armed and refueled.

The two key players in the Tonkin Gulf incidents, the

Maddox and the *Turner Joy*, were United States destroyers assigned to special operations in the Tonkin Gulf. Both ships were attached to the United States Navy Seventh Fleet, and patrolled in the Tonkin Gulf quadrant. Commissioned on 2 June 1944, the *Maddox* was an "English" class destroyer with an overall length of three hundred seventy-six feet and was the guide bearing ship during the August incidents.⁷ Powered by 60,000 shp geared turbines, the *Maddox* could attain a top speed of thirty three knots. Accommodating over three hundred crew members, the ship replaced the *USS Picking* as a Desoto Patrol ship.⁸ Armament aboard the *Maddox* included three twin 5"/38AA dual turrets and an array of other weapons such as torpedoes and depth charges.⁹

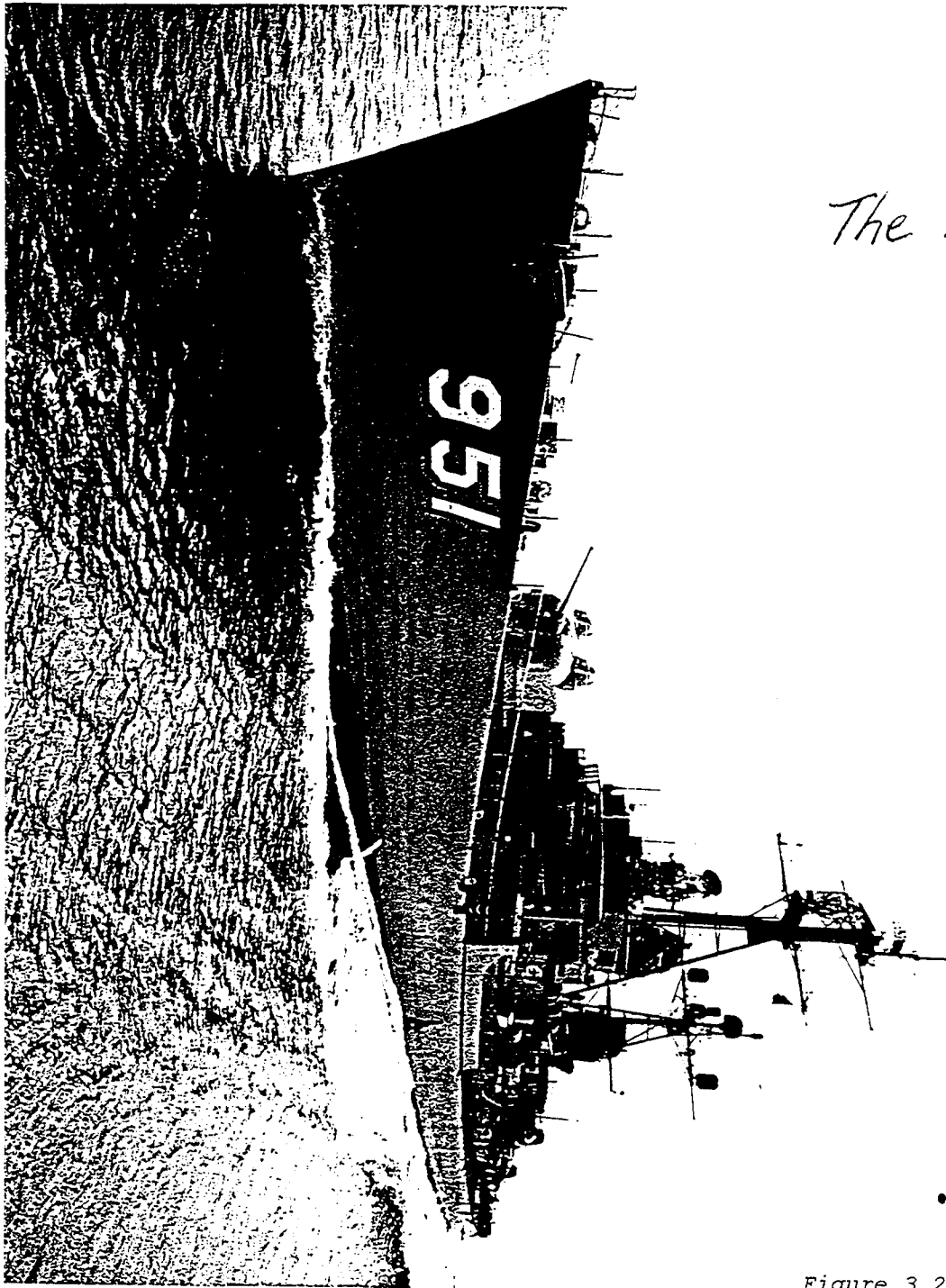
The *Turner Joy*, *Maddox's* picket ship on the Desoto Patrol, was commissioned on 3 August 1959. Similar to the *Maddox*, the *Turner Joy* was a "Forrest Sherman" class destroyer with an overall length of four hundred eighteen and one half feet. She could accommodate over two hundred crew members.¹⁰ Two geared turbines, 70,000 shp, powered the ship to speeds of thirty-three knots.¹¹ Weaponry aboard the *Turner Joy* included three 5"/127mm guns, six torpedo tubes, and depth charges.¹²

Of vital importance to the overall history of the Gulf of Tonkin incidents are the South Vietnamese naval force



The Maddox

Figure 3.1 courtesy NHC



The Turner Joy

Figure 3.2 courtesy of NHC

vessels. Commanded and trained by United States Navy personnel, the South Vietnamese Navy relied on United States vessels for their operations. While Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara repeatedly testified in the Tonkin Gulf hearings of 1968, that the South Vietnamese forces leased ships from the United States, this was not the case:

To induce the approval and support of the RVN in implementing the planned maritime and over the beach actions against NVN by RVN operators, as well as to minimize attributability to US sponsorship, it was implied that the PTF craft were being turned over to RVN possession for unilateral actions...Actual leases were negotiated with the RVN...The procedure provided support, at least initially, for the cover story of RVN independent retaliatory actions against NVN and the deniability of US sponsorship and direct participation. Credibility of the leases and ultimate ownership of the craft remained uncertain.¹³

The leases to transfer ownership to the South Vietnamese navy were never signed, the PTF's remained under the ownership of the United States Navy.¹⁴ Implying that the vessels were leased to South Vietnam enabled the United States to deny participation in the maritime operations. The leases, at least on paper, separated the United States from the South Vietnamese operations. However, since the leases were never signed, the operations were, as noted above, directly controlled and commanded by the United States.

Ownership questions aside, who manned the PTF's has caused much debate since the incidents. Secretary McNamara,

in 1964, 1968, and still today, claims that no Americans were aboard the vessels when they attacked North Vietnam on 31 July and 3 August 1964, "There were no U.S. personnel participating in it [Oplan 34A]".¹⁵ Limits that kept United States personnel from taking part in the South Vietnamese operations did not exist until after 1965. While Washington and military officials such as McNamara and General Earle G. Wheeler repeatedly stated that no United States personnel were aboard the Oplan vessels, the following evidence suggests otherwise:

All maritime operations north of 17th Latitude were conducted by Vietnamese personnel . . . (Report, C.O. NAD DANANG, "Historical Analysis of Maritime Operations Group, Danang, 3 Jan 69)

US assigned personnel were not permitted to accompany nor participate in actions north of the 17th parallel line . . . (Same as above)

Supervise, coordinate and assist RVN counterpart operational personnel in the recruiting, organization, training, preparation, briefing, staging and launching of operational forces engaged in MAROPS . . . (Same as above)¹⁶

Although this evidence does not specifically state United States personnel took part in the Oplan 34A operations, it does imply that prior to 1969 there were no restrictions on United States personnel. To say positively that United States personnel were on board during these operations is impossible. Aside from United States personnel, there were others besides the South Vietnamese aboard the vessels that

bombarded North Vietnamese islands. Crew members of these ships included Chinese and European nationals.¹⁷

The participation of the South Vietnamese Navy in this historic episode was minimal. The Oplan-34A program was completely controlled and commanded by United States military personnel under the heading of NAD (Naval Advisory Detachment).¹⁸ All of the "Vietnamese Navy personnel came under operational control of SOG." (Special Operations Group)¹⁹ The United States limited its responsibility in the Oplan operations purposefully. On paper the command structure appeared to be wholly South Vietnamese responsibility; however, as noted above, the United States controlled the whole operation. South Vietnamese participation in the Oplan operations was limited to those South Vietnamese who ran the missions into North Vietnam. The United States, covering up its control over the operations, staged the appearance of Oplan 34A as being a South Vietnamese endeavor. Although the South Vietnamese did have a command center jointly associated with the United States command at the Da Nang training center, this was simply a formality. "Planning and operational control was retained by the United States Government."²⁰

While the structure and activities of the South Vietnamese Navy can be easily detailed, the North Vietnamese naval operations in the Tonkin Gulf are somewhat more

difficult. As the United States supplied South Vietnam with vessels, China and the Soviet Union supplied ships and equipment to the North Vietnamese. With the support of the two communist giants, North Vietnam maintained a strong but somewhat limited force in the Gulf. The North Vietnamese Navy divided the Gulf in half, "Patrol Region 1- Van Hoa and Patrol Region 2- Port Giang."²¹ Within these two areas, the NVN Navy divided its forces. The Hai Phong division consisted of four PT boat squadrons and four Swatow boat squadrons.²² The divisions, maintained on paper had not yet been completely filled with vessels. In 1964, the North Vietnamese did not yet have a full flotilla of Swatow vessels.²³

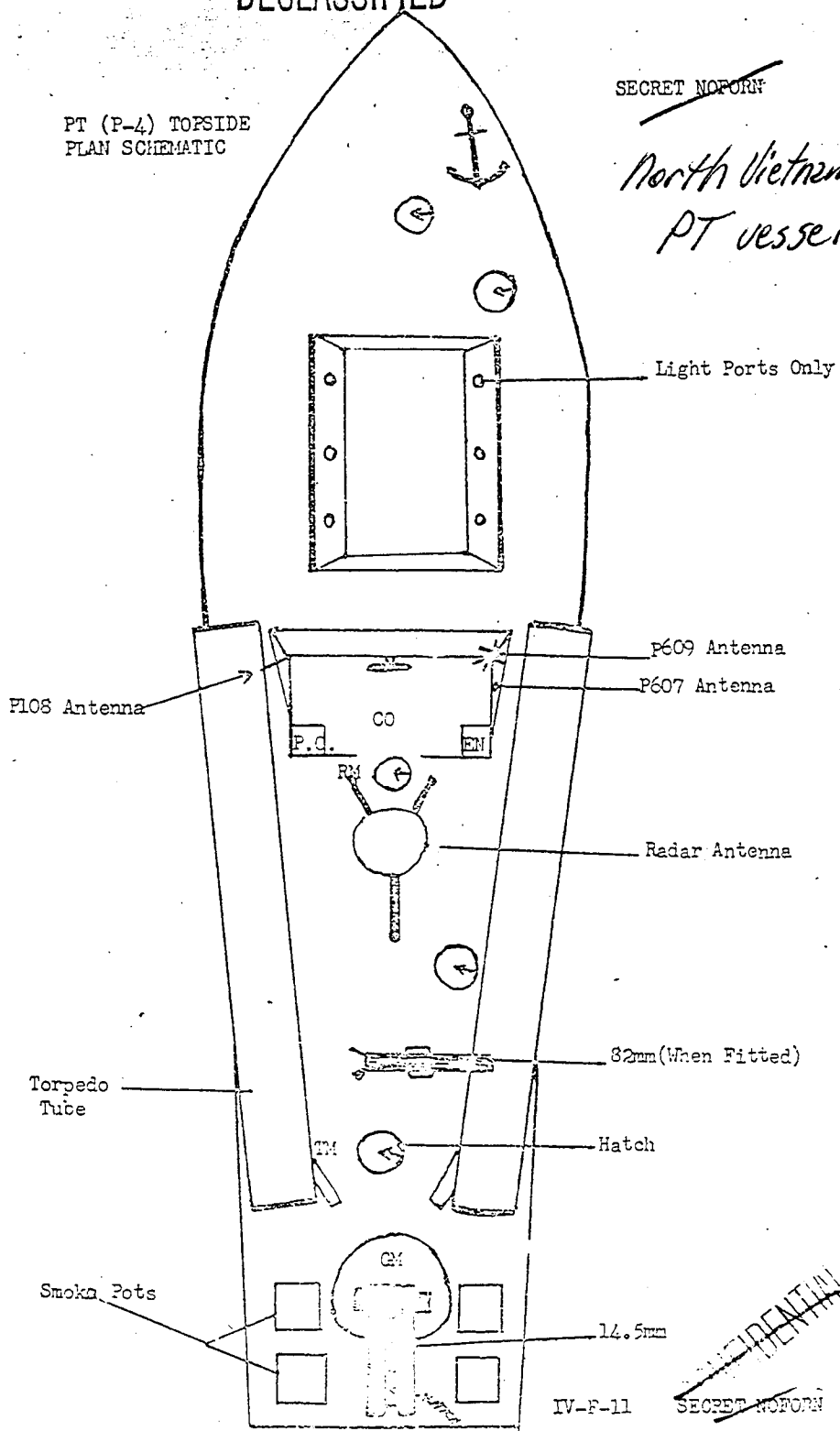
Specifically assigned to guard the coastal areas against destroyer ships, the PT forces were small compared to their enemy counterparts. "The official NVN naval concept . . . assigns them the primary responsibility for defending the coast against large ships types . . . destroyers."²⁴ Traveling in three unit squads, the PT boats followed strict procedures for attacking larger ships. Approaching the destroyers, the North Vietnamese ships came in at angles between thirty and ninety degrees. Without the aid of radar, the PT's manually calculated the approachment direction in one minute intervals. Radar was used to find and follow the enemy ship to within a five mile distance;

DECLASSIFIED

~~SECRET NOFORN~~

PT (P-4) TOPSIDE
PLAN SCHEMATIC

*North Vietnam's
PT vessel*



IV-F-11

~~SECRET NOFORN~~

Figure 3.3 courtesy of Tourison

after that the approaching course was set manually.²⁵ Arriving at the optimal location in regard to the enemy vessel, the PT's fired their torpedoes and retreated.

The North Vietnamese areas of operations were limited within the Gulf. The Swatow vessels, which patrolled in the area west of 107.11°E, were directed not to exceed that eastern point. Navigational, fuel, and size limitations kept the vessels within the 107.11° quadrant.²⁶

In comparison, the South Vietnamese Oplan vessels and the North Vietnamese PTF's could attain about the same speeds. The North Vietnamese PTF's maximum speed was fifty-two knots, while the South Vietnamese Nasty's maximum speed was fifty knots. This is important to remember in the discussion of what boats were sighted as the *Maddox* refueled on the morning of 31 July.

Operating in the small island area of the northern gulf, Chinese naval forces maintained an operational area above twenty-one degrees. Their efforts were limited to the surveillance of the northern Gulf close to the Chinese-Vietnam border.

Other nations, such as the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France sailed into the Tonkin Gulf during this period. Soviet military, as well as civilian trade ships were often seen in the Gulf waters. Yet, as for large, military

vessels, it was the United States forces that were more frequently seen in the Gulf waters. Of these ships, the Desoto Patrol vessels cruised into the Gulf on an average of once a month in 1964. However, the exact details of the Desoto Patrol program are minimal. The authority to grant the patrol's participation in the Gulf came directly from the JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff). Their authorization included not only the patrol course but the activities the patrol would undergo in the Gulf. These activities were:

Seaward defense posture: disposition of forces and capability. Deployment and operations of naval units, particularly submarines.

Air defense posture: disposition and capability. Response to unexpected surface and air contacts.

Merchant shipping activity.

[Electronic] intelligence collection in support of objectives above.

Photography and visual identification in support of objectives above.

Hydrographic and meteorological observations.

Such additional recurring or nonrecurring collection as may be directed by higher authority.²⁷

Originally suggested by Vice Admiral William A. Schoech, a 7th Fleet commander, the Desoto patrol program command and control structure developed as follows:

| | |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Department of Defense | Secretary Robert McNamara |
| Joint Chief of Staff | General Earl Wheeler |
| Commander in Chief, Pacific | Admiral U.S.G. Sharp |
| Commander in Chief, US Pacific Fleet | Admiral Thomas H. Moorer |

Seventh Fleet Commander
Commander Task Force
Commander Task Group
Commander, *Maddox*
Commander, *Turner Joy*

Admiral Roy L. Johnson
Admiral Robert Moore
Captain John Herrick
Commander Herbert Ogier
Commander Robert Barnhart

28

While the above command structure explains the direct flow of control, others played an important part in the Desoto patrol operations. Of those playing a role in the operations President Johnson had knowledge of the patrol and Secretary McNamara had control of some aspects of the patrols and operations.

The Desoto Patrol program began in 1962 with the deployment of the *USS Agerholm*.²⁹ By 1964, the Desoto Patrol mission of the *Maddox* followed similar objectives and routes as the earlier missions. While Secretary McNamara repeatedly stated at the Senate hearings the importance of the Desoto patrol, and the patrols freedom to the seas, the lack of Desoto Patrol records makes a full account difficult. However, it is enough to know that these patrols were simply spy missions against communist controlled areas.

Beginning in 1964, the United States actively pursued a different strategy in Vietnam. Not comfortable with sitting and watching the North Vietnamese infiltrate and destroy the democracy of South Vietnam, the United States increased its efforts to forestall the North's aggression. The overall appeal to "send a message" to North Vietnam, to end its

aggression against the south, shadowed all decisions concerning the effort to establish and protect the Republic of South Vietnam. In July 1964 the United States sent ICC (International Control Commission) member Blair Seaborn to Hanoi with this message:

United States was fully aware of the degree to which Hanoi controlled the Viet Cong insurgency and the Pathet Lao and might be obliged to carry the war to North if DRV-assisted pressures against South Vietnam continued.³⁰

This message, along with the effort to push the war north, directly impacted on the already planned Desoto Patrols and Oplan 34A operations.

No longer willing to accept North Vietnamese infiltration, the United States, through MACV and its affiliate programs, devised plans to let North Vietnam know that South Vietnam and the United States would no longer support and control the war as it had evolved. The United States was ready to step up all operations, overt or covert, against North Vietnam. These increases in military activities, designed to limit North Vietnamese infiltration and squelch North Vietnam's belief that their actions would be unchallenged, allowed support for the operations that in the past had proven unsuccessful.

Desoto Patrols were incorporated into the overall increase in military activity directed against North Vietnam. While in reality unconnected to the Oplan 34A

operations, both programs were components of the overall strategy to push the war north. The lack of a thorough record of Desoto patrol operations does not lessen the assumption that the intelligence information gathered by the Desoto patrols was used by MACV to help the Oplan operations in respect to targets, military strength, and military installations in the north.

The Oplan 34A operations, directed by United States Naval personnel from Da Nang, moved from Phase I operations to Phase II operations in June 1964.³¹ "Phase I of Oplan 34A was approved for execution at the Washington level on 1 February 1964,"³² but failed to cause a reaction from the North Vietnamese. Lacking adequate ships, men and equipment, the operation continued until June 1964. With new ships arriving, the Oplan missions moved from commando infiltration to naval attacks on North Vietnamese installations. The command and control of the Oplan program included:

| | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|
| Defense Department | Secretary Robert McNamara |
| Joint Chiefs of Staff | General Earl Wheeler |
| CINCPAC | Admiral U.S.G. Sharp |
| COMUSMACV | General William Westmoreland |
| Special Operations Group | General Paul Harkins |
| Naval Advisory Detachment | Unknown ³³ |

Although these command centers maintained control over the operations, others were involved at least to the point of knowledge and or influence in the Oplan 34A operations.

Also part of the flow of command and control were:

CINCPACFLT
CIN7thFLET
CTG

Admiral Thomas Moorer
Admiral Roy Johnson
Admiral Robert Moore³⁴

While it has been maintained that Captain John J. Herrick was not party to Oplan operations, he was at least knowledgeable about the kinds of ships utilized by the operations, the existence of the operations and the patrols.³⁵ This is supported by the immediate identification Herrick gave of the sighted PT's on 31 July 1964 during the refueling with the *Ashtabula*.

The connection between the Oplan 34A operations and the Desoto Patrol programs was more than the description given by Secretary McNamara during the 1968 Senate hearings. He stated, "Our ships had absolutely no knowledge of it, were not connected with it; in no sense of the word can be considered to have backstopped the effort."³⁶ As is evident by the command lists, knowledge of the two operations was held by those persons directly responsible for the Desoto patrol. Further support for the connection between at least some level of the Desoto Patrol command and the Oplan operations is found in the directive to the Oplan operations:

MAROPS forces were not normally supported by US ships or aircraft in the Gulf of Tonkin. However, when MAROPS forces were engaged by NVN aircraft or superior NVN surface forces, they were authorized to contact

US ships and/or aircraft for assistance. Additionally, certain high risk missions proceeding above 19°-30'N required the support of prescheduled US air support. Such support was authorized provided it was included in the request for mission approval and was coordinated with PACFLT forces...MAROPS...could also contact US surface forces...when out of sight of land.³⁷

Clearly, these two operations were part of the overall push to the north and the increase in United States activity in Vietnam.

Desoto patrols and Oplan operations were a large part of the United States presence in the Gulf in 1964. Another presence in the Gulf during this period was a unit code named the Beach Jumpers. Begun in the later years of World War II, the Beach Jumpers were a seaborne cover and deception unit. Originally the actor, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., developed the unit with great influence from the Combined Operations unit of England.³⁸ The main function of the Beach Jumpers was to deceive the enemy about the capabilities, forces, and plans of United States naval and landing operations. By the early 1960s the unit also participated in radio and radar cover operations. Beach Jumper unit 1 was assigned to all WESTPAC (Western Pacific) operations, which included those operations in the Gulf of Tonkin.³⁹

While assigned to train crew members of the *USS Kitty Hawk*, the unit also trained crew members assigned to other

ships in the gulf.⁴⁰ Participating "in all major WESTPAC operations,"⁴¹ the unit "was embarked in five amphibious ships to support contingency operations in Southeast Asia."⁴² The unit received the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal for its part in the operations off of Vietnam in August through September 1964.⁴³ In order for the unit to have participated in operations in the Gulf on 5 August 1964 it had to be in the Gulf prior to that date. According to available naval sources those ships on duty in the Tonkin Gulf during the first week in August had been in the Gulf for some time. The only ship that arrived after 2 August was the *USS Constellation*. She arrived sometime on 3 August 1964.⁴⁴ Because the full command history for the Beach Jumpers Unit 1 for 1964 remains classified and or unavailable, it is difficult to reveal the exact nature and participation of the unit during the Tonkin Gulf incidents. However, understanding the unit's capabilities, it is easy to assume that its activities would have greatly benefited the operations in the Gulf during the period.

The unit's ability to cover landing operations would have helped the South Vietnamese raiders on 31 July and 3 August. These raiders were directed to shell the islands after their attempts to land commandoes proved unsuccessful.⁴⁵ Masters at interception, the Beach Jumpers would

have also vastly improved the intelligence gathering capabilities of the Desoto patrol. By manipulating their equipment, the Beach Jumpers could jam, intercept, and deceive North Vietnam's radar and radio communications systems. All equipment used by the unit was developed by the unit for these purposes only. Making use of portable Communications Vans, the unit was loaded aboard surface ships. Like the *Maddox's* COMVAN, the Beach Jumpers were the only unit in this time period to utilize such equipment. All attempts to find other units using this equipment proved fruitless.

As Secretary McNamara stated during the Senate hearings on the Tonkin Gulf incident, "they turn on certain kinds of equipment on board the *Maddox* which, in turn, leads the ... North Vietnamese to turn on the radars so that we can measure the radar frequencies."⁴⁶ The equipment needed for these types of operations was not standard destroyer devices. This equipment was specialized and very closely resembled Beach Jumper equipment. Specialized radio and radar equipment like this was loaded on the *Maddox* in the COMVAN.⁴⁷ This information directly associates the Beach Jumper unit with the Desoto Patrol of August 1964. The Beach Jumpers were either aboard the *Maddox* or somewhere very close to the ship during the patrol. Whether or not

the unit was aboard a ship sailing in the Gulf during the covered period is in reality a moot point. One of the most important aspects of the Beach Jumpers activities was their ability to train other units to use and maintain Beach Jumper equipment.

Generally, it is not unusual for electronic equipment information to remain classified. The nature of the operations and equipment makes general knowledge a problem of National Security. Yet, from available information, a good picture of the Desoto Patrol operations and the equipment used can be described. The *Maddox* was sent into the Gulf to gather intelligence information on the North Vietnamese. She was on a SIGINT (Signal intelligence) patrol, "Surface warships [were] are used extensively for SIGINT activity. The United States destroyers TURNER JOY (DD 951) and MADDOX (DD 731) were on the Desoto SIGINT patrols off the North Vietnamese coast in August 1964."⁴⁸

SIGINT is the overall designation given to electronic gathering programs:

(SIGINT) includes the collection of intelligence information for Navy and national requirements, including all Communications Intelligence (COMINT), Electronic Intelligence (ELINT), Acoustic Intelligence (ACINT), and telemetry intelligence.⁴⁹

In order to gather the intelligence information, the United States Navy would send special equipment to regular

operations and assign special duties, thus creating an extra capability for a normally unequipped military unit. Prior to 1965 "destroyers were deemed the appropriate ESM [Electronic Warfare Support Measures] platforms.⁵⁰

Utilizing the extra equipment loaded on board the *Maddox*, the United States Navy, in conjunction with the NSA (National Security Agency), was able to "detect, intercept, locate, record, and analyze enemy electromagnetic radiations . . . ESM provides the information required to conduct electronic countermeasures and counter-countermeasures for immediate threat recognition."⁵¹ Simply stated, with the equipment on board the *Maddox* the United States was able to gather information on North Vietnamese radar, radio, and all other military capabilities.

Yet other equipment brought on board the *Desoto* ship allowed the ship to participate in ECM (Electronic Countermeasures) activities. These activities included "detect threats to friendly forces and . . . inhibit or degrade the effectiveness of enemy weapons and sensors."⁵² Equipment of this nature is referred to as jamming or cover and deception equipment. One such piece of equipment loaded on board the *Maddox* was the AN/SLA-2.⁵³ The description of this piece of equipment is limited by classification, but the SL designation does include S=surface ship installation

and L=countermeasures type of equipment.⁵⁴

By 1960, Beach Jumper unit 1 had devised and developed many pieces of ECM equipment. Working closely with 7th Fleet ships and operations, which were those units deployed on Yankee Station, the Beach Jumpers introduced the equipment utilized in cover and deception and jamming operations. The AN/ULQ-5/6, loaded aboard destroyers of the 7th Fleet, was responsible for ECM activities.⁵⁵ The AN/ULQ-6 equipment was an U=multi-platform, L=counter-measure, Q=multiple or special purpose deception repeater.⁵⁶ "These systems, when triggered by search radars in the S and X band, will give a small ship the appearance of a carrier."⁵⁷

The above described equipment was extra equipment loaded on board the *Maddox*. Utilizing the COMVAN (Communications Van), the Beach Jumpers could transport their equipment wherever needed. The ownership or control of the COMVAN is difficult to ascertain, but after a thorough review of other naval units, no information was found that indicated other units utilized this piece of equipment. Also, NAVSECGRU (Naval Security Group) personnel operated the van aboard the *Maddox*.⁵⁸ NAVSECGRU and the Beach Jumpers participated in "joint efforts" by the mid 1950 era.⁵⁹ These personal were TDY (Temporary Duty) men

from NAVSECGRU San Miguel, Philippines, where the Beach Jumpers unit 1 base was located.⁶⁰

Knowing of the special operations of the Beach Jumpers, their mobility and capabilities, and the scenario of the Tonkin Gulf Incidents, it is easy to conclude that the *Maddox* was not on "routine patrol" as stated by Secretary McNamara in 1964. This unit's modes operandum directly correlates to the activities in the Gulf. It is difficult to pinpoint the exact nature of the activities of the unit, but the overall events in the Gulf during this period, suggest that the unit played a role in the Desoto operations and the subsequent incidents. One simple explanation is that the United States Navy had the capabilities to practice cover and deception operations during this period. The close relationship between those at Oplan command and control and Desoto command and control would support the apparent co-existence of these two operations. Given the activities of all participants in the Gulf, it is likely that each supported and helped the other units also in the Gulf who were operating under the same command structure.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISPUTING THE RECORD

In 1964 and 1968 Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara stated the "facts" detailing the Tonkin Gulf incidents to the Joint Foreign Relations Committee of the United States Senate. During the 1964 hearings, which led to the passing of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, McNamara recounted the events of the Tonkin Gulf incidents to the full Foreign Relations Committee. With little delay, and less debate, the committee passed the resolution quickly. McNamara related the facts in such a manner that no one could really comprehend the serious nature of those fateful August days.

When Secretary McNamara took control of the Defense Department, under President John F. Kennedy, he assumed responsibility for every aspect of the Department. McNamara consolidated the power of the Department of Defense and held the top seat of control over every branch of the armed forces of the United States. As McNamara increased his power and control, he fit the Defense Department routine into his *Planning, Programming, and Budget Services*; McNamara utilized these systems to gain and hold control and power over government offices.¹ McNamara did not simply become Secretary of Defense, "McNamara was indeed taking

over" every aspect of Defense Department act-
McNamara also carried his expansion of power to
outside of the Defense Department. In early 1964 M
wanted all military policy studies to be conducted by
Department of Defense rather than the National Security
Council.³ His gathering of control leaves McNamara
responsible for answers he gave during the Senate Hearings.
The history of his command of the Department of Defense, and
his tight rein of control, makes him accountable for the
statements he made in 1964 and 1968. As will be reviewed,
many of McNamara's statements are at worst misleading, at
best inaccurate.

In 1968, when asked if South Vietnam's President
General Nguyễn Khánh pressured the United States to "take
the war north", McNamara responded "I don't believe he
did."⁴ While the impression was that the South Vietnamese
did not pressure America, McNamara was not forthright in his
response. As noted earlier, prior to August 1964 the United
States was preparing to push the war north. While not
making an untrue statement, McNamara's answer falls far
short of an honest response to matters he was very familiar
with. At the Honolulu Conference of early 1964, McNamara
took an active role in plans that called for increased
pressure against North Vietnam.⁵
Much of the 1968 Senate hearings dealt with information

about the Oplan 34A operations against North Vietnam. When asked to describe United States involvement in the Oplan 34 operations McNamara responded that "the United States was informed of the operations . . . The operations, however, were under the command of the South Vietnamese and were carried out by the South Vietnamese."⁶ As documented in the MACSOG study, this was again untrue. The United States military commanded and controlled these operations and taking control of all military activities, as noted above, McNamara knew exactly what the involvement of the United States was in the Oplan program. McNamara had, one day prior to the 4 August incident, even received a message detailing the Oplan 34A patrol for 3-4 August 1964. This message was sent directly to McNamara, and not simply to the OSD (Office of the Secretary of Defense).⁷ It is ironic that McNamara wanted full control over all Defense Department operations and programs and then denied knowledge of one of the most extensive operations conducted by the United States in Vietnam prior to direct ground troop involvement.

To make matters worse McNamara continued misleading the Senate when he further stated that the United States was "informed of the nature of the operations."⁸ Simply to be "informed" falls far short of the Department of Defense

Order which "directed the transfer of responsibility of the NVN covert operations to COMUSMACV."⁹ This action of January 1964 was comparable with the chain of command over the Oplan operations described earlier. McNamara, through the Defense Department, held the power of planning and control over most aspects of the covert operations. As noted above, each new operation was submitted to the Defense Department.

Next, asked whether the United States directed the "push to the North" policy, McNamara responded that there were "no such recommendations"¹⁰ to take the war north made by the Defense Department. This statement is an outright misrepresentation of fact in that the Defense Department was involved in the Honolulu strategy conference of early summer 1964, where the push to the north strategy was debated and subsequently given to an ICC member to relay to Hanoi.¹¹

As the Senate hearings of 1968 wore on, McNamara continued answering questions, according to the record of the hearings, to the best of his ability. That ability was less than truthful for what appears to be a wealth of knowledge. Not only were the statements of Secretary McNamara less than complete, but then Joint Chief of Staff General Wheeler's inability to explain what military logistical changes took place prior to the incidents is unexplainable. Asked whether military units were moved into

Thailand and Vietnam prior to the incidents, General Wheeler responded that no such information had been found.¹² Yet ground force stocks had been increased in Thailand by this time as well as the movement of air units to Thailand and Da Nang.¹³

Reviewing McNamara's answers to Senate questions reveals a consistent pattern of misrepresentation. Utilizing the information in other sources, particularly the Defense Department's own study of 1971, it is clear that most of McNamara's statements are inaccurate. Many of McNamara's answers are bewildering, considering this man demanded all of the power and control over the Department that ran the war. For McNamara to respond to any question with less than full, honest detail, is inconceivable.

Getting to the heart of the hearings, when asked about the patrol of the *Maddox* McNamara's responses remain the same as the above responses. Asked what kind of mission, spy or otherwise, the *Maddox* had undertaken, McNamara responded that it was a routine patrol. Routine patrol would have been an honest response had the Senate and McNamara considered each other's definition of routine. Unfortunately, each understood routine to mean something very different. Routine, to McNamara, meant those missions carried on by the United States Navy throughout the world.

It was routine in the sense that these missions were usual and frequent.

To the Chairman of the Senate Hearings routine held a very different meaning. William Fulbright's connotation of routine meant the type of mission and not the frequency of the missions as McNamara was responding to. This difference in interpretation had far reaching significance in the course of government actions. There remains one very important question whose answer means little today. Had Chairman Fulbright understood, and miraculously received from McNamara the response that yes the *Maddox* was a spy ship, would the Senate have passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution? That it makes little difference today is based on the fact that the war is over, fifty-eight thousand Americans died, and South Vietnam is now a communist state. Also, the United States was bound to uphold the fight against communism in Southeast Asia and as such would have entered into a war in Vietnam or elsewhere in the area regardless of which incident led to a resolution.

The Senate hearings of 1968 continued, as did the responses made by McNamara to key questions. McNamara repeatedly was less than forthright in his responses. One of the most important problems discussed at the hearings was the details of how much the United States Navy knew about

the Oplan operations. McNamara held firm that there was no relationship between Oplan and Desoto programs. As noted in Chapter Three, this was not true. Trying to salvage credibility, McNamara several times during questioning on this topic, departed from earlier statements of fact:

1964 Hearings-

Our Navy played absolutely no part in, was not associated with, was not aware of, any South Vietnamese action, if there were any . . . It [Maddox] was not informed of, was not aware of, had no knowledge of, and so far as I know today has no knowledge of any South Vietnamese actions in connection with the two islands¹⁴

1968 Hearings-

The *Maddox* did know what 34A was, no question about that. But *Maddox* was not associated with 34A, was not playing a part of it, was not planning to draw forces away from it¹⁵

However much he tried to maintain control over his statements, McNamara repeatedly diverged from earlier statements. His claim that the *Maddox* knew nothing about the South Vietnamese operations is easily disputed.

As detailed in Chapter One, when Captain Herrick observed the Oplan vessel returning to Da Nang he did not follow normal procedures of sending an IFF check. In not observing this normal action, it can be assumed Herrick knew what kinds of ships he was observing and where they were coming from. Also, in comparison to his observations of enemy ships on the day of the first attack, Herrick

instinctively activated a surface search on the ships.¹⁶ Herrick's statements that the North Vietnamese confused his Desoto Patrol ship with the Oplan vessels gives great support to the assumption that the *Maddox* knew about the operations, knew the kinds of ships used in the operations, and had full knowledge of the operations and actions of the 34A plans. Herrick's words, during the incidents, came back to haunt McNamara. McNamara scrambled to overcome the debilitating facts of Herrick's clear and precise knowledge:

Evaluation of info from various sources indicates that the DRV (Democratic Republic of Vietnam) considers patrol directly involved with 34-A operations. DRV considers US ships present as enemies because of these operations and have already indicated readiness to treat us in that category.¹⁷

McNamara's argument concerning Herrick's knowledge is weak:

First, we can find no basis for the commander making this statement, that the DRV considered the Desoto patrol directly involved in 34-A operations . . . Herrick himself now states that he can recall no basis for coming to that conclusions.¹⁸

It is easy for McNamara to wish that Herrick had never made the statement, yet it is difficult to argue that the statement had no basis years later. That the Senate let this discrepancy pass without further inquiry remains one of the great mysteries of the hearings.

The list of discrepancies, and misleading statements, grows longer with each response made by McNamara. Almost

every statement he made can be refuted by evidence and information that becomes declassified each year. Yet, although it is important to disprove what McNamara stated; it is more important to find the truth. McNamara's misrepresentations are only important in that they led to the passing of the resolution that allowed America to legally wage war in Southeast Asia.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

More than thirty years after the fact, questions raised concerning the Tonkin Gulf incidents have been difficult to answer. However, as more documents become declassified the answers also become available. As this study shows, some of the questions focus more on the incidents themselves and while sidestepping the results of the incidents. The Tonkin Gulf incidents occurred far from American soil, yet America responded with the passing of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. These matters are extremely important even today because what happened in Vietnam is still affecting what actions the United States takes in world affairs in 1997. Vietnam, America's first military defeat, permeates foreign and domestic policy today. The indelible mark this war has left on the United States can only be removed when a careful, honest account of the Tonkin Gulf incidents and subsequent Resolution is recorded.

The presented chronology, although not including every detail, is as complete as needed to understand the nature of events in the Tonkin Gulf. United States ships, attacked by North Vietnam on 2 August, responded with the will to stand up against communist aggression. Utilizing all available means, the United States endeavored to show Ho Chi Minh that one attack would not win the fight for South Vietnam.

Whether in the form of the Oplan 34A raids, or the Desoto Patrols, the United States continued its fight.

While North Vietnam declared that the United States acted provocatively prior to 2 August, the attack on American warships was still unexpected. Government officials, in Washington, scrambled for a response. Taking evasive actions, the *Maddox* pulled away from the coast of North Vietnam for a short period. However, soon after she returned with the *Turner Joy*. Showing the flag, and demonstrating that one raid would not scare the United States, the ships continued their patrol.

The type of patrol these ships were participating in was vital to United States interests in the area. South Vietnam, as determined in the SEATO Agreement, had to be protected from the communist wave heading south from Hanoi. It was incumbent on America to take advantage of every means possible to protect South Vietnam and other allied countries. The intelligence gathering patrol of the *Maddox* allowed America to gain knowledge that would help protect the south. Comparably, North Vietnam took part in infiltration into the south. The network of intelligence, set up by the north, was an elaborate plan that included many thousands who lived in the south but sent information to the north. The Desoto Patrols, and the Oplan 34A

operations, in truth, paled in comparison to the intelligence network of the north.

Although there is no declassified information that can put the Beach Jumper's in the Gulf at the time of the incidents, the introduced evidence clearly indicates that the activities of this unit were necessary. That the United States Navy had the capabilities this unit demonstrated makes it highly likely that they would have been used. Also, it has been proven that the equipment this unit developed for deception and cover, was in fact present at the time of the attacks. It is unlikely that the United States Navy would not make use of the Beach Jumpers, and or their equipment.

Many believed that the fight to stop the spread of communism demanded that the United States participate in some activity that would stem the tide of aggression. That fight erupted on 2 August 1964. While some reject the Desoto and Oplan operations as provocative, the stage had already been set for an encounter between America and North Vietnam. The United States ships, gathering intelligence, and the smaller vessels that carried South Vietnamese north to attack, took part in activities that equaled actions taken by North Vietnam.

By 4 August 1964, the United States could not have reacted any differently. The course was set for a showdown.

That showdown came when the *Maddox* reported she was under attack late in the evening of 4 August. Whether or not there actually was a second attack is inconsequential. The United States was ready to go to war to protect South Vietnam. If this attack had not played out some other event probably would have. America needed the legal grounds to wage war. The greatest miscalculation made was using this questionable attack to gain that legal foothold. Government leaders, in their zeal to pass the Resolution, overlooked important facts that would lead to questions about the attack.

As the chronology indicates, military actions taken in Vietnam were effective. Even as early as 1964, prior to the passing of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, America was quite capable of destroying North Vietnam. Not until Washington officials began to lead the war effort did things go bad. And that mishandling occurred quickly. Robert McNamara, by presenting incorrect information, opened the gates of protest against the war. He alone, stands out as the most questionable character in the scenario of events that led to the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. By basing all United States involvement on the 4 August incidents, McNamara realized soon after that he would have to misrepresent the facts in order to protect his decisions. It was not the chronology

of events in the Tonkin Gulf that became important. Rather, it was the misleading testimony that caused the uproar. The incidents spoke for themselves. United States ships had been attacked, without question at least on 2 August. Yet from 2 August on, the decisions made by McNamara plagued the entire war effort.

With hindsight it is easy to say that the United States eventually would have gone to war. Another event would have appeared that could have been the basis for the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. All McNamara needed to do was sit tight and wait. But he did not do this. He manipulated events to fit his purpose. Then he went to the Senate, with his misrepresentations and demanded action. As presented, the chronology provides enough information to prove that all of the disinformation presented by McNamara was unnecessary. There was no need to manipulate the facts. American ships, for whatever reason, felt the small but important military power of North Vietnam.

As the evidence suggests, the attacks of 2 and 4 August 1964 appear important. Yet, it is how McNamara used those events that is really important; the forgoing evidence simply illustrates a minor sea skirmish. The Tonkin Gulf incidents were not by any stretch of the word a Pearl Harbor attack. They were not comparable to the events in Cuban waters that almost led to World War III. These attacks

simply represent two nations playing a game of cat and mouse. Each country tried to incite a reaction from the opposing party. And for this McNamara felt it necessary to persuade congress to pass a resolution that eventually led to a war he then did not want to fight to win. All of his programs, number crunching, audits, and plans, could not support his incorrect assumption that North Vietnam could be beaten in a few weeks. He left office, giving up on the war that he thought he could win in a short period of time.

Many believe that the Vietnam War had to be fought. McNamara may have been correct in assuming that the United States had to take a stand. Yet once he realized that his plans did not win wars, he cut his losses and left. McNamara used the Tonkin Gulf incidents, the Tonkin Gulf Resolution, and three million Americans.

APPENDIX I

Southeast Asia Collective Defense

By the President of the United States of America

A PROCLAMATION

Whereas the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty and a Protocol relating thereto were signed at Manila on September 8, 1954 by the respective Plenipotentiaries of the United States of America, Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Republic of the Philippines, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland;

Whereas the texts of the said Treaty and the said Protocol, in the English language, are word for word as follows:

The Parties to this Treaty,
Recognizing the sovereign equality of all the Parties,
Reiterating their faith in the purposes and principles set forth in the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments,

Reaffirming that, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, they uphold the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and declaring that they will earnestly strive by every peaceful means to promote self-government and to secure the independence of all countries whose peoples desire it and are able to undertake its responsibilities,

Desiring to strengthen the fabric of peace and freedom and to uphold the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, and to promote the economic well-being and development of all peoples in the treaty area,

Intending to declare publicly and formally their sense of unity, so that any potential aggressor will appreciate that the Parties stand together in the area, and

Desiring further to coordinate their efforts for collective defense for the preservation of peace and security,

Therefore agree as follows:

Article I

The Parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international disputes in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are

not endangered, and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

Article II

In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack and to prevent and counter subversive activities directed from without against their territorial integrity and political stability.

Article III

The Parties undertake to strengthen their free institutions and to cooperate with one another in the further development of economic measures, including technical assistance, designed both to promote economic progress and social well-being and to further the individual and collective efforts of governments toward these ends.

Article IV

1. Each Party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty area against any of the Parties or against any State or territory which the Parties by unanimous agreement may thereafter designate, would endanger its own peace and safety, and agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes. Measures taken under this paragraph shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations.

2. If, in the opinion of any of the Parties, the inviolability or the integrity of the territory or the sovereignty or political independence of any Party in the treaty area or of any other State or territory to which the provisions of paragraph 1 of this Article from time to time apply is threatened in any way other than by armed attack or is affected or threatened by any fact or situation which might endanger the peace of the area, the Parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on the measures which should be taken for the common defense.

3. It is understood that no action on the territory of any State designated by unanimous agreement under paragraph 1 of this Article or on any territory so designated shall be taken except at the invitation or with the consent of the government concerned.

Article V

The Parties hereby establish a Council, on which each of them shall be represented, to consider matters conceding the implementation of this Treaty. The Council shall provide for consultation with regard to military and any other planning as the situation obtaining in the treaty area may from time to time require. The Council shall be so organized as to be able to meet at any time.

Article VI

This Treaty does not affect and shall not be interpreted as affecting in any way the rights and obligations of any of the Parties under the Charter of the United Nations or the responsibility of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security. Each Party declares that none of the international engagements now in force between it and any other of the Parties or any third party is in conflict with the provisions of this Treaty, and undertakes not to enter into any international engagement in conflict with this Treaty.

Article VII

Any other State in a position to further the objectives of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the area may, by unanimous agreement of the Parties, be invited to accede to this Treaty. Any State so invited may become a Party to the Treaty by depositing its instrument of accession with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. The Government of the Republic of the Philippines shall inform each of the Parties of the deposit of each such instrument of accession.

Article VIII

As used in this Treaty, the "treaty area" is the general area of Southeast Asia, including also the entire territories of the Asian Parties, and the general area of the Southwest Pacific not including the Pacific area north of 21 degrees 30 minutes north latitude. The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, amend this Article to include within the treaty area the territory of any State acceding to this Treaty in accordance with Article VII or otherwise to change the treaty area.

1. This Treaty shall be deposited in the archives of the Government of the Republic of the Philippines. Duly certified copies thereof shall be transmitted by that government to the other signatories.

2. The Treaty shall be ratified and its provisions carried out by the Parties in accordance with their respective constitutional processes. The instruments of ratification shall be deposited as soon as possible with the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, which shall notify all of the other signatories of such deposits.

3. The Treaty shall enter into force between the States which have ratified it as soon as the instruments of ratification of a majority of the signatories shall have been deposited, and shall come into effect with respect to each other State on the date of the deposit of its instruments of ratification.

Article X

This Treaty shall remain in force undefinedly, but any Party may cease to be a Party one year after its notice of denunciation has been given to the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, which shall inform the Governments of the other Parties of the deposit of each notice of denunciation.

Article XI

The English text of this Treaty is binding on the Parties, but when the Parties have agreed to the French text thereof and have so notified the Government of the Republic of the Philippines, the French text shall be equally authentic and binding on the Parties.

UNDERSTANDING OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

The United States of America in executing the present Treaty does so with the understanding that its recognition of the effect of aggression and armed attack and its agreement with reference thereof in Article IV, paragraph 1, apply only to communist aggression but affirms that in the event of other aggression or armed attack it will consult under the provisions of Article IV, paragraph 2.

In witness whereof, the undersigned Plenipotentiaries have signed this Treaty.

Done at Manila, this eight day of September, 1954.

FOR AUSTRALIA:

R. G Casey.

FOR FRANCE:

R. G Casey.
FOR FRANCE:
C. La Chambre
FOR NEW ZEALAND:
Clifton Webb
FOR PAKISTAN: Signed for transmission to my Governemnt for
its consideration and action in accordance
with the Constitution of Pakistan.
Zafrulla Khan
FOR THE REPUBLIC OF THE PHILIPPINES:
Carlos P. Garcia
Francisco A. Delgado.
Tomas L. Cabili
Lorenzo M. Tanada
Cornelio T. Vilareal
FOR THE KINGDOM OF THAILAND:
Wan Waithayakon
Krommun Naradhip Bongsprabandh
FOR THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN
IRELAND:
Reading
FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:
John Foster Dulles
H. Alexander Smith
Michael J. Mansfield

Protocol to the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty

Designation of States and Territory as to which provisions
of Article IV and Article III are to be applicable

The Parties to the Southeast Asia Collective Defense
Treaty unanimously designate for the purposes of Article IV
of the Treaty the States of Cambodia and Laos and the free
territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam.

The Parties further agree that the above mentioned
states and territory shall be eligible in respect of the
economic measures contemplated by Article III.

This Protocol shall enter into force simultaneously
with the coming into force of the Treaty.

In witness whereof, the undersigned Plenipotentiaries
have signed this Protocol to the Southeast Asia Collective
Defense Treaty.

Done at Manila, this eight day of September, 1954.

Source: US Foreign Realties

APPENDIX II

The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution

Whereas naval units of the Communist regime in Vietnam, in violation of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law, have deliberately and repeatedly attacked United States naval vessels lawfully present in international waters, and have thereby created a serious threat to international peace; and

Whereas those attacks are part of a deliberate and systematic campaign of aggression that the Communist regime in North Vietnam has been waging against its neighbors and the nations joined with them in the collective defense of their freedom; and

Whereas the United States is assisting the peoples of Southeast Asia to protect their freedom and has no territorial, military or political ambitions in that area, but desires only that these peoples should be left in peace to work out their own destinies in their own way: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Congress approves and supports the determination of the President, as Commander in Chief, to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.

Sec. 2. The United States regards as vital to its national interest and to world peace the maintenance of international peace and security in southeast Asia. Consonant with the Constitution of the United States and the Charter of the United Nations and in accordance with its obligations under the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, the United States is, therefore, prepared, as the President determines, to take all necessary steps, including the use of armed force, to assist any member [Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan] or protocol state [South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia] of the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty requesting assistance in defense of its freedom.

Sec. 3. This resolution shall expire when the President shall determine that the peace and security of the area is reasonably assured by international conditions created by action of the United Nations or otherwise, except that it may be terminated earlier by concurrent resolution of the Congress.

Source: 1964 Congressional Quarterly

ENDNOTES

Introduction

¹John Galloway, *The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press: Rutherford, USA, 1970), Appendix 9.

²The United States did not begin sending ground troops into Vietnam until March of 1965 when two battalions of Marines landed at Da Nang. This first step in escalation was followed by massive increases of troops which lasted until 1968. By 1968 the troop levels began to decrease as a result of the concept of Vietnamization, which called for less United States involvement and more South Vietnamese involvement. By the end of United States involvement there had been 2.7 million service men in Vietnam, of those more than 450,000 were combat troops. The remaining troops served in support and logistics positions.

³While events prior to August 1964 play a part in this particular time period, limited attention will be given to them due to time and space constraints. For more in-depth study of the Vietnam Conflict one can turn to the voluminous works addressing the war. Early study includes Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy 1941-1966* (New York:Houghton Mifflun Company, 1966.) Part of the so called revisionist school of thought dealing with the war, Guenter Lewy provides a well rounded general overview in his work *America in Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.) Gabriel Kolko introduces the socialist view of the war in his work, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York: The New Press, 1985.) Specific information pertaining to the Tonkin Gulf incidents is limited, only three volumes have been written which deal with the events of the Tonkin Gulf incidents. Joseph C. Goulden's *Truth is the First Casualty: The Gulf of Tonkin Affair-Illusion and Reality* (New York: Rand McNally & Company, 1969) offers early interpretation of the events. Utilizing unknown informants, much of the book lacks the sources necessary to support the presented information. Yet Goulden's work is an excellent attempt at piecing together the scenario of events. John Galloway wrote *The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1970) and presents a more supported outline of the events surrounding the Tonkin Gulf incidents. Incorporating first hand accounts, Galloway tells the story

of the incidents in clear fashion. His work is made complete by the inclusion of many of the documents, speeches, and hearings detailing the incidents. The last work detailing the incidents is Eugene G. Windchy's *Tonkin Gulf* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971.) While similar to the two previous works detailing the incidents, Windchy offers personal narratives about the key players to enhance the public's understanding of the events. The background of the players and what happened to them after the incidents allows readers to better understand the circumstances surrounding those involved in such important events in our history.

⁴Richard Witkin, "Craft Hits Target Area: 4,000 Pictures Sent Back," *New York Times*, 1 August 1964, p. 1. The 4000 pictures were taken within a 17 minute time frame before Ranger 7 disintegrated near the Sea of Clouds.

⁵*New York Times*, 1 August 1964, p. 9.

⁶*Ibid.*, 13.

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸SEATO Agreement, see appendix 1.

⁹*Ibid.*, Other major powers signing the SEATO Agreement included France, England, and Australia.

¹⁰Ho Chi Minh, formerly known as Nguyen Ai-Quoc, proclaimed independence for Vietnam and became president of the country on 2 September 1945. Calling his country the Democratic Republic of Viet-Nam, Ho presided over the communist country until his death in 1970. A leader beloved by his people, Ho was also responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands during communist purges in the North. Affectionately referred to as Uncle Ho by his followers, Ho Chi Minh was able to spread Vietnamese nationalism across his country of North Vietnam and also into the culture of South Vietnam.

¹¹The Tonkin Gulf has other names in the Vietnamese language, Vinh Bac Viet is from the map created by the Defense Mapping Agency. Revised April 1989, Series TPC, Sheet J-11D, Edition 4. Gulf of Bac Bo is from the map created by the Cartographic Mapping Institute, Dong Da-Hanoi-Vietnam, 1994-1996, #499.

¹²Defense Mapping Agency.

¹⁴Ibid. Hai Nen Dao is a Chinese island which will be important to remember when explaining the patrol route and entrance into the Gulf by US ships.

¹⁵Espenshade, p. 10.

¹⁶Blue and brown water is the designations given to water bodies in Vietnam by the United States Navy. Blue water refers to the ocean waters off the coast of Vietnam. The blue water navy was that part of the United States Navy aboard ocean going ships in the South China Sea. Brown water refers to the rivers and delta areas of South Vietnam. The brown water navy was that part of the United States Navy aboard patrol boats and smaller ships in the rivers and delta areas of South Vietnam.

¹⁷*New York Times*, 3 August 1964, p. 1.

¹⁸Goulden, p. 167. See appendix II for complete resolution.

Chapter One

¹*USS Maddox "Narrative"*, p. 1 enclosure 1 of 13 of After Action Report, DD731/DMJ:bt-3000 Ser:002 24 August 1964. Hereafter cited as "Narrative." Began in 1962, the Desoto Patrol program sent United States Naval ships to waters off communist countries to collect intelligence information about the military and defense situation present in those countries.

²Ibid., p. 1-5, Espenshade, p. 208.

³*Maddox "Deck Log"* July 1964.

⁴This location was determined by utilizing the information on page 4 of the "Narrative". The position of the ship was given in accordance with Typhoon Helen, located at 25.54°North and 141.36° East. From the point of location of the typhoon a circle was drawn in a radius around that point at 1750 miles out. At the point on that radius that would be the closet point to the Gulf on the *Maddox* course another point was drawn. Measuring that point to Yankee Station

gives the distance from Yankee Station for the *Maddox*. The distance was also multiplied by 1.1 to give the measurement in nautical miles. The location of Typhoon Helen information as obtained from the "Narrative", p. 4, information and calculations was obtained from Espendshade, p. 208.

⁵Joseph C. Goulden, *Truth is the First Casualty: The Gulf of Tonkin Affair-Illusion and Reality*, (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1969) p. 80.

⁶Letter to Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt from Colonel Trinh Nguyen Huan Assistant to General Giap, dated September 12, 1994. Copy of letter given to author by Dr. James Reckner, Texas Tech University.

⁷Edward Marolda, *The United States Navy and the Vietnam Conflict: From Military Assistance to Combat 1959-1965*, (Washington DC: Naval Historical Press, 1986), p. 409.

⁸*Maddox Deck Log*, 29-31 July 1964. *Turner Joy Deck Log*, 29-31 July 1964.

⁹Turner Joy "After Action Report" DD951/AGM/gjr 3100 Ser:004 11 September 1964, enclosure 1, p. I-1.

¹⁰*Maddox* "Visual Contact Log", enclosure 3 p. 7.

¹¹"Narrative", p. 3.

¹²*Maddox* "Schedule of Events", enclosure 13, p. 1-3.

¹³*USS Maddox* "After Action Report", Photographic Summary, enclosure 8, p. 1.

¹⁴Schedule of Events, p. 1.

¹⁵"Narrative", p. 5.

¹⁶*Maddox* "Deck Log" 31 July 1964.

¹⁷All of the information in this list was collected from the sources indicated above in the headings of each new account.

¹⁸Raymond V. B. Blackman, ed., *Janes's Fighting Ships*, (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1965), pgs. 472, 476.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Joint Chiefs *MACSOG Documentation Study-C*, p. C-d-16.

²¹"Visual Contact Log", enclosure 3 of 13, p. 2.

²²*Maddox* "After action Report" enclosure 3, p. 2.

²³Marolda, p. 410.

²⁴Schedule, p. 1-5.

²⁵Deck Logs, 31 July 1964.

²⁶Narrative, p. 5.

²⁷Schedule, p. 2.

²⁸*Turner Joy* "Deck Log", July 1964, 31 July.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Narrative, p. 6.

³³Narrative, p. 8.

³⁴Marolda, p. 411.

³⁵Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967*, Section: Prologue: Actions and Programs Underway, Study Prepared by the Department of Defense, (Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 1971), p. 3.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁷"Narrative", p. 8.

³⁸Marolda, p. 409. This information is important in that Westmoreland had knowledge of the Oplan operations and kept in contact with those in command of the *Maddox*.

³⁹Marolda, p. 408. Although previously thought to have been leased to South Vietnam, the *Nasty* boats remained US property, Interview with Sedgwick Tourison, February 15, 1996. *MACSOG Documentation Study*, D-7, C-d-3-5. The boats were delivered to the US Naval installation at Da Nang where US naval

personal trained South Vietnamese naval forces to undertake missions in North Vietnam.

⁴⁰Marolda, p. 409.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Closed the port refers to the last ship in the port that day.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 410.

⁴⁵Windchy, p. 66-7.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 411.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 412.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 413.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 414.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid., p. 414.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Zumwalt letter.

⁵⁵All of the information contained in the above list is found in Marolda's book, the After Action report of the USS Maddox, the After Action Report of the USS Turner Joy, the Deck Logs of both the Turner Joy and the Maddox, and James Stockdale's book, *In Love and War: The Story of a Family's Ordeal and Sacrifice During the Vietnam War*, (Washington, DC: Naval Institute Press, 1990. Interview by author with James Stockdale, 18 February 1996.

⁵⁶"Deck Log", Samuel N. Moore, *Ticonderoga, Ashtabula*. August 1964.

⁵⁷Ashtabula "Deck Log" August 1964, 2 August 1964.

Chapter Two

¹All information for the chronology was obtained from the deck logs and action reports of the *Maddox* and *Turner Joy*, 4 August 1964.

²Telephone interview with Admiral James Stockdale, 18 February 1996 and the writer.

³Ibid.

⁴Stockdale forwarded a copy of the "Flash" request for evidence, sent to the *Maddox* 8/6/64, to the author 20 February 1996. The request asked for information that supported evidence of an attack. It specifically left out requests for all information. Also, of those agencies listed in the heading of the "Flash", the CIA and NSA are included. The request came from the JCS.

⁵Stockdale interview.

⁶Telephone interview with Jack Bahm 20 August 1996 and the writer.

⁷Telephone interview with Charles DeCourley 20 August 1996 and the writer.

⁸Telephone interview with Gerrill D. Moore 20 August 1996 and the writer.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Telephone conversation with Naval Historical Center, 1996.

Chapter Three

¹This buildup of naval forces in the Tonkin gulf was part of an overall buildup of US forces in Southeast Asia. Other troop and military increases included: ground force supplies in Thailand, new airbase at Da Nang, "Moreover, the base was characterized as part of a network of new airbases and operational facilities being developed in South Vietnam and Thailand" Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations*, p. 1.

²Marolda, p. 376.

³Yankee Station was actually an operations area in the Tonkin Gulf. East of Da Nang, the area was the center command of all United States Naval forces in the Tonkin Gulf during the summer of 1964.

⁴Yankee Station was actually an operations area in the Tonkin Gulf. East of Da Nang, the area was the center command of all United States Naval forces in the Tonkin Gulf during the summer of 1964.

⁵Edward Marolda, *By Sea, Air, and Land: An Illustrated History of the US Navy and the War in Southeast Asia*, (Naval Historical Center: Washington, DC, 1994), p. 387.

⁶*Maddox*, Turner Joy "Deck Log" 1-31 August 1964.

⁷K. Jack Bauer, Stephen S. Roberts, *Register of Ships of the US Navy, 1775-1990* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), p. 199-200.

⁸Marolda, *US Navy*, p. 402.

⁹The *Maddox's* illustrious service with the US Navy ended in 1972 when she was sold to the Taiwanese Navy on 6 July. She was renamed the Po Yang.

¹⁰Norman Polmar, *The Ships and Aircraft of the US Fleet* (Naval Institute Press: Washington, DC., 1984), p. 155.

¹¹Raymond V.B. Blackman, ed., *Jane's Fighting Ships* (Bucks, England: Sampson Low, Marston & Company, LTD, 1967/1968), p. 390.

¹²Polmar, p. 155. Contemplating a transfer to the Naval Reserve Force, the US Navy instead retired the *Turner Joy* on 13 February 1990.

¹³MACSOG, p. C-d-3-4.

¹⁴Interview with Sedgwick Tourison, 15 February 1996.

¹⁵Robert McNamara, *In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam* (Random House: New York, New York, 1995), p. 129. US Senate, *The Gulf of Tonkin, the 1964 Incidents, Part II*, Committee on Foreign Relations, Nineteenth Congress, second session, December 16, 1968. Goulden, p. 220-221.

¹⁶As is evident in the footnote to this information, all references to US personnel limitations were made in 1969, long after the incidents. There is no information to in existence that puts limitations on US personnel prior to 1969. MACSOG, p. C-d-17-22.

¹⁷Interview with Sedgwick Tourison.

¹⁸MACSOG, p. C-d-2.

¹⁹Ibid., p. C-d-5.

²⁰Ibid., p. C-d-21.

²¹Commander Seventh Fleet, *NVN PT Boat Exploitation Team Report (S)*, July 1966, p. IV-A-1.

²²Ibid., p. IV-A-3. Swatows were the North Vietnamese patrol boats supplied by China and Russia. These craft carried no torpedoes but were agile craft with high speed capability.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. IV-C-1.

²⁵Ibid., p. IV-C-3.

²⁶Ibid., p. IV-C-15.

²⁷Marolda, *The History*, p. 394-5.

²⁸Ibid., p. 208, 274, 410, 435, 431-2.

²⁹Ibid., p. 395.

³⁰Department of Defense, *United States-Vietnam Relations: 1945-1967*, House Committee on Armed Services, Ninety-Second Congress, First Session (US Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 1971), p. 1-2.

³¹Ibid., p. 3.

³²MACSOG, p. C-d-35.

³³MACSOG, p. C-d-2, 7.

³⁴Eugene G. Windchy, *Tonkin Gulf* (Doubleday: New York, New York, 1971), p. 127, 243. MACSOG, p. C-d-7.

³⁵Captain Herrick's knowledge of the Oplan operations remains a mystery today. Yet, the circumstances of his life after the incident offers some interesting details. "The careers of both Herrick and Ogier were shelved . . . Since 1964 neither officer has enjoyed the command of another ship or promotion in rank." Windchy, p. 257. Herrick retired in 1970.

³⁶United States Senate, *The Gulf of Tonkin, The 1964 Incident*, Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, Nineteenth Congress, February 1968 (Government Printing Office: Washington, DC), p. 14.

³⁷MACSOG, p. C-d-17.

³⁸John Dwyer, *Seaborn Deception: The History of the US Navy Beach Jumpers* (Praeger: New York, 1992), p. 3.

³⁹US Navy, *Beach Jumper Unit One Command History, 1962*, 003:bn, 5750 Ser 1- 0018, Commander Amphibious Force, United States Pacific Fleet, p. 1.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 2.

⁴¹US Navy, *Beach Jumper Unit One Command History, 1962*, 03:mr, 5213, Ser:08, 16 Jan 1963, Beach Jumper Unit One, US Naval Amphibious Base, enclosure 1.

⁴²WESTPAC Detachment, Naval Beach Group One, Command History Annual Supplement, 1 Jan 1964-31 Dec 1964, p. 3.

⁴³Ibid., p. 1.

⁴⁴Department of Defense, p. 4.

⁴⁵Marolda, *US Navy in Vietnam*, p. 409.

⁴⁶Goulden, p. 124.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 126.

⁴⁸Polmar, p. 473.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 472-3.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 473.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 470-1.

⁵²Ibid., p. 473.

⁵³Maddox, "After Action Report", p. 3.

⁵⁴Polmar, p. 470.

⁵⁵Beach Jumper Command History, 1960, 1961, 1960 p. 2, 1961, 03/gr 5213, p. 1.

⁵⁶Polmar, pgs. 470, 474.

⁵⁷Beach Jumper Command History, 1961, p. 1.

⁵⁸Maddox "After Action Report", p. 2.

⁵⁹Dwyer, p. 98.

⁶⁰Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, *The Gulf of Tonkin, the 1964 Incidents Part II*, Ninetieth Congress-Second Session (Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 1968), p. 7.

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¹Thomas C. Hone, *Power and Change: The Administrative History of the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations 1946-1986* (Naval Historical Center: Washington, DC, 1989), p. 57.

²Ibid., p. 60.

³Bromley K. Smith, *Organizational History of the National Security Council during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations* (National Security Council: Washington, DC, 1987), p. 37.

⁴Galloway, p. 267.

⁵United States Vietnam Relations, p. 1-3.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Message 040955Z", Form Number JCS 1 Dec 63 58.

⁸Ibid., p. 268.

⁹MACSOG, p. C-d-2.

⁹MACSOG, p. C-d-2.

¹⁰Galloway, p. 270.

¹¹United States Vietnam Relations, p. 2.

¹²Galloway,, p. 272-73.

¹³Department of Defense, p. I.

¹⁴Galloway, p. 282.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 284.

¹⁶"Surface Search Radar Sheet", Maddox 2 August 1964, p. 3.

¹⁷Ship Message, 040140Z from CTG 72.1.

¹⁸Galloway, p. 387.

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