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P.L. 86-36

TOP SECRET

MATERIAL

Interview with Mr Gen Gordon A. BlakeUSAF Retired

with Wiliam Gerhard and Jeanne Renee Jones, [redacted]

of the Cryptologic Working GroupHQS National Security Agency, 9AF55

June 5 1972

The classification of this interview is TS Choforn

(laughter) (chatter)

Tommy OK Gentlemen you're on

Mr. G. We began in 1967 -- nobody really remembers the time. I have trouble with chronology too.

I happen to remember 197 because this is when I got tangled up in this project—when the peace talks had begun and everybody expected the war to end at the end of 1967.

What we have done -- weve put out a few books We have been collecting Lord knows how much documentation with a room filled with documents about the size of . . . . . .

GB: must be massiveand . . .

Mr. G: And our guidance is simply to take SEA and cryptology and come up with something

We recognized very early on, you know, the GTK incident s were one of our implortant subjects.

Renee has been working on it about three years - gathering documents on the subject and drafting premliminary drafts.

She has I think perhaps the best documentation that exists on the subject and we're beginning now to sound out interviews with a few of the people that had a part of the action .....weve got Dr. Tordello on tap for later on.

We're goning to depend on him we hope for some insight into the congressionalrelations. Hes the only one who has tje continuity. The documentation, the work that we're doing really wont be complete unless we at least touch base with you and we're hoping that we can trigger your memory. There have been a number of books on the open market on the subject -- this is why - do we have them all here renee? Windcy, the Presidents war we have some congressional record gpo prints of the senate foreign relations committee sessions ~~of pm tje sibject~~

even brought the pentagon paters along -- we have one of the original 15 sets of the Pentagon Paters which we stole out of the pentagon and that too touches or covers these events.

Now were going to try to set the stage for you if we can and renee if you want to start off by taking about the -- - some of these open books -- if you want to describe for general blake -- first of all the there are al l kinds of inaccuracies, were hoping that when we produce our work we will have a definitive study.

GNE BL it will be a good history anyway.

Mr. G be accurateat least.

NSA palys a part in all three of these books.

the establishment of a recordis important -- now how that record will be used yjthats another problem but we ewant at least to establish a recordas throroughly as we can. Were putting some honest labelling on it.

we have other business here of course, we are also working on the air war

I promise that I wont ask (laughter) I promise I wont ask you any wuestions about the use of SIGINT in the ari war -- I'll restrain myself

GEN B. Ive got a son flying a F-4 his a second tour over there so I probably have more cuurrent interest in that than in the ton kin history

Mr. G. Maybe we'll slip one in on you on the air war

GEN B that would be more personal than historical

MR G you want to start that yway? Were going to try to do the talking for a while.

R taking fro it from the

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R to see the raw traffic.....a massive search on - holabjurd, all the records,, and as far as we kmow its never been found just by coincidence we talked with Dr. Berdon of the AF history office and in 67 he was asked by

IDA, for which he worked at the time, to do acommand and control study on Ton Kin.... At that time he saw all the raw traffic down in DIA it had all the operator's comments, operator chatter, pen iled in sippositions as to what the traffic might mean

In Sept of 67 Fulbright sent his first letter to DOD asling for all of the documentation on the Ton Kin and Dr. Beldon was told to drop his project and consequently that the last he -ever saw of the raw traffic so we know aat least one copy if it got down to DIA for some strange reason

If it is out in the building its not being !rpdiced

GEN B Of course I don't know eought about what they say and don't say ex cept that I recall sort of a general feeling that we couldn't possibly save everything or we would have been inundated in a veryj very short period of time I recall a figure which may be innacurrate something like 700 tons was digested through the digestion processes annually'

Mr. G Were a real paper mill out there probably 70-0 thougsand

GEN B so I dont know that i would be inclined to make a lot ofthe nonavailablilty of a particular collection of raw traffic

R I think the most revealing thing about the raw traffic situation is that it shouwed just how much of the system had been broken It was [redacted] DRV naval system and we had it fairly well broken maybe partially up to the timeof the tk incidents.

MR. G. [redacted]

GEN B I recall it to be one of the systems we were in and out of and this become critical at one point.

R well we never had enough dept in ti to break itsuccessfully until the TK incidents and then there was such an abundanceof DRV traffic passed at that time that right after the incidents we were able to break it fully

GEN B what at issue here I suppose is the credibility of the cryptanalytic portion of it and I dont/t

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recallany substantive discussion - there may have been - but I don't peraonally recall it at the timeover the specifics of the credibility -- i have a VAGUE recollection of it - I hate to even mention it - juh of a critical interpretation of a word rather thatn the cryptanalyticfeature of it ~~-nin other words~~ - whether it was related to uh I don't recall the word-butas it sticks in my mind very fitfully like thewords now and notin English - where I may say I AM NOT GOING TO TOWN IS DIFFERENT THAN I AM NOW GOING TO TOWN

R exactly

G Translation was also part of the progblem

R the mood

G the tense of the verbs

B I recall the language expertsexplainging the the nucances in this partuicular language which apparently are quite pronounced in other words its not an easy language which to tbe absolutely sure the translation of it is right

Gat that time NSA did not havea large staff of highly qualified Vietnamese linguists

R NO they were all just starting out the main linguist had just come from school

G Renee maybe we'd better get started

B Right were getting ahead of ourselves here

go hahead and taok awhile

After the the incidents had quietened down, the thing remained dormant for 2 years and then in July of 67 Ap printed an article, they had interviewed several of the men on the MADDOX. One was the main sonar and radar operator They made several statements oindicating that the 2nd attacck that is the one on the 4th never happened -- In fact at one point he asaid that he was ordered to home ikn on a radar blip - this happebed at night - and fire. He asked asked the other ship - thE Turner J9y - to turn on its running light . Apparnetly they were homed in on the TJ instead of a PT boat -- Well this was printed in the Arkansas Gazette Came to the attention of Senator Fulbiright

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and he was already having doubts about the use of the resulaution to caryry forth the war anywayanf japparntly he lept on it with all four feet

By September he was writin g a letter toSECDEF asking for all the documentation. This was kicked around throughthe Navy Dept JEC SECDEF They gave him quite a bit of the operational matter

By December they briefed himonthe SIGINT aspects and in Feb he aked Mcnamara to come talk to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and that this document I have here, -- the coffee stained, well worn document

This was February of 68 the month athat Mac was leaving office and most of what has co,e out in the open about the SIGINT aspects of TON KIN WERE revealed by Mac himself in this document. This is the UNCLAS version.

Right after that this book by Goulden His thesis is that the attack on the fourth did not happe n NO WAY

And after Goulden produced this work -- jwhich remains until today - the best one on the subject

the subject was quiet again until the relase of the Pentagon Paters last year. There not too much in the PP themselvesabout hthe GTK incidents-- They tend to accept them as they were reported at the time. But ofllowoing right on thiss - the New York Times e pose Antohony Austin wrote his book the Presidents War-- SHe is attacked to eh New York Times Daniel Ellsberg highly endorsed the book . Its nowt too good expect for the last ten pages.

And in that he discuss3-s our material in depth . He alleged that what we presented as SIGINT evidence of hostile intentfor the 4th whwas in fact after actions reports of the action of the 2nd. And this started a resurgence of Fulbight interest. FHe wrote the current SECDEF and asked for the ra w traffic. so that got back out to the agency almost immediately and I had to go brief jADM Gaylor on everything to do with the incidents And the SIGINT is shakey for the 4th. What SIGINT Ive been able to say -- which as I said is not raw traffic has been colected into notebooks for both the August incidents and the 18 September incident. And even o n a cursory review oof the evidence shws that it is shakey. If Fulbiright wever saw the whole thing Im sure he would be convinced it never happebed

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To recap the incidents we had the first one2 aug We had substantial SIGINT evidence that the DRV was tra cking the MADDOX frin tge time it enter3d the Gulf until the incident of the 2nd. It was broad daylight. We know they came out We have a bullet hole in the MADDOX. We have the bullet to show that they did fire. And the evidentce in SIGINT which is quite good even though we werent reading the system too well we could wsee what they were doing we were able to warn the ship]2 hours in advance that there might be hostile intent

For 4 August the situation was quite different It happebed on a very dark night no moon jclouds, heavy atmospheric disturbances- with radar and communications and the SIGINT was very shakey If you read it over you can see that even though it was passed during the time frame of the 4 august incident which covered about 4 hours it does read like an after action report of the 2nd . The DRV claimed WEVE CHASED OFF THE ENEMY, We LOST TWO BOATS wWell they kistlost 2 on the 2nd They claimed to have brought down an american a/c We;l on the 2nd, they apparently did hit one of the American fighter a/c. It wasnt brought down but it had to recover at Da Nang instead of on the carrier because it was damaged

This was all passed downtowm and the best I can reconstruct the time sequence it hit downtown right at the time

'the critical NSC meeting was in progress when the decision to retaliate was apparatly made.

It appears as ifthey latched onto the rather shakey SIGINT evidence and decided to retaliate possibly because they already wanted to this just added the fuel that they needed and then it looks li,e we were stuck with the story because after the decision was madewe had a wrap up summary wherein for the first time NSA attached the traffic to a definite attack on the fourth,. The retaliation was carried out acording to what I've learned from people like Lou Grant at the agency the retaliation took every one by surprise. NSA want wasnt warned that there would be a retaliation. We weren't even able to re adjust our coverage i n order to see the effects of the retaliation

However we think we got everything we could possibly

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We just never put out anything in that building that says SOMETHING WAS DEMONSTRATED IRREFUTABLY but the lead senetence in this retport is "Herewith follows a summary of the evidence which demonstrates irrefuatably that an attack did take place on the foruth. And then it lists the SIGINT evidence attached to the fourth. It strikes anbybody - even without cryptologic experie ce - that the evidence was shakey. Also here in the wrap up of the 6th appears one scrap of SIGINT evidence quote "Khoai has met the enemy". I haven't ben able to find it any other place Sjust that wrap up of the 6th. MacNamara brought this out -- he relied on it quite heavily -- as UNIMPEACHABLE evidence that the attack ttook place. He also reported that POW report fro m 67 and a pow report from 68 wherein this Khoai was further identified as a PT boot commander in the DRV navy at the time of the incident and of the same flotilla that attscked the MADDOC but does not say that the atack acutally took place. He was backed down on that also. Anthony Austin also mentioned this bit about Khoai has met the enemy and this is a point that ADM Gaylor has been particularly interested in reacalling. He wants to see the wraw traffic himself on Khoai But there is only that one fleeting reference that went out in that rather strage summary of the 5 no 6th. Well a month later, the 18 September incident occurred. This involved two idifferent destroyers -- MORTON and EDWARDS -- MORTON with the SIGINT detachment . It was almost a repeat performance of 4 August. It happened at night for a period of about two hours They had radar blips They never actually sighted enemy veessels they had only radar evidence and again we had a super abundeance of SIGINT reflections of the DRV passing traffic but this time it was determined that the tone of all of the traffictaken cumulatively was defensive not offensive And here i have to go into an interview that Mr. Gerhard and I had with GEN CARTER because GEN CARTER was Deputy of CIA at the time and gehe sat in on the NSC meeting in September in the place of the Driector of CIA who was out of town. To the best of his recollection McNamara came to that meeting ready to go with another retaliation had the plans in hand and GEN CARTER, representing the intelligence community ,as a whole said there absolutely no evidence SIGINT or otherwise that they had hostile intent or that hthey were even out there We can't back you on this one and apparently MacNaramr abomg others were bent at that meeting were bent out of shape about this.

and this caused an investigation a PFIAB investigation

and here I go into an interview we had with Lou Grant. The PFIAB investigation was not so much directed at WHAT HAPPENED WITH SIGINT in August - why was it wrong in August but WHAT AHAPPEED IN SEPTEMBER why couldn't you back us up in September. This brought out all of the facts that we had broken the system' between August and September. We had reevaluated within the SIGINT community and found to our satisfaction lets say that the ucumulative SIGINT evidence from August that the DRV was in a defensive Mood then not in an offensive mood for 4 august not 2 theres never b-en any question about 2 August Oh theres wquestions that it may have been an accident that the PT boat comander went steaming out there expencting to meet an ARVN swift and instead met a dstroyer But no that the 4 August was defensive and not offensive

and this brings me up to the point of why I wanted to speak with you What was NSA's position in this were we forced into the position of ba king up the decision downtown did they misuse make the decision on the fragmented evidence that we had for the fourth and then we were forced into the positon of backing it up. We did soul searching in August in and in September and decided that we couldn't fdo it anagain for the 18 Setember incident I think thats basically what I need to know at this point.

GEN B WellIm agrai thats e xactly the point on which I cant help you because I don't have personal recollection in sufficient detail to do that I can state that in the deliberations at the time notheing emerged in the laight of we sort of bit this off now we have to back it up and the vagaries you mentioned between the August 4th example and the September example I don't recall those differences but it does make sense that the records shows that we were deeper in the system in September than in August and having gone through this exercise one time you are bound to be sharper the 2nd time around I think this follows as a comon sensical arrangementbut in terms of what happened at the time and the quality of the SIGINT evidence and the precise reporting i'm sure people like Lou Grant paticularly - Lo u was always very promi nent in all these Southeast Asia SIINT matters at the time there was another man - you haven't mentioned him - he was an Air Force LT COL - I can't recollect his name naow

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Mr G and R simultaneously: DEL LANG

GEN B DEL LANG, that's the man These were sort of the Gold Dust Twins of South East Asia SIGINT Grant and Del Grant Everyhing that we seemed to be involved in - at the Director level anywat = always Lang and Grant were the cahps who were in effect down at the firing line andup on all of the detail abd if their memories don't fill these gaps I certainly swouldn't do so in terms of the technical aspects of the thing. As far as the policy level WAS USIB backin g up a decision I don't recall anything that would suggest that

R: Del Lsng is of course the critical point in the whole thing but he doesn't want to talk about it. That's why I didn't mention him . I know that he handled the whole thing . Lou Grant was at the staff level anddowntown most of the time . Del Lang was handling it out at the building and I know that from what I've heard other poepole say he handled the complete reinvestigation for the Fulbright affair - in a closed roo m -- nobody really knows what he found ourt in the reinvestigation . I've attempted to talk with him and he's indicated that he isn't

. xxxxxxxxxxx talking.xxxx

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GEN B Well I certainly can't help you at this juncture on a matter of that kind

(Everybody toaks at onece) Minly Mr. G. who says there are other aspects that we will solve in time.

Gen B A sort of general procedure that we followed tend to and I don't recall precisely when we followed it in this case but I have a strong hunch that we did---essentially these questions of what hads the intelligence community to sayabout a particular involvement- whether its this Ton Kin gulf thing or the Cuban Missile Crisis you name it. It headed up properly ikn the Director Central Intelligence The Head of the CIA who as you know is a two hat arangement and hes the man who sits in with the NSC special ops group? all that sort of thing or some rpresentativeof that activity So except for formal meeting of the intelligence boardor siscussions back and forth our normal practice was to send the real expert We'd send the Lous Grants and the Del Langs to participate in intelligence level discussions and what the record shows in this particular case I don't recall but it wouldn't surprise me what would happen was that Grant or Lang or both would be down there at the elbow of the intelligence people

filling them in and but the decisions always remained when you eget up to this level were essentially Mc Cone Carter-level decisions . Whether they were misled by the shakey nature of the August fourth incident I wouldn't know. Not by director level or by USIB level.

R: Well the entire August affair was handled in the fieldand the entire September affair was handled at NSA every shredwas sent back here and put out by N SA examined really examined -- by us. For August you had severla message -- CRITICS -- CIRITIC follow ups The text on these would simply show that rhe DRV was tracking the MADDOX but the headliner which the field site would put on would say DRV may attack De Soto patrol and I have evidence that some people at the MACV level were concerned before the attack about the inflammatory nature of that title when the text didn't actually back it up. In September for instance to give you an example USN 27 picked up one of these similar tracking messages and sent out a CRITIC flagging it.....

GNE B USN 27 was in San Miguel wasn't it

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R Yes, They tracked it the same yway D E SITO patrol, in this case the MOROTON, may be attacked tonight. NSA reviewed it sent out an immediate message to the communitycancelling the critic and the language is " all evidence shows that th the DRV to be in a defensive repeat defensive vice offensive mood. I understand this was the basis for the PFIAB investigation the difference in handling of the SIGINT body of evidence between August and September The question was Was it the field who was right, or was it NSA who was right mand that they really wanted to hang NSA because they hadn't been able to sue intelligecnce that is SIGINT as backup for another retaliation . The Pentagon Papers does bring out the fact that after the succssful retaliation of August- that they were ~~really~~ rather eager for another excuse - the New York Times made quiyr a bit of that .

Gen B I don't recall any participation and conscious decision yoalter proceduresbetween August and September with relation to the particular targets involved here to those related to the Ton Kin Gulf I do recall that in the whole consideration of operations in South East Asia a number of discussion. I think so me of them Milt Zaslow and people like that about the pilosophy of handling those targets out there . Its a classic dielemma Its not

peculiar to South East Asia Its the question of whether its better to put talent out at the end of the line and report directly to the fild commanders delegate in fact the analysis and reporting responsibility or whether to rely on communications and concentrations of technical experts and this classic dielemma constatnly recurs in the mannagement of SIGINT and its usually resolved more or less pragmatically in particular situation-- obviosouly if youve got good communications and very few experts its better to centralize and apply their expertise to a number of locations in the field. If youve got a lot of experts you can afford to spread them around people who can translate and do cryptanalytic work That sort of technical expertise -- if ouve got a lot of them you can afford to spread them out at several field locations and youve got poor communications then ovviously you would prefere- it would be the only practical solution - Whether this cahnge from August to September that you point out as fa fact was related to these kinds of philosophical changes perhaps even triggered by the language dificulties t that may have emerged in the August indcidences in translations -- whether this triggered a centralization this depending on a centralized snmall n-jmber of experts drawing the raw traffic.

and drawing or second guessing the analyss in some cases from field analysis second guessing field analysis i have no recollection of that kind of relationship I suppose its possible in general contact of reporting We did make some communications changes which I don't know what time they came along but there was a general tendency as the Vietnam war ground on to upgrade communications more direct ciruits so on so forth. npt pm not only in SIGINT but in other ways as well. Part of this sheer availability came from the philippines to South Vietnam for example added a capacity we never had before. But a conscious decision to make this change was because of the realtionship between the quality of SIGINT between September and August I don't recall that.

Mr. G: Renee Weve gone onver ~~very~~ rather lightly the 4 August evenet as far as certain Pentagon figures are concerned. Perhpas Gen Blake would appreciate a few details on the agaony of deciision as portayed fy some of these books particularly in respect the case of McNamara. Of course SIGINT has turned out to be one of the lodestones for that decision.

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R: Well they tried to make it justigy. In his testimony in 1968 before Fulbright he brought the SIGINT with him and I've never been able to find in what form he showed it to him. I've tra ced it from NSA down to JCSI know he saw it down there and it wa s prepared by his intellgience and his legal staff

GEN B: This is in 67

R: This is in Feb 68, right before he left office

GEN B: That was almost three years after I left;

R:: Yes, and he gathered up what he could on 4 August and our people haand I have gone over it with a fine tooth comb to try to match up what he described in that testimonyas SIGINT with what we actually have in hand out there and in places it wlooks like he's taken the critical message the possible after action report and split it into two and at other times it looks as if he's taken four and telescoped it into three. At one point he mentions nine bring telescoped into 4

GEN B: What do you mean by telescoped into 4

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R: He mentiones 9 messages but when he describes the content we can only equate them with 4

GEN B: I see

R: He was backed intoa corner by one of the senators on this and he got out of it by saysing Well you have to understand these things were flowing back and forthbetween stations. And we really can't find evidence out in the building that that was the case. These were fragments that were picked up.. The point is, ritht toward the end he's backed into a corner again he backs up into this what he ckeeps calling unimpeachable communications intelligenceevidence and wseveral of the senators hit him with Well nothing you've shown us here today convinces us in the least that that SIGINT _they didn't call it SIGINT - communications intelligence shows that there was an incident on the fourth. It shows that they were discussing us our ships Yes. At this time they didn't doubt the that SIGINT was genuine but it didn't prove to them that there was an incident on the fourth . And finally one of the senators asked him Would you have gone ahead and retaliated without the SIGINT evidence and he said YES.

And the senator said In other wrods this communications intelligence justified your decision. And he siade yes. I intend to point that out in my third volume.as pointing out that acutally NSA for those people who criticize our effort as attaching the war to NSA that to emme that takes the burden off us completely.When Johnson in his book the VANTAGE POINT passes over Ton Kin briefly he describes it much as it was described in 1964.as gneuine events.but at one point when he come to 4 August he mentions communications intelligence and says that they did have evidence of it and then the sentence. Our experts told uf this meant - washing his hands of deciding what it meant.

GEN B: You mean nothing came after meant Well I think what we call agony by Secretary Mcnamara as was customary and proper in a matter of this kind,. The secretary didn't pick up the phone and call me He would deal with I presume people like his own intelligence staff with Bill Carroll aor with peipole at CIA the Directro, or perhaps the Depubty Director. And he was using what I always thought - it didn't hurt my feelings any -- this I thought was proper channels -- We were the servant of the intelligence community and if they wanted to analyze the quality of our service if they wanted to call on the director they could but normally we were furnishing the real expert to participate in the discussion. They know perfectly wel l that the director is not a vietnamese language expert to testify directly oln the validity of breaking a scerjtain system. You want to get into that sort of thing and measure it As to credibility, you've got to get down to the man who knows how to break that code and talk to him about a particular message and a particular circumstance As I recall our methodology was tofeel that expert was the one to who should prarticipate in the discussions -- not passing the buck to him really -- it NSA did'nt have the buck We belonged to the custormer really Intelligence being full of gvagaries -- not only SIGINT vagaries but the credibility of direct sources and analysis of a number of things.

MR. G: Ultimately itthere was mis;interpretation of SIGINT on the part of the custormer

B: Yes, thats not to suggest that he couljdn't be mislead and I don't whether one could say he ways in the case your talking about here or not. The record whould have to show hathat and discussion with the particular individuals involved. on both the customers sideand on the side of NSA by looking at a specific incident what was the intelligent

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customer told what was the SIGINT man's analysis of it Put these two down and then you can begin to develop credibility Can't develope it I would say youre a better expert on this at the moment having looked at the..... than almost anybody else.

Mr. G. I think Renee knows more about the submect than anybody else What youve said babout sending the experts Reneez for the Pfiab breifing.

R: Lou Grant and [redacted]

G: Understand they took down the traffic, the worksheets, and members of the PFIAB (speell out)

B: I don't even recall that PFIAB investigationl PFIAB would,,, I appeared before PFIAB on a mnumber of matters. O don't recall whether I appeared before them in connection with this or not. Does the record show that I did. No, Lou said that it happened in October after all the in idents were overwith and to quote him, he said they were on a witch hunt to in other words the burden was that NSA was wrong in September at that time in 1964 and there was a prepared statement -- they planned to allott 10 or 15 minutesfor statement to them . JHe and [redacted] wnet down. [redacted] being the actual He was the man who worked the system HThey got down there areamd

GEN B I don't recall who that was I mentioned earlier when we were talking informally I recall vagely the criticality of translation in antything related to Vietnamese language.

G: [redacted] would have figured ...

R: Well anyway they got down there and read exactly two sentences out of the prepared statement and then they spe nt he thinks a full hour or more doing crypt problems with memebers of the committeeactually down around a table working on the system. Ap!arently this ended the postmortems'

GEN B: I don't recall that postmortem at all We ewere often involved in this sort of thing. In addition to putting the expert down there If I would call supervisory pparticipation or required there was susually anywhere from one to ofourbkey individuals between the director and that paticualr cell where something might have taken place. If you needed something besides a specific

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prod,his head civil wervice employee, you get down below that in the case of South East Asia at that time, I think in B group Milt Zaslow. Youve got 3 or 4 if you want to send down a top flight individual who participates in the overall management aspects in an investigation of that kind the Director is probably one of the worst guys you could sned in terms of knowledge of supervisio nof that particular thing.

laughter

G: Thats what Lou said

R: Yes

G: PFIAB does not want policy briefings

R: right

G: ..wnant more knowledge...

R: The idiaot treatment was his exact words.

G: the traffic and the codes

B: You don't ask the chairman of the board to fix a carburetor.

G: General do you recall participating in any discussions at the Pentagon or Pfiab on the Gulf of Ton Kin incidents?

B: Nomy recollections, which I have time and again havad to admit are vague as to detail were all internal in the agency itself, I don't recall any downtown so to speak I have an idea that probably the US Intenlligence Board the Director,normally my self, and occassionally Lou Tordello, would represent the agencyat the USIB meetings, but it was normal practice for the director toattend personally . I don't recall specific discussions there There must have been some I don't recsll any And you mentioned in this document here -- this first chapter concern about what China would do and so forth and the recollection that tsticks in my mind not just in this particular period but ov er the period of my USIB participationwith respect to intelligence view of China the thing that seemed to stick out the most was concern over recce photography and the lack of it primarily because of weather. The areas in particualy question - South China - characterized by long periods and a great deal of the time weatjher either from an overfligh recce orsatellite photography. And this kept cropping up repeatedly I remember Mr. Mc Cone. This was almost a pet

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subject with him. When would we get some photography Very little concern about the SIGINT indications What sticks in my mind we wereof course working with [redacted] targets and all that sort of thing but the thing that the board was fretting about the most was photography fir south China. This was really the broad question What can [redacted] do. In other words whats their posture which hopefully good inte-lience can give you more difficult and much and I think related to this Ton Kin thing if I may say so is the question of intent. Its very well and good to analyze tracking but its another question to say is it offensive or defenseive.

G: Going back to Renee's vol. I do you recall anything on the various pressures designed to...

R: That was my next question...

B: Designed to what....

G: get North Vietnam to desist in supporting the commuhnist acitivy in the south

B: No I don't recall any pressure at all that came to NSA nto do anything but the best job that we could in producing SIGINT. We were largely insulated from high level discussion. I never attended a discussion above the level of the USIB

G: A question of intelligence suport for some of these pressure actions.

B: Well there was considerable pressure to increase our coverage in South East Asia. I think the record will is a better testi monh of that in terms of personel Somewhere in this period while I was there I think probly it must have been before these incidents. we set up new offices in SAIGON and [redacted] was I believe the first man in charge of it. As far as the demand for resourcescommitted against South East Asia this was -- if you are referring to that kind of pressures -- yes theres a lot of it in terms of manpower allocations, budgets, putting in new stations, Phub Bai for example-- That pretty well built up.....

G: What I was referring to in the press resthat the U.S. participated in against North Vietnam. the latoian ops.

R: DE SOTO patrols and Laotian air ops also.

B: I recall vagely the setting up of the DE SOTO patrol but I don't recall any pressure was designed to trigger some

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sort of reaction. It was a way of getting better SIGINT as far as we were concerned. Whether there was any otehr intent behind it I rather doubt. I don't think there was that Machiavelian in retrospect

G.n It's amazing something and amusing to read operational messages long after the fact You wonder about the intent You have to consider the level of message who might write the message... was it DIRNSA who said this or was it somebody 4 or 5 echcelons below...

B: I'm sure DIRNSA said lots of things UI never knew about.

G: Attributions to the head man always are

B: I;m sure there are many cases where you wouldn't remember where in fact you saw the message and said Yeh that makes sence depending primarily on the ability of the guy who wrote the message when your own personal knowledge the message was in fact was exactly right. I'm sure there are messages where the expert honestly believes this is a proper message persuades his supervisors which might or might not include DIRNSA that the message should be sent and a year later shown that message says thats a stupid message, I shouldn't have sent it It turned out to be some other way It was Monday morning quarter backing you never lose a game.

G: Renee and I decided we were not goin g to ask oyou detailed questions.

B: I don't mind you asking them but its obvious that

G: If youve had time to think back over your relationship to thes e vents

B: Well Im will ing to testify that I have to these broad considerations but thats only the buildup of rewoursces on South East Asia (garbled).

G: Weve covered that fairly well in documents...

I think the record shows that better than any recollection thatn any recollection one wants to talk about. There are fragments of of specifics that stand out if youre involved enough in them personally. Phu Bai is not in question here but just as an example of very close personal attention toparticular points I recall spending a lot tof time and even making a trip to South East Asia associated with many matters, but this was one uppermost in my mind Was Phu Bai a safe place for a SIGINT detachment that would bother me and yet the decision as to whether the answer was yes or

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willingness of the commander to say yes it can be put there and Ithink it can be defendedamd Im willing to see to it that it is defended. These are the ------that DIRNSA has to have. to say Yes Phu Bai is a place where it dan be placed. That was one that I was involved in in a very personal sense

G: It turned out to be a very successful field station.

G: Well its long since that analysis but I think theres enough history under the b ridge to indicate that those who advised me Yes it can be there were right I cant help of course when this current offensive started when its gets down close to Hue and I hear referencesin the paper oabout the U.S. activity at Phu Bai I assume theryre talking USA whatever the number isIve forgotten the nmber of it.Whatev is the number of it.

R: 626

G: That was the one that...626 was the one that you got established at Saigon

B: Whats Phu Bai

G: USM 808 but when you were at NSA that was still called USM 626J

R: Yeah because they got a couple of bronze stars out of this Ton Kin flap. 4]4T was in the next room They got two bronze stars

B: I don't know where the raw traffic came from I dont expect that San Miquel and Phu Bai perhaps Monkey Mt. at Da Nang aside from the Destroyer stations probably would have furnished raw trafficfor this whole exercise.

R: The destroyer didn't get anything

Mr. G: Renee and I were glimpsing the mistakes in the current literature -- this is one of them/ Various writers attribute to the ships balck box detachment the intercept.

R: Fortunately theyve never caught on. But current with this thing were the [redacted] which came down on the 6th of August to Phuc Yen. USA 32 picked that up and put a critic out on it [redacted] reversed the CRITIC invalidated it - NSA invalidated [redacted] all taks at once (the [redacted] came in with the scoope Mrxx&xB you mentioned Phuc Yen in this background paper [redacted]

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But they came down to Phuc Yen later on didn't they?

R: 6th of August

G: Right after the tretaliation.

R: In fact in one of the McNamara briefings on the 5th of August when the press weas asking about the retaliation Mr. Secretary what do you think will be the Chinese reaction to these bombings and he said I think they might snd fighter a/c south to the DRV Yes I think that would be a likely reaction He knew they were coming anywasy.

B: The reason I recall that they did come to Pnuc Yen - I hadn't associated it in memory with the dates ve just you describe here but I had a son flying F-4s over there at the time and as a matter of fact a little later on I think in65 as I recall he shot down one of the first MIGS and so the operational change at Phuc Yen kind of stuck in my mind The fact that ist was related to the retaliation - I didn't remember that'

Mr. G: I think in all fairness they were coming down one way or another

R: Oh Yah that might have sjpeeded it up

B: The impression I get f-om this is that they were going to Phuc Yen whenever the north felt they might be useful

R: Right. That's the whole point tin the tree volumes to me is to downplay Ton Kin even though its the tiele subject These open press people have all indiecated that that hole messstarts with Ton Kin AMD THE POINT IN my whole presentationis that it didn't,.

Gen B: I think i'll step doewn the jhall if you don't mind

INTERMISSION

B: Are you sure babout that or are you just speculating on it.

Mr. G: I found it in the testimony

B: Well I know but have you ever been called upon to testify before Congress or PFIAB or somebody like that Well I'll tell you what happens and I'll bet you its what hapened to McNamara's case . OK I got to go see the PFIAB

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what about - well about the Dunlap spy case I remember that one with much more clarity because I was more personally involved you seee than I do this Ton Kin Gulf -- That was just one more flap rapidly overtaken by someother flapso but what happens is that you get busy and do your nhomework and it wouldn't startle me a damm bit if the first time Robser McNamaragot together the SIGINT inputs to the statements he made a long time earlier was when he got ready to testify several years later He seid Hey give me the poop and so they bring in the poop and he starts looking it over and sez Hey I can hang my hat on that so don't be under any illusions that sombebody like Robert McNamara or anybody is going in from a fairly high level supervisory to testify before Congressor the PFIAB or anybody else is going to be dealing from clear cut memory of what happened at the fime He going to go back and get the record He's going to get the people in that were involved He's going to prime hisself Hje's going to learn well the things that will hslp himand he' s going to forget the things that don't help him not deliberately ubut just because jou know He can only remember fso much - don't fool with that, that doesn't have anythin g to do with what I'm trying to put across

G: He's only human

B: Thats right so----------Well I know on other occasions not having to do you know with a flap of this kind just straight old budget things you know hes goin g to present the budget of some kind He has to do some homework so he reads up on it. He talks to people gets a few things firmly in mind that can be useful and goes in and goes to work

B: Well I'm afraid I haven't helped you much Renee ~~Everyxlittlexbit~~ Every little bit I guess-----

R: Every little bit yes

G: You'd be jsurpesed how many incomplete records were working on and how the person thats acquiring all these incomplete records----------remember----------

B: I suppose youve ~~got~~ you can just lay one on top of the other like a matrix and if you bdrop a ball on top and it goes all the way through it will signify that everybody has the same hole 8 or]0 people all agree well there's a ohole there And if the ball goes all the way through to the bottom - that not bad but if the ball doesn't

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get more than 2 matrices down before somebody sez no it wasn't that way, it was some other way then you can forget it. Its a correlation I suppose between statistically suffiecient poor memores. xMinexinxfactxx might in fact produce a fact.

R: That's quite true.

G:Also its important to us to some extent to know what it is that you don't say .

B: I suppose it could be historically significant that to me in memorty ithis was just another flap

R: That's right

B: You know, either it wasn't all that gigantic you know as some high level conspracy to launch a retaliation certainly
at least not at my level

G: thr pressure was off for at least two years.

B: It seems to have commanded more attention in retrospect than at the time.

R: At the time...

B: xWexhadxnoxintentionxzxzxxxzwould be my analyses of it just as a recollection.

R: We had no intention of going ino any controversey when I started this.

B: Took a long time for it to get important

R: ---after I first started.

B: I don't know when this first came to my attention as the kind of flap that you now have

In other words a key element. *in the escalation of the war I don't recal l at the time it representing that Maybe at the time it did represent that but but if it was it didn't stick in my mind you know that heres this supercritical a point here at which did some guy come out with a torpedo boat with evil intent in mind or was he just steeming up and down the coast. mI don't have the slightest recollection of the criticality of that -- looking back at that particular time.*

R: *wel that bears out my thesis that it was unimportant at the time.*

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G: Lets switch subjects. I warned you that I might try it.

Right after the flap that we have been talking about there was a great deal of attention givin to a U.S. bombing program against North Vietnam.

B: In Sept you mean

That would be

R: Rolling Thunder.

G Many Many people in government thaought the bombing program would begin about January 1965 Others felt that perhaps that South Vietnam was not paolitically or militarily strong enough at that time to resist an all out invasion from North Vietnam . They argued that the bombing program should proceed somewhat later.

B: I don't recall any participation at all in that kind of dixcussion

G: I'm wondering about the SIGINT programs which might have been.

B: Well I recall Roling Thunder of course I don't remember when it started but

G: March 65 .....am I going too far afied for you?

B: Donesn't have anything to do with the Ton Kin Gulf but youre trying to soak up all of South East Asia I guess. the things I recall SIGINT wise, and this may have been nust personal interest in this sort of thing was the question of warnig as far as air craft crews are concerned I supose I have to admit that having a maybe stooging? around there at the time may have sharpened my interest . I don't really think so Having been an aviator all my life I think I'm resonably honest in saying thatthis sort of thing always interested me How SIGINT can be lof diresct support Of course it gets involved in how do you screen it You have to get back to the air operations activity someway adn let them take some action which doesn't give away your whole operation and thats fairly tricky sometimes But there was sthis sort of thin g cooked up. I remember visiting Da Nang and places like that and sort of looking personally at the reporting procedures and how they would get rword backto Well they had to go all the way back to Sai Gon for it and hthat struck me as -- aI suspect -- I don't recall it precisely butmy guess is that that would strike me as la little cumbersome in terms of the time involved and so on

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and so forth -but thats really up to the theatre air commander - he should can't second guess him on that

TT: Did you get personally involved in any of the discussions when they were working out the air warning system.? tp aor the SAM warning system: This was of course generated...

B: Not personally except keeping track of it -- knowning that we were doing it and I do recall takling to some retur nes~~s~~ I don't remember who this was? or even where about the degre of comfort that this may have given him and he thought it was great stuff He didn't have the foggiest notion - I remember this -- how it ha!pened you know but he said We used to get these tip offs - you know very often - but he didn't - and I just sort of chuckled to myself you know a great deal of satisfaction that the operation that I was involved with this kid up there all by heimself with a fighter strapped to his butt you know I appreciated it. At DIRNSA level you kind of search for those -- something you can bite into --

TT: Well the point is that the discussion became quite hectic between PACAF and 7th Air Force and pacsctyreg and how much security we would be ewilling to compromise

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B: I recall that -- those kinds of arguments - I don't recall in this context but I recall distinctly my penchant for risking security I usually tended to line up a little bit against our own experts Look weve put a lot of dough in thsis and if we can't deliver something that heps at the other end . We got to take a little risk now and then that s my general philosophy and it didn't always set well I recall that Each case was a case of its own You can't decide these policy wise How good your source is and how much cover you can put into it that has a hel of a lot to do swith it Each one is separate and distinct Youre subject to twin pressures the 9ooperations fellow at the other end of the line You know he wants give him a ranch in Kansas and your SIGINT expert who hasn't the foggiest notion about what it means to fly over Hai Phong or Ha Noi. He sets there you know and hes got this little scrap of evidence and he wants to make it bigger and hers desparately afraid that that will go away if its used at all. He tends to hoard it you see Its like the spendthrift and the miser fighting with each other over operational use.

I

G: Think they pretty well decided in favour of operational use.

B: Im sure we did but I don't recall the. But it wasnltxan NSA decision it did = may have made it personally I don't recollect or I may have influenced it by my preaching to people like Milt Zaslow Never had trouble with Milt on tMilt was a believer on this sort of thing In those days he was Mr. Seouth East Asia When I sogo oup there now I still say Miltie hows our war department? Uncle Miltie Hows our war going Last time unfortunately it wasn't going to o welo He siad ther re coming in the windows

G: Thats about the size oif it

GB: There back at that same junction again and this time he 's had a lot of F-4 experience - spent 3 years of Egglaund in the Tactical Air Warfare center in air to air missile weaponry so hes a real pro now/ and naturally they turned to him and asaid OK youre one of our top flight strike commanders you can gaet that damm bomb on target and hes getting it on target but I cross my fingers of course Nsty war shame it lasted so long

G: and R agree

Guess I'd better joint M--- now if we've just reached the point of hjust reminiscing.

I know you don't want any more of that I have to read some of these books There hard to get I suppose aren't they

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R: No I bought them all in the booksotre They may be sold out by now

They ujust latched on to a discrepancy - the anti war critics - and are just blowing it up

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G: This is all there are...

R: !° !° Wdel Dr. Tordello stoped me in the hall the other day and said theres another letter in from Fulbright To SECDEF - and he want that raw traffic - Dr. Tordello is tstill holding out against giving it to him I agree he shouldn't see it.

B: I trust Lou's judgement in this as always but I can't get ex ited about Fulbright Ive had to shut my adrenalin off - think he comes close to being a traitor maybe unintentionally but hes too smart for that thats wahat I keep telling myself I ranted and railed on Fulbright - my wife will tell you this -- Whe'll also tell you

I see him gone strangely silent on this the question of Sen the Senator. And that is I've decided not to waste my adrenalin on him and I'd let him have the damm traffic and let him fulminate and all that - it wouldn't worry me a damm bit.n- To hell with you I'm through worrying about you Your's a menace - you have your influcence and cause a lot of trouble but I've got no more adrenaline to waste on you

TT: He can sure keep the soup stirred thought

B: Yeah thats right. If he woulnd up to be Secretrary of State aI'm afraid I'd say well that a sad day for America and i'd shut my adrenaline off even more laughter and garbles He leaves me cold

G: Well we want to thank you

R: Yes we do, THANK YOU

B: Appreciate the.....

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