Gulf of Tonkin Incidents
Additional SEAHAG Inputs(U)

(b) (6)

Prior to and during the July-August period of 1964, tasking at USM-626J, Detachment J, 3d RRU, at Phu Bai, SVN, included 2 positions covering North Vietnamese Naval Networks. (USM-414T, collocated, also operated 4 positions, but against different cases). The traffic passed by these nets was high precedence, high priority traffic, transmitted by highly qualified operators. Although encrypted, it was a readable system which 626J analysts had retrieved completely. In covering these nets the best available skilled intercept operators were assigned to these targets. Primary among these were SP4 Harry H. Evans, [redacted] and SP5 Paul J. McQuaid, [redacted] both of whom were exceptionally suberb interceptors and dedicated to their duties to the extent that, during the period of high volume traffic which developed on those nets during the Tonkin Crisis, they routinely worked a double shift of 16 hours per day. These two men copied and processed the intercept which provided the invaluable plans and intentions of the North Vietnamese Navy, and furnished the initial warning to the US Navy that attacks were impending and imminent against the USS Maddox and the USS C. Turner Joy, during the episodes of 4 and 7-8 August, which later figured prominently as a turning point of US National policy with regard to the conflict in SVN.

They obtained background on the workings of those nets in monitoring them during amphibious operations by South Vietnamese Navy and Marine forces against selected coastal targets in North Vietnam, during June-July 1964. Those stations passed information relative to North Vietnamese reactions to such

Declassified and approved for release by NSA on 02-15-2006 pursuant to E.O. 12958, as amended

operations, the complete coverage of which produced a decryptable volume of traffic which read like a story. Through such intercept SIGINT followed North Vietnamese tracking of the NAVN amphibious force from below the 17th parallel north to the target area, then back south below the 17th parallel again. Further, the actions and reactions to these operations reflected in NVN communications was such that the conduct and results of those operations were reported to command and intelligence consumer-recipients concerned, even before the participants returned and reported on the outcome of their mission.

On 28 July and until 8 August 1964, the target stations commenced passing an unusually high volume of traffic. Realizing the significance of this indication, SP4 Evans informed his NCOIC of this SIGINT indicator and both Evans and McQuaid stayed on their positions as long as the transmitters were active, copying all traffic passed. During those long, ardous hours and days, numerous messages were intercepted, decrypted and analyzed, which revealed plans and staging progress for a proposed North Vietnamese Navy attack on the USS Maddox. The magnitude and clarity of this traffic was recognized immediately and, passed to MACV, USN-27, USN-414T, the 7th Fleet, and NSA, alerted them to possible operations as early as 29 July 1964. These, in turn, directed further SIGINT and other intelligence collection efforts against those targets. On 3 August, USM-626J intercepted readable traffic between NVN Navy torpedo boats and their shore stations which revealed their imminent assault and enabled their locations and movements to be tracked. Thus, initial advance warning of attack was passed to the USS Maddox, and other elements of the Fleet were alerted 12 hours in advance of the actual attack which took place the night of 4 August.

Subsequently, heavy traffic volume on those entities continued, as did the coverage. This reflected the NVN reactions to the unsuccessful attack on the USS Maddox and, three days later, revealed the plans and staging for a second attack, by a larger force, against both the USS Maddox and the USS C. Turner Joy. Again, the fleet was alerted , warned and no damage to the vessels or casualties to US personnel resulted from either of those attacks.

The SIGINT derived from the efforts, especially, of those two operators and the traffic and cryptanalysts who supported them, originated the forewarnings of impending attack against US vessels in open waters by the DRV. As a result of these incidents, national policy decisions were made which changed the trend and intensity of the war against the Communists in SVN, and commenced retaliatory and interdictory bombing against NVN. This was one of the significant contributions of SIGINT to US actions and policy, from the MACV-7th Fleet level, to the deliberations of the national Executive and Defense Branches , which had a far reaching affect upon the prosecution of the war against NVN and the defense of SVN.

As the result of exceptionally meritorious performance of duty and contributions to the defense and protection of vessels and personnel of the US Navy, SP4 Evans and SP5 McQuaid subsequently were awarded the Bronze Star Medal on 29 June 1965.

As a sequel to the increased SIGINT attention directed to that area, which produced more intelligence on which to base US reactions, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, on [illegible] Secretary McNamara, commended DIRNSA and

directed that their expressions of gratitude and appreciation be conveyed to the personnel of NSA and SCA's who were involved, citing especially, USM-626J/USN-414T and USN-27 for the outstanding vigilance and skill and the forewarning of national magnitude of interest which they provided during the incidents in the Gulf of Tonkin.

Sources: ~~TSGW,~~ History of the 8th Radio Research Unit, pp. 6 and 8, 16 Aug 65; CI&H, ODCESSEC, HQ USASA. ~~SHVCCO,~~ Recommendation for Award of the Bronze Star Medal (SP4 Harry H. Evans), CO, 3d RRU, 19 Nov 64, and 1st and 2nd Ind., CUSASA-PAC and CG, USASA. ~~SHVCCO,~~ Recommendation of the Bronze Star Medal (SP5 Paul J. McQuaid), CO, 3d RRU, 18 Nov 64, and 1st and 2nd Ind., CUSASAPAC and CG, USASA; U, Msg 43758, COMUSMACV to CG, USASA, Recommendation for Award, 141123 December 65; TAG RRR (R-14/96) HQ USASA. N.B.: No other records of Tonkin coverage exist at HQ USASA or the 3d RRU/509th RR Group or 8th RRFS (USM-808) in SVN at this time (18 Oct 68). All traffic was passed to NSA.