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IPLACE: OPS1, [redacted] **Office**

IVIEWER: Johnson, Thomas [redacted]

[redacted] This is Oral History 08-95 of [redacted] in his office at OPS1, NSA. The interviewers are Mr. Thomas Johnson, and [redacted]

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My next direct support assignment was on the USS RS Edwards which was a destroyer which engaged in Desota patrols in the Gulf of Tonkin. This particular deployment was one month after the MADDOX Incident which really began the Vietnam situation in ernest. The decision was reached by the President right after the MADDOX and TURNER JOY incidents that we should ratchet up our military activities in an offensive context. The retaliatory raids against the naval bases after MADDOX and TURNER JOY are some of the examples. So since we were going up there after those incidents, as soon as you crossed the demilitarized zone extended into the Gulf of Tonkin, you were basically at general quarters all the time. Our mission basically was not only to collect to develop a technical data base for national and theater interests but also to provide, if you will, on-board advisory support to the ship, to the skipper of the ship and the crew. And so most of our targets were the North Vietnamese naval and air targets where they could come out and cause our ship to be in harm's way. We spent, as I recall, 45 or 50 days plying the waters just above the DMZ and around the DMZ. So we were looking at the southern naval bases in North Vietnam from the port of Tang Qua south to Bin Lin, as I recall the ports that we watched and the associated air and air defense capabilities in that area.

Johnson Can we go back to something?

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Johnson With the Gulf of Tonkin?

Yes.

Johnson What involvement did you have with that?

The involvement we had in that, I was off of TAD at the time and so our P&R section was exploiting a lot of the naval communications that were associated with the activities related to both MADDOX and TURNER JOY. The CRITIC, as I recall, that started the whole situation was actually produced from an attachment at Phu Bai in the Republic of Vietnam. And so we kind of got caught up in all of the follow-ups to the CRITIC and then the SIGINT Alert declaration was made and so we participated in the reporting that was affiliated with keeping track of the events that were ongoing at the time and providing

support for the air strikes and thinks like that. So it was a full-blown crisis focused effort principally from the section that I had responsibilities for.

Johnson [redacted] says that NSA came back and asked for all the traffic (TR NOTE: Mr. Johnson is barely audible at this point and it is not possible to understand the rest of the question)

[redacted]

I recall that was the case. That rather than just that material that we would data reduce and send back that they wanted full text of all the traffic (1g). I think that is correct. As I remember it, yeah. So that's what I was kind of what I was doing during the MADDOX and TURNER JOY incidents.

Johnson Was there prior to that, were there any (2g) disputes that you can recall between the Navy and NSA as to where this traffic was going to be processed. Whether it was going to be at (1g) or back at the Fort or going to be at San Miguel?

[redacted]

I guess the thing that sticks in my mind the most, I can't remember clearly enough about jurisdictional disputes. I had my first realization that the fount of technical continuity etc. was based at the national center at Fort Meade because oft times we would make some analytic judgements on what we were seeing in the traffic that we intercepted. And oft times we were corrected that we didn't have the complete picture nor did we have the X number of years of continuity that they had. And so oft times we were mentored appropriately so that we could enhance our technical capabilities. The other think that I remember, it was during the period of 1963 through about 1966 that everyone was engaged in [redacted]

[redacted]

Did you have any kind of reporting relationship with the (B% Det T) this (1g) Det that was in Vietnam in '62.

[redacted]

What we were trying to do, as I remember it, was kind of develop some division of effort between what they were doing and what we were doing at San Miguel. As my memory serves me, I think that they were given certain targets that were the targets that any of our ships or aircraft would first meet as they were deploying from bases in Vietnam or as they were moving up into the Yankee station areas, north of the Demilitarized Zone in the Gulf. So we kind of delineated responsibilities on the basis of the time sensitivity of the target. They were better connected to certain units in the Republic of Vietnam than we were at that time, and so it seemed to make sense that since the command nodes were there for those purposes that 414T and then 27J, that they would work the naval and the air defense activities closest to the DMZ and then we would try to take a picture of what was happening up in Haiphong and Thanh Hoa and some of

the northern naval bases. And then we also tried to maintain as much as capability from a tech data base because we had to build a tech sup det--technical support detachment-support kits that would go out on the ships when they would come into Subic Bay before they were deployed out into the Gulf.

So they didn't necessarily pass or share all their information through you. It went to...do you now if it would go to 1st Radio Company or would they just use you as the closest direct link?

The technical reporting as I remember it, and I'm talking now about the electronic technical reporting. I'm not sure how the hard copy got split up. There was the 5-ply, the goldenrod would stay at station and the green copy would come to NSA and the blue copy would go someplace else etc. Setting that aside because I just don't remember, you'd have to go back to the old tech info for that level of detail. The electronic reporting which was a date reduced technical summary or a techsum that would feed databases many places. Both we and 414T and later on when it became USN-27J, had basically the same technical distribution. So it would come back to NSA to the organization responsible for technical development and reporting back here. It would go to USN-414 We would each share our information with each other. So each of us would be on the distribution. The center at Clark Air Base would get it. The Army and the Air Force operations at Clark would get it. The activities would get the techsums. And I believe the Air Force activities, which at that time I believe, were located at also got the techsums. So it was kind of broadcast across a number of SIGINT producing organizations. There was, for example, a large tech support effort engaged by the Army at (B% Sangley Point) Station at Clark Air Base. They would do a lot of comparing the Navy SOI information with the ground forces to see if there was any similarities. I guess I would say that at that time in the Vietnam Era, the next largest center of traffic analytic excellence on the Vietnamese target was centered at, let's see? was that USM-9? Yes. OK. In the Philippines at Clark. The Army, when they were the Army Security Agency, had a corps of traffic analytic expertise that was world class at that time. When they were totally a SIGINT organization they didn't have all the other general intelligence accoutrements like INSCOM has now. But anyway, that was kind of the relationship we had with the Det. As years progressed, the Det, now USN-27J, really became the hub at Phu Bai for the Navy target. And USN-27 in the Philippines took on a much different role. This was after my time but I remember it from when I was back here. USN-27 then kind of became the place that continuously augmented the Dets on all the ships. It became the program too for the Navy and Marine Corps. And then most of the Marines really went to 27J. Because that was basically a Marine Corps operation at 27J. The commanders at USN-27J had, through a fair amount of the war were Marine officers: captains and majors, as I remember my history. Well anyway, that's what I was doing during MADDOX and little bit on how we were connected. The jurisdictional issue Tom...there has always been a jurisdictional issue between NSA and field operating elements based on the architecture that was in vogue: Did you centralize control or did you de-centralize control. Did you centralize reporting or did you de-centralize reporting. And that's just been part of our history over the years.

Johnson That was really right in the middle of the time when NSA was centralizing things like crazy and having a lot of trouble (B% without us knowing Southeast Asia at the time. It

was the '60's really, was the ((TR NOTE: the rest of the comment is too weak to understand. Mr. Johnson is too far from the microphone to provide a good quality recording; a problem throughout this interview))

[redacted]

But being out at the tip of the spear as it were, we worried more about whether we were technically correct, so we were down there in the (B% knitting) worrying more about than who was going to end up reporting things and what have you. It wasn't until I got back to Fort Meade where I engaged [redacted] and began to understand the "bigger picture."

Johnson I was just interested because we got...it was (1g) under [redacted] where we were very strong on the flavor of who's doing what, who's should do what. And I just wondered how that effected you out there. You were right in the center of it.

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//End of Interview//