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TAPE I of II - SIDE 1

Oral History Interview

NSA-OH-07-84

with

Lieutenant General Gordon A. Blake, U.S. Air Force, Retired

19 April 1984

Lt Gen Blake's residence in Universal City, Texas

By Robert D. Farley

INSERT A Today is 19 April 1984. Our interviewee is Lieutenant General Gordon A. Blake, United States Air Force, Retired.

General ~~Gen~~ Blake held the position of Director, National Security Agency, from July 1962 to May 1965, which was his last assignment before retirement from the Air Force. After graduating from West Point in 1931, he served as a Communications Officer with the Army Air Corps Unit in Hawaii. He set up the Army Airways Communications Office in Alaska, entered the Research and Development field at Wright Patterson Air Force Base and served in various additional command

Declassified and approved for release by NSA on 11-01-2005 pursuant to E.O. 12958, as amended

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FARLEY Absolutely. Sir, do you have any comments on the controversial subject that has been plaguing NSA and its precessor Agency for years, that the Agency is a producer of raw material rather than finished

intelligence, and we got this from DIA later?

BLAKE No, no, that I treated when I became involved in it from time to time as an interesting, intellectually philosophical argument. Obviously, if we are reading their mail to the extent that you get a message that is absolutely incontrovertible and you hand that to somebody that needs that information, you handed him finished intelligence. If he prefers to call it "raw" and put his own stamp, I believe, on it, that's his privilege, that's his job really. If he starts, and of course he does with great glee and gusto, if they ever started which I never recall a case, by saying, "Well, we're not too sure that these guys know what they are talking about," because we were usually the first. This one thing that I always admired and certainly supported, that to the extent that it is raw and requires some analysis, and has got some holes in it, and I recall a famous message having to do with the Tonkin Gulf and the single word, I don't know what that word was now, but I recall being briefed on this particular subject. ~~what~~ What was that word, was it "key"

and it cast some shadow on the Tonkin Gulf message that I guess still exists.

FARLEY Yes.

BLAKE But I never fought about that. I dismissed it. It depends, it may be raw as can be, and it may be finished, or maybe somewhere in between, and I expect the customer to receive what we give them with whatever analysis we may tack on tending to validate or say, "Wait a minute, now don't put $100 on this one, the odds are a bit long," and as long as we were honest, I never worried about that, because we produced a lot of finished intelligence.

FARLEY I know, call it what you will. Sir, you may have answered this, how deeply were you personally involved in the Bross Committee, '63, '64, in their discussions and decisions and actions?

BLAKE Well, I remember the Committee and I don't really remember how much I met with them. Don't even remember how it turned out.

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FARLEY ~~Alright,~~ All right. ~~Alright,~~ All right, maybe this one -- the Gulf of Tonkin incident occurred in August '64. What actions did you take? Did you establish a Task Group, a SIGINT alert, any adjustment of tasking? You talked about the message, the question on one word.

BLAKE The only thing I recall there was when SIGINT became so crucially important to whether the Tonkin Gulf incident

was exactly as it was portrayed. That was one of the few cases that I remember being briefed on very specific detail of that particular input, and I suppose the reason for that was that sometimes the Director had to be in a position to say, "Yes, I know all about that, I have gone into every last detail of it, and I believe what we say." That was probably the reason that I wanted to be on top of that particular one, but ~~I recall,~~ I wish I could remember that word. It had different meanings.

~~FARLEY~~ ~~Oh, I see.~~

~~BLAKE~~ A. depending on exactly how the thing was used.

FARLEY I should dig it out of the Archives and send you a copy, if I can. (Laughter) No?

BLAKE Don't worry about it.

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