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Hanyok
Joe, why don't you tell us how you got into the SIGINT business?

[redacted]

I enlisted in the Army in 1960, I guess it was. I went to the language school for Chinese and got assigned to the Philippines. I ended up as the chief of the reporting shop in the Philippines -- USM-9. The main mission in those days was North Vietnam ground forces. USN-27, which was down the road from us, did the Navy.

Hanyok
You were in Vietnam when the Gulf of Tonkin incident happened?

[redacted]

No. I went over to Phu Bai in early 1964, probably, to set up the reporting shop that was initially USM-626J; then it became USM-808. I was only there for a month.

Hanyok
You left when?

[redacted]

February, and went back to the Philippines. I left the Philippines probably in July of 1964.

Hanyok
Okay. So you were basically in transit when the Gulf of Tonkin happened? When you got back to NSA, where did you go?

NSA25X3

[redacted]

A14 to do [redacted] An old Air Force colonel said, "That's a weird assignment for you." ((TR NOTE: Laughter.)) I said, "I couldn't agree with you more." He said, "I'm going to do something about that." So somewhere probably around the latter part of October or November, I got assigned over to B26. One of the first things Dave Gaddy -- who was the chief of B261, I think it was -- asked me to do was to do an independent study of the Gulf of Tonkin incident.

Hanyok
That would have been roughly September or October?

[redacted]

Give or take.

Hanyok
Was it just you?

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[redacted]
Just me.

Hanyok
What did he ask you to do? To look at everything?

[redacted]
He told me to go do a review and come to my own conclusions about what happened.

Hanyok
What did you use when you did that?

[redacted]
That's one of the things I'm having a hard time remembering. I looked through all the intercept that they had in the division, or the branch. I guess it was a branch. I had most of it retranslated with one or two of the best linguists, and I don't remember who they were. I remember [redacted] was involved. I don't remember who else. I had them go over all of that stuff with me. I know I worked with a lot of Navy guys.

Hanyok
[redacted] would have been the primary linguist because he was the primary linguist during the incident.

[redacted]
I worked with a lot of guys who were working like the [redacted] and a lot of guys who were in the Navy liaison office. I don't remember what it was called in those days. Those are the guys who got me all the operational traffic. They had piles of operational traffic that I was able to go through. There was a lot of stuff coming just from the ship itself during all of that.

Hanyok
Yes, the Desoto reports. A lot of them are in there. I've seen them. But it was quite a bit of material then that you were looking at?

[redacted]
Yes. I went through a lot of stuff, and then I talked to people about, like, torpedo boat tactics and whether these guys were using something conventional or unconventional. I was told that basically what they were using was the Russian model -- two on one side, one on the other.

Hanyok
Let's talk about the famous after-action report. Let's see if we can find it -- Tab 52. Let's see if you recall this. ((TR NOTE: Sound of pages turning.)) Everything sort of hinges on this. Do you recall that? It's NSA translation 2/O/VHEVHNT10-64. Do you recall this translation? It's become very famous inasmuch as it's even mentioned in LBJ's memoirs about the incident. He talks about this translation -- the loss, the sacrifice of two boats and so on. Do you recall looking at this?

[redacted]
That was the tally, right? Didn't we lose two planes?

Hanyok

My first question is, do you recall seeing this?

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No. I think that the stuff that I had in my article that I wrote -- two pilots, one killed, one captured -- that all came from operational reporting. NSA25X3

Hanyok

The incidents of the aircrafts, I think, was actually on August 5th, when the strikes occurred, and the aircraft got shot down. But the issue here is...This was intercepted on 4 August, and the time here -- 1542 Zulu -- puts it about an hour and 10 minutes into the supposed engagement that night. This has always been interpreted as an after-action report, and there have always been difficulties with this by people who have looked at it because of the way the message reads and the fact that, how can it be an after-action report if it's only an hour into the event? And who are these people talking to one another? And what exactly is the time frame? This was I believe initially used by McNamara for two points in his justification for the bombings, which happened the next day. Unfortunately, the problem with this translation is we can't find the original Vietnamese anywhere. That's the problem.

[redacted]

I'm wondering if this is actually an after-action report for the earlier...

Hanyok

Well, that's been the interpretation, and the reason why was that USN-27 at 1550 Zulu intercepted a short message apparently from one of the Swatow boats that had been involved in the attacks on the 2nd to a coastal facility. At least that's the way they interpreted it. It read originally that they had lost two comrades and that everybody was okay. Then five minutes later, USN-27 sent in another message that talked about, down here, seeing planes, they said, sink or fall into the sea and that the American boat might have been damaged. Two separate reports came in. If you hook them together, you get this translation. The problem is, of course, the original from 27 says two comrades. The NSA version says they lost two boats. I'm not a Vietnamese linguist, but I did look up in the code charts for this system -[redacted]- and I did look in dictionaries.

(B% Dongchi), which means comrade, is a noun used specifically only in a personal context. In other words, when you talk about a comrade, I'm talking about people. I'm not doing some sort of metaphorical or poetic license thing saying comrade-boat. I'm saying comrade. The word for boat is (B% tao), which is often abbreviated to "t" when you see it in messages -- you'll see a "t" followed by a number, which basically means boat so-and-so. They're not even close to each other in the code charts. They can't be Morse garbles. One begins with a 4 and the other begins with a 5, and the numbers aren't even close to get a Morse garble. So the question has remained in my mind and those of people who have looked at it -- and we may have to go back and talk to [redacted] and so on. One, how did you get from comrades to boats? Two, what happened to all the original Vietnamese?

[redacted]

Could there have been more than one intercept of that message? USN-27J was operating at the Phu Bai in those days.

Hanyok
I checked the records. 27-J doesn't have anything. 27 is the one that intercepts this stuff.

[redacted]

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I also recall that a lot of this intercept wasn't very clean.

Hanyok
No, it wasn't. There were a lot of gaps and garbles and so on. But the problem is that the reporting by 27 is pretty straightforward, you know, "We sacrificed two comrades." The NSA says, "We sacrificed two boats." LBJ mentions this in his memoirs. "Our experts," and he doesn't identify who they are, "said that the Vietnamese commander could have been referring to two comrades or two boats in his unit, but we believed it was the boats." Obviously this got all the way up to the White House. The question is, how did they do it? Unfortunately, we don't have the paper record. That's the problem that we have latched onto. How did we get from comrades to boats? If 27 is saying comrades, and NSA is saying boats, we've got a real distinct problem here. Without the Vietnamese text, we have to really wonder how they got there. Who's telling the truth?

[redacted]

The inclination would be to believe the NSA version because we didn't have the same pressure of time on us that they did in the field.

Hanyok
Well, yes. But it was going...

[redacted]

I harken back to another episode we had where the field put out a thing talking about 50,000 Chinese (1-2G) through Laos. It turned out to be a Coca-Cola truck that was stuck.

Hanyok
Yes. I've had millions of stories. When I was in NSOC, every time the field would come in with a CRITIC, everybody would just cover their ears and eyes. "Oh, no. Here we go again." When you did your review, do you recall seeing anything like this?

[redacted]

I don't recall it specifically.

Hanyok
What was your conclusion, when you went back to talk to Dave Gaddy after you had looked at everything?

[redacted]

That the incident never happened.

Hanyok
The second incident never happened?

[redacted]

I think most of the Navy guys that I talked to believed that, as well.

Hanyok

This was November, December?

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Probably December 1964. I don't think there was much doubt about the first incident.

Hanyok
No. That happened in daytime and they could see them. The problem with the second incident...

[redacted]
The second incident was at night. It was not a clear night.

Hanyok
It turned out that there were heavy swells, and the scenario...If you look at the scenario claimed by the Navy. For those who claimed an attack, the scenario becomes impossible once you start adding everything together.

[redacted]
Right. The number of torpedoes fired...

Hanyok
The original boats were coming in from the east, so if the Maddox and the Turner Joy are 80 miles out at sea, and they don't detect the North Vietnamese boats until they're to the east, that meant the North Vietnamese boats had to sail all the way around the destroyers and come in from the east without being detected and without their radars being on either, which is even more fantastic.

[redacted]
Because they were not good sailors.

Hanyok
No, no.

[redacted]
They used to drive into the banks when they were trying to get up the Red River.

Hanyok
Yes. They had a hard time even getting the first attack together. I've gone back and looked at some of the intercept, and they had conflicting orders and didn't know quite what to do, so there seemed to be a lot of confusion. Had you heard afterwards -- I guess we get back into 1967, 1968 time frame when the Fulbright foreign relations committee is talking about the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, and McNamara comes in and gives a talk on it, a deposition, and then answers questions about it. Do you recall NSA's involvement in that? Did we pass information to him for that?

[redacted]
By 1967, I was in Hawaii.

Hanyok
When you did the report for Dave, was it just a verbal report back to him?

[redacted]
No, it was what I later published in the *Cryptolog*.

Hanyok
Okay.

[redacted]
Nothing happened with that. I didn't know what Dave was going to do with it, and it was several years later when I came across it in my stack of junk. I figured it was a shame to let it all lie fallow, so I gave it to the *Cryptolog*, and it published it.

Hanyok
They have to go talk to Dave again. [redacted] (b) (6)

[redacted]
Oh, no!

Hanyok
Yes. Several months ago, maybe a year ago he [redacted] I talk to him occasionally on email. That's interesting. But you're not aware of this Del Lang thing?

[redacted]
No. I don't think I ever did see his.

Hanyok
Del was B205, I think, at the time.

[redacted]
At the time I would not have questioned this because I was a lieutenant and he was a lieutenant colonel.

Hanyok
Yes. The genesis of this is apparently DIA and NSA were asked to produce a chronology some time afterwards, probably by mid to late August. This was what came out. The problem with this is that there are enormous gaps, and in this case, when you look at material from 2 August and the so-called CRITIC from 4 August, which was what they interpreted were military operations being an attack on the Desoto, what you find is some of the intercepts with the original Vietnamese text, like here. ((TR NOTE: Sound of pages rustling.)) That's in there. They have it in every case, yet when you get to this, which is so critical...I mean, McNamara talks about it in his book. He doesn't specifically mention the report, but the issues are in here about who's in boats, and planes being shot down and so on. He mentions it in his book. LBJ mentions it in his book. Yet this is included only as a sample, and we can't find the original Vietnamese text, the intercept, or anything. That's what has got us...We thought, "Why wouldn't they have saved this if it was so critical?" That's the issue that comes to mind. It's really difficult. It's entirely possible that if McNamara didn't have that translation in hand or had been briefed about the translation, it's possible that the attacks the next day would never have gone off because they would have felt that they didn't have enough evidence.

[redacted]
I sort of think the attacks would have taken place the next day no matter what else

existed just because of the initial attack and our desire to preserve out rights on the high seas.

Hanyok
There were a lot of problems that afternoon.

[redacted]

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We were pretty much in a war-like state anyway.

Hanyok
They were just ready to go. CINCPAC was ready to go.

[redacted]

It was about time we went out and killed someone. ((TR NOTE: Laughter.))

Hanyok
That answers some questions. Too bad Del Lang is not around. I'll probably have to talk to [redacted] Other people who were involved during that period.. [redacted]

[redacted] is one.

Hanyok
Lou Grant. Does that name pop up?

[redacted]

Yes. Is he still around?

Hanyok
I don't know. Dave Gaddy. I think Dave was actually not in country when this happened. I think he told me he was in Phu Bai at the time. He and [redacted] were there, and he said he got back and wanted to see the material. Milt Zaslow. [redacted]

[redacted]

I can't remember who else was in that shop in those days. There were just a handful of linguists. There weren't many.

Hanyok
Let's turn the clock up to 1972. Do you remember the story about Tordella talking to an intelligence committee or congress about this incident?

[redacted]

No.

Hanyok
That got reported in newspapers and so on, but I can't find who he was talking to at the time. Dr. T said that essentially what was reported to have happened on the 4th actually was talking about the 2nd. They were not certain where he got that from.

[redacted]

This says that the flares may have been mistaken for aircraft.

Hanyok

That's probably what happened. As it turns out, the aircraft were dropping flares, and the Turner Joy and the Maddox were firing starshells. It's entirely possible that the North Vietnamese on the shore were observing this and may have felt they had a hit. In fact, Turner Joy and Maddox fired close to 300 rounds that night, so there was a lot of ordnance being dumped.

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[redacted]

From the shore, that would have looked like a major attack.

Hanyok
Yes. That's probably the source of their look at it. That's interesting that you've never seen that before.

[redacted]

I don't recall seeing it. I think what they wanted me to do was, without any kind of bias at any time, look at this stuff.

Hanyok
Why don't we end that here, then?

////////////////end of interview//////////////