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CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS

TUESDAY, AUGUST 4

and

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 5, 1964

TONKIN GULF STRIKE

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August 28, 1964

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INTRODUCTION

This is a chronological account of the events of Tuesday, August 4, 1964 and Wednesday, August 5, 1964 as they relate to the attacks on the destroyers MADDOX and C. TURNER JOY in international waters by patrol boats of the North Vietnamese Navy and the subsequently executed retaliatory strikes against the North Vietnamese by naval aircraft from the USS CONSTELLATION and TICONDEROGA.

No chronology, of course, can ever hope to capture the full flavor and intensity of these two days in August. The events were complex, the pressures were great. Throughout, however, a number of basic themes emerge. There is the search for options, as word of the second attack on the destroyers filters in early on the morning of August 4th. These options must be shaped not only to the immediate problem of dealing swiftly and sharply with the PT Boat Bases but must, in the selection of additional reinforcements, deal as well with the long range strategic implications of the situation. There is a period of carefully refining these options for the President, the ultimate decision resting in his hands. Planning the strike occupies a good part of the afternoon of the 4th, coupled with the insistent demand that the attacks on the destroyers be verified clearly and convincingly. Throughout the evening, word is awaited for the first launch, signalling the start of the retaliatory response. The launches begin at 10:43 PM, EDT, and the President goes on the air within the hour to announce our action to the world. Finally, the strike itself is completed, a remarkably successful operation.

The chronology has relied substantially on cables, recordings, maps, news releases, minutes of relevant meetings, and discussions with Messrs. McNamara, Vance, Bundy, McNaughton and General Wheeler.

It must be remembered that much of the action reported is occurring simultaneously at different levels - the Pentagon, in CINCPAC Headquarters Honolulu, Tonkin Gulf, the South China Sea, and the target areas. Most of these locations are in different time zones, and reports of the action arrive at different intervals. For ease of reference, however, all of the times, unless otherwise indicated, are Washington Eastern Daylight Time.

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Saigon time is 12 hours later than EDT. Gulf of Tonkin time is 11 hours later: the Destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin kept Saigon time, while the Carriers there used Golf of Tonkin time beginning in the later afternoon (EDT) of August 4. CINCPAC (Honolulu) time is 6 hours earlier than EDT. Thus, for example, 10:00 AM in Washington is 10:00 PM Saigon time and 4:00 AM Honolulu time.

The various abbreviations used throughout are these:

CINCPAC - Commander-in-Chief, Pacific - Admiral Sharp

CINCPACFLT - Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet- Admiral Moore

COMSEVENTHFLT - Commander, Seventh Fleet - Admiral Johnson

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TUESDAY

AUGUST 4TH, 1964

7:40 AM (7:40 PM, August 4, Saigon time): The MADDOX reports that an attack appears imminent from actions taken by unidentified vessels. The MADDOX, in company with the C. TURNER JOY, is heading southeast near the center of the Gulf of Tonkin in international waters approximately 65 miles from the nearest land. These ships immediately go on the alert. (NMCC receives this report at about 9:30 AM.)

8:13 AM: First word of a possible attack on the MADDOX is received at the Pentagon by the DIA Indications Center over the phone from NSA. While on the phone, a copy of the NSA field unit message arrives and copies are delivered sometime about 9:00 a.m. to the Secretary of Defense McNamara, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Wheeler. The message states that there are "imminent plans of DRV naval action possibly against DeSoto mission" gathered from COMINT.

8:36 AM (8:36 PM, August 4, Saigon time): The MADDOX establishes its first radar contacts with two unidentified surface vessels and three unidentified aircraft. U. S. fighter aircraft are then launched from the USS TICONDEROGA to provide the MADDOX and the TURNER JOY with protection against possible attacks from the unidentified vessels and aircraft, in accordance with the President's previously issued directives. At this time, the TICONDEROGA is located approximately 100 nautical miles East North East of Da Nang. (NMCC receives this report at about 10:30 AM.)

9:08 AM (9:08 PM, August 4, Saigon time): The MADDOX reports that the unidentified aircraft have disappeared from its radar screen but that the surface vessels are still remaining at a distance. U. S. aircraft from the TICONDEROGA arrive and commence defensive patrol over the MADDOX and the C. TURNER JOY. (NMCC receives this report at 11:04 AM.)

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9:12 AM: McNamara calls the President and tells him about the NSA/DIA intelligence warning he has just received that the MADDOX is on the alert again, with the presence of hostile ships reported.

9:19 AM: Wheeler is now in receipt of several messages, including the NSA/DIA cable, indicating that the MADDOX may be under attack. He calls Admiral Grimm, NMCC, and asks whether Grimm has seen any messages on the attack and whether CINCPAC will be able to respond effectively. Grimm reports that he has one message, but has not talked to CINCPAC. Wheeler then says he will call CINCPAC himself.

9:23 AM (3:23 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Wheeler calls General McCutcheon (CINCPAC J-3) and asks whether he has received any word on an impending attack on the destroyers. McCutcheon says he has no word, but will immediately check. Wheeler is insistent that the destroyers "clobber" the attackers, and make every effort to destroy the hostile ships, using additional air support, if required.

* * * *

9:25 AM - 11:25 AM
TUESDAY, AUGUST 4
EARLY MEETINGS AT PENTAGON

McNamara, Deputy Secretary Vance, General Burchinal, Colonel Jones, and Admiral Mustin of the Joint Staff meet at the Pentagon beginning at 9:25 AM as reports of the attack on the destroyers come in. As the situation grows more intense, possible levels and time of retaliation are discussed, and target folders are examined. High on the list are the PT boats and bases and supporting POL installations, but other targets such as airfields, industrial complexes and bridges are also scrutinized. Captain Miller of the Navy, a mine expert, is also asked to join the meeting and the possibility of mining one or more of the North Vietnamese important ports is discussed. Here it is pointed out that the mines would have to be brought to the carriers from Subic Bay, the Philippines.

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McNamara orders that mines be brought to the carriers as soon as possible. Burchinal informs McNamara that a retaliatory attack can take place at first light. McNamara, during this time, calls the President, informs him that a retaliatory attack is being planned, and tells the President that he will call Secretary Rusk and Presidential Assistant Bundy to join him in preparing a number of options to be presented to the President as soon as possible.*

During these discussions, McNamara develops four options for a sharp limited blow and one option for continuous pressure against the North Vietnamese. The four options for the sharp limited blow are:

1. Air strikes against PT boats and their bases.
2. Air strikes against petroleum installations.
3. Air strikes on bridges.
4. Air strikes on prestige targets, such as a steel plant.

The option for continuing pressure against the North Vietnamese is to mine important ports along their coastline.

McNamara, about 11:00 AM, summons Rusk, Bundy, and the JCS and they arrive shortly thereafter.

Wheeler leaves Washington, D. C. at 10:30 AM to keep a previously arranged appointment with the New York Times editorial board for a luncheon and off-the-record discussion. He arrives in New York at noon, and ten minutes later is called by McNamara, who tells him to finish up his business and return to the Pentagon. Wheeler leaves New York at 3:00 PM, arrives at the Pentagon at 4:30 PM, and immediately meets with Burchinal.

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*McNamara made three calls to the President during this period at 9:43 AM, 10:53 AM and 11:06 AM.

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9:26 AM (9:26 PM, August 4, Saigon time): The carriers report to CINCPAC stating that pursuant to JCS orders issued on August 2, they have launched a combat air patrol over the destroyers, consisting of 2 F-8s, 2 A-3s, and 4 A-1s.

9:30 AM (9:30 PM, August 4, Saigon time): Additional vessels are observed on the MADDOX radar screens, and these vessels begin to close rapidly on the destroyer patrol at speeds in excess of 40 knots. As the attacking craft continue to close rapidly from the west and south, the MADDOX evaluates their intentions as hostile. (NMCC receives this message at 11:20.)

9:32 AM (3:32 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Grimm (NMCC) contacts the CINCPAC duty officer, Major Rosenbaum. Grimm reports that the NMCC has just received word from the MADDOX that a possible attack appears imminent from PT boats, wants to know if air cover is available, and what has been done to supply the destroyers with an effective response capability. Grimm indicates that additional measures, beyond those directly involving the destroyers, are being considered in Washington. The duty officer has no information about the situation but adds that McCutcheon is on his way in. Grimm says that he will arrange for an open line between CINCPAC and Washington, and tells the CINCPAC representative that this is a "hot one."

9:52 AM (9:52 PM, August 4, Saigon time): The destroyers report that they are under continuous torpedo attack and are engaged in defensive counterfire against North Vietnamese patrol boats. (NMCC receives this message at 11:39 AM and 11:42 AM.)

10:04 AM (4:04 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): McCutcheon calls Burchinal, who is then in McNamara's office. Burchinal tells him that the Pentagon has just received a "flash" that the destroyers are under attack. McCutcheon replies that he has not seen it yet, but indicates that the fleet and the Carrier Task Force have been alerted. The TICONDEROGA, about 15 minutes away from the destroyers by air, is alerted. So is the CONSTELLATION, which had left Hong Kong yesterday and is headed south. Burchinal

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states that the CONSTELLATION will be ordered to move into position off South Vietnam, in the vicinity of the TICONDEROGA. He also tells McCutcheon that a possible retaliatory strike is being considered against North Vietnamese bases and asks him to take a look at some of the possible targets if, in fact, an attack is carried out against the destroyers. Burchinal mentions that McNamara is considering a new set of rules of engagement.

10:15 AM (10:15 PM, August 4, Saigon time): The destroyers report that they have avoided torpedoes and have sunk one of the attacking craft. (NMCC receives this at 11:52 AM.)

10:19 AM (4:19 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): McNamara calls Sharp and asks whether he has seen the messages regarding a possible attack on the MADDOX. Sharp says he has just arrived at the CINCPAC Command Center and that the messages are in. They discuss the "kill" capability of the MADDOX and the TURNER JOY. McNamara is particularly interested in assuring that the destroyers have whatever they need in the way of complete support, air and sea. McNamara tells Sharp to make it "perfectly clear" to the destroyers that the objective is to "destroy the attacking craft." McNamara also indicates that a modification of the rules of engagement is being sent to Sharp. (See 10:33 entry below.)

10:33 AM: A message, personally signed McNamara, is sent from the JCS to CINCPAC modifying the existing rules of engagement for the destroyers and their supporting aircraft. Under the old rules, in event of attack in international waters (11 miles offshore or more), U.S. Forces were to destroy the attackers, but hot pursuit of attacking forces into hostile waters or airspace was not authorized (JCS Message 7681, August 2, 1964) and the destroyers were to approach the North Vietnamese coastline no closer than 11 miles. Combat air patrol was restricted to daylight hours and maintained seaward of the destroyers so as to preclude any possibility of overflying North Vietnam. (JCS Message 7680, July 2, 1964) Under the new rules (JCS Message 7700), the closest approach to the North

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Vietnam coastline for the destroyer patrol is 11 nautical miles, and in the event of a hostile attack, aircraft only are authorized to pursue and attack the hostile forces up to the three mile limit of the North Vietnamese coastline. The message also directed that the CONSTELLATION be moved into the area off South Vietnam, with the exact location at the discretion of the commander. (Note: At 5:19 AM, August 2, the CONSTELLATION was ordered to slip quietly out of Hong Kong. The CONSTELLATION departed Hong Kong at 6:01 PM and proceeded south toward the Gulf of Tonkin.)

10:42 AM (10:42 PM, August 4, Saigon time): The destroyers report that they have evaded additional torpedoes and have sunk another of the attacking craft. Other protective aircraft have arrived overhead, but weather and darkness are hampering their activities. (NMCC receives this message at 11:37 AM.)

10:52 AM (10:52 PM, August 4, Saigon time): The MADDOX reports that the destroyers are still under attack. (NMCC receives this message at 12:24 PM.)

10:55 AM (4:55 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Miller of Joint Staff calls CINCPAC and directs that mines be placed aboard the TICONDEROGA.

10:59 AM (4:59 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Sharp calls Burchinal in McNamara's office, and a discussion of possible options for a retaliatory strike ensues. Sharp suggests HON NE, HON ME, BEN THUY, and QUANG KHE. Burchinal indicates that a number of options along these and other lines are being considered. Sharp says that a strike could be carried out -- "All you have to do is say so" -- states that an armed reconnaissance along the North Vietnamese coast would be advantageous, and points out that the CONSTELLATION, about 350 miles from the destroyers, is coming in to provide support. Sharp says, "She could go in there right now and support them . . . we've speeded her up to get her down there as fast as possible." There is also talk of providing the carriers with a mining capability. Burchinal tells Sharp that McNamara wants him to get a mining capability on the TICONDEROGA

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as quickly as possible. Sharp says that it might take about 48 hours to achieve the capability, the problem being to get the mines aboard the carriers. He also reports that he has a message indicating that the destroyers are under continuous torpedo attacks.

11:18 AM (5:18 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Sharp calls Burchinal and provides him with the latest situation report on the attack. According to Sharp, the destroyers were exchanging fire with the patrol boats and the MADDOX had dodged at least five torpedoes. Sharp then suggests that the LOC CHAO estuary be added to any list of targets since he now has information it is being used as a hiding place for the PT boats. When Sharp mentions the desirability of an armed reconnaissance "at first light" along the coastline, Burchinal makes it absolutely clear that McNamara is seriously considering more severe action. He also indicates that there is a desire to act "at the first light background." He tells Sharp that Secretary of State Rusk is on his way to the Pentagon, and that meetings will be held later at the White House. Sharp reiterates that it will take about 48 hours to attain a mining capability.

11:30 AM (11:30 PM, August 4, Saigon time): The CONSTELLATION receives a preliminary alerting message stating that for planning purposes "there is a strong possibility you will be directed on short notice to lay on armed reconnaissance at sea against Swatows or reprisal attack against Swatow bases such as QUANG KHE, BEN THUY or PHUC LOI." At this time, the CONSTELLATION is heading in a south southwest direction to join the TICONDEROGA.

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11:20 AM - 12:30 PM
TUESDAY, AUGUST 4
JCS MEET

BUNDY AND RUSK ARRIVE AT PENTAGON

11:20 AM: At McNamara's call, the JCS meet in McNamara's dining room with Vance and McNamara. Present are Acting Chairman LeMay, Admiral McDonald, General Johnson, General Greene, General Goodpaster, Burchinal, Mustin and Joint Staff assistants. McNamara informs the JCS that he has called the President and that he is interested in a quick capability to respond.

11:38 AM: Rusk and Green (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Far Eastern Affairs) arrive at the JCS meeting. At McNamara's direction, Burchinal briefs Rusk.

11:40 AM: Bundy arrives at JCS meeting. McNamara briefs Bundy. McNamara describes the five options listed on page 5 above. McNamara informs the group that he has issued orders to have mines moved from Subic Bay into Da Nang. There is a discussion of retaliatory measures. McNamara and Bundy discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a sharp limited blow such as air strikes and/or the continuing pressure of mining the North Vietnamese coast. McNamara tells LeMay that the JCS should work up recommendations for immediate action, then recommended actions for 24, 48 and 60 hours ahead, with special emphasis on reinforcements, such as the movement of B-57s into South Vietnam and fighter-interceptors into the Philippines.

12:04 PM: McNamara, Rusk, Bundy, Green (State Dept.) and Vance move to McNamara's office, while the JCS continue meeting in McNamara's dining room. At this meeting the options are essentially refined to three:

1. Sharp limited strikes against such targets as PT boats, PT bases, oil depots, etc.
2. Continuing pressure, i.e., mining the Vietnam coast.
3. A combination of both.

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12:20 PM: McNamara, Rusk, Bundy and Greene depart for White House. Vance goes into McNamara's dining room to ask JCS if it would make any difference whether the retaliatory strikes were conducted at first light. JCS tell Vance that the time of attack would make no difference from a military standpoint but that fewer people would be at the PT boat bases and supporting installations at first light.

12:25 PM: Vance departs for the White House. The JCS continue meeting until 1:49 PM. During their meeting, at JCS direction, Burchinal calls McNamara at White House to recommend the sharp limited response option.

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12:40 - 3:00 PM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING

LUNCH WITH THE PRESIDENT

A regularly scheduled National Security Council Meeting centering on the Cyprus situation is in progress when McNamara, Rusk, and Bundy arrive at the White House. McNamara briefs the participants*, including the President, on the available details of the attack on the destroyers. Rusk indicates that he, McNamara, and the JCS are developing a set of options, but that they are not sufficiently refined for presentation at that time.

At a lunch, which began about 1:04 PM and ended about 2:50 PM, following the NSC meeting, the types of response and the targets are key topics. Rusk, McNamara, McCone, Bundy, and Vance are with the President at lunch.

*Present are Robert Kennedy, McCone, McDermott, Ball, Talbot, Dillon, Rowan, Reedy, Valenti, Clifton, Bromley Smith, and Komer.

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The President agrees that a firm, swift retaliatory strike must be carried out. Here, a general consensus is formed on the approach finally taken in the JCS message to CINCPAC, developed later that afternoon, ordering the strikes into execution against the PT boats located at bases PORT WALLUT, HON GAY, PHUC LOI and QUANG KHE and LOC CHAO estuary and the oil depot at VINH. (See the 5:19 PM entry below.) The mining option, as well as an attack on HAIPHONG, is rejected. The President asks how long it would take to execute the strike. McNamara estimates from the advice he has received that a strike could be launched at about 7:00 PM, (7:00 AM, Saigon time). The President suggests that McNamara call the JCS to confirm the time, but McNamara says he wants to work it out carefully with the JCS on his return to the Pentagon.

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12:22 PM Sharp calls Burchinal and gives him the latest situation report on the torpedo firings at the destroyers. Estimates are that 3 to 6 PT Boats are engaged, with two reported sunk, no enemy aircraft are reported in the area, and aircraft (10 A-1s, 2 F-8s) from the CONSTELLATION are on station over the destroyers. Sharp asks that the destroyers be given permission to pursue PT Boats to the three-mile limit, and that aircraft be permitted to engage in hot pursuit over North Vietnamese territory. Burchinal advises him that the rules of engagement are being considered by McNamara and the JCS. Burchinal advises Sharp to dig out target material on PHOC LOI, QUANG KHE, and the VINH oil complex.

12:32 PM (12:32 AM Saigon time, August 5): The destroyers report that at least two enemy craft have been sunk, but that low ceilings continue to hamper the aircraft operations. (NMCC receives this report about 1 1/2 to 2 hours later.)

12:54 PM (12:54 AM Saigon time, August 5): In addition to the torpedo attack, the TURNER JOY reports that during the engagement she was fired upon by automatic weapons while being illuminated by searchlights. (NMCC receives this report about 1 1/2 to 2 hours later.)

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12:57 PM (6:57 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): CINCPAC sends message to JCS recommending that authority be granted to conduct punitive U. S. air strikes as soon as possible against BEN THUY, HON ME, QUANG KHE, and LOC CHAO. (NMCC receives this message at 1:27 PM.)

1:01 PM (7:01 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Sharp calls Burchinal and reports two jet aircraft have been sighted flying out of HAINAN as far south as DA NANG. Sharp says that we cannot afford to permit hostile aircraft to fly over carriers. Sharp then quotes proposed message on rules of engagement for aircraft which would grant authority to declare hostile and engage any North Vietnamese/ChiCom aircraft whose actions show within a "reasonable certainty" that an attack on U. S. forces is intended. Burchinal agrees that the message should be sent if needed for the security of CINCPAC Forces, will note Sharp's comments for the JCS, and tells Sharp that a meeting is now going on at the White House.

1:03 PM: Bob Hayes at the White House Situation Room calls Col. Nickols at Pentagon Command Center and advises that the NSC meeting has just broken up. McNamara, McCone, Rusk, Bundy, and Vance have now gone to lunch with the President. Situation Room wants to be sure that the latest reports from the destroyers are forwarded at once.

1:24 PM: McNamara, still at White House, calls Burchinal at Pentagon. Burchinal tells him that Sharp had reported the presence of hostile aircraft (probably IL-28's) flying out of HAINAN and was issuing a "to engage" order if the security of his forces was threatened by enemy air (see the 1:01 entry above). McNamara is insistent that faster situation reports be obtained from the MADDOX and asks that Sharp try to contact the destroyer by radio. Burchinal advises that the JCS have selected the option involving air strikes against PHUC LOI, QUANG KHE, LOC CHAO, and the VINH-PHUC LOI oil complex.

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1:27 PM (1:27 AM, August 5, Saigon time): The Destroyer Division Commander on the MADDOX sends a "Flash" message to CINCPACFLT, with JCS on the information list. The "Flash" states that a review of the action makes many reported contacts and torpedoes fired "appear doubtful". "Freak weather effects" on radar, and "over-eager" sonarmen may have accounted for many reports. "No visual sightings" have been reported by the MADDOX, and the Commander suggests that a "complete evaluation" be undertaken before any further action. (NMCC receives this report about 1 1/2 to 2 hours later.) (Note: Sharp repeats the substance of this message to Burchinal. See the 1:59 PM and 2:08 PM entries below.)

1:28 PM (7:28 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Following up McNamara's request, Burchinal calls Sharp and asks for a status report on the engagement. Sharp reports that two PT Boats have been sunk but is uncertain as to the total number involved and says that some 13 torpedoes have been launched. Also, he reports that there is some indication of enemy aircraft in the area but says that aircraft from both the TICONDEROGA and CONSTELLATION are on the scene. Burchinal asks Sharp to obtain a direct radio report from the ships engaged.

1:30 PM (1:30 AM, August 5, Saigon time): The destroyers report that the attacking craft had apparently broken off the engagement. The MADDOX and TURNER JOY are directed to resume their patrol in the Gulf of Tonkin at daylight on the 5th of August. (NMCC receives this message about 1 1/2 to 2 hours later.)

1:59 PM (7:59 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Sharp calls Burchinal and says that he cannot contact ships by voice radio, but tells him that he has sent message requesting that situation reports be expedited. As for the communication link between CINCPAC and the destroyers, Sharp says that "our Flash messages have choked up the circuit. I have just told everybody to knock off using FLASH." Sharp says that the last message from the ships reports that freak weather is affecting radar performance, with many contacts and torpedo runs doubtful. Sharp says that the MADDOX itself has reported no visual sightings, and over-anxious

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sonarmen may have accounted for what they erroneously thought to be torpedoes.

2:08 PM (8:08 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Sharp advises Burchinal that the latest situation report indicates that three PT boats have been sunk, and that the weather is deteriorating and hampering aircraft operations. Sharp expresses the view that there is no doubt that a torpedo attack did occur, but adds that many of the reported torpedo attacks may have been due to inaccurate sonar reports. "Whenever they get keyed up on a thing like this, everything they hear on the sonar is a torpedo," says Sharp.

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3:00 PM - 5:15 PM
TUESDAY, AUGUST 4
MEETINGS AT THE PENTAGON
THE STRIKE EXECUTE MESSAGE IS DRAFTED

At the Pentagon, the Joint Chiefs begin their meeting at 3:00 PM*. McNamara and Vance arrive at 3:06 PM and inform the Chiefs that the President wants the strikes to take place at 7:00 PM Washington time, if possible, and at the following targets: PT boats and bases at QUANG KHE, PHOC LOI, PORT WALLUT, HON GAY and LOC CHAO, and the oil complex at VINH. The JCS agree with this proposal. At about 3:25 PM, Burchinal alerts Sharp by phone and gives him the targets to be attacked and the time of attack. At 4:42 PM, McNamara and Vance return to the JCS meeting. McNamara states that the time of the strike is important, for there will be no announcement until the strike gets under way. McNamara reviews the strike message which originally reads "By 0700 local time 5 August or as soon thereafter as weather permits conduct attack" and changes it to "By 0700 local 5 August conduct a one-time maximum effort attack",

* Throughout the afternoon, Wheeler, LeMay, McDonald, Johnson, Greene, Burchinal, Goodpaster, Mustin, General Carroll and Service and Joint Staff assistants are present at various intervals.

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and that "if weather precludes meeting the above time of attack, proceed soonest, and notify JCS ASAP." (The major part of the message is quoted in the 5:19 PM entry below.) Also during the meeting, the deployment and alerting of reinforcements to the area is considered, telling proof of our desire to escalate if we had to. These are divided into three categories. In the First category are those forces ordered deployed as soon as possible. They consist of the 1st CVS Group (the Kearsage, 4 destroyers, and 3 destroyer escorts) which would be moved from Japan to the South China Sea; a Marine Special Landing Force (1600 men, 24 helicopters, the Valley Forge and supporting Craft) to be moved from Subic Bay to the vicinity of Da Nang; the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, consisting of 6500 men to be moved from Okinawa to the South China Sea; an F-101 Reconnaissance Task Force to be moved from Shaw AFB to Kadena and a CVA Task Group, consisting of the Ranger and 4 destroyers to be moved from the 1st Fleet to WESTPAC.

The Second category are those forces alerted for deployment immediately upon the receipt of political clearance. These will consist of 2 B-57 squadrons, to be moved from Clark AFB to South Vietnam; 1 F-105 squadron to be moved from Yokota to Korat; 1 F-100 squadron to be moved from Clark AFB to Takhli; 12 F-102s to be moved from Clark AFB to South Vietnam; 8 KC-135s to be moved from SAC to Clark AFB; 2 F-100 squadrons from STRICOM to Clark; 1 F-105 squadron from STRICOM to Yokota; and 1 Reconnaissance Task Force (6 RF-101s) from Misawa/Kadena to Southeast Asia.

The Third category consists of those forces alerted for possible deployment to Southeast Asia. These are the 173rd Airborne Brigade, a Forward Floating Depot, a Marine Air Group, and an Army Brigade.

3:30 PM (9:30 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Mustin of the Joint Staff calls Sharp and tells him to be on the alert since a strike execute message is being prepared and would be transmitted as soon as released.

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3:34 PM: Mustin calls General Smith, Deputy Director for Operations, Joint Staff, and informs him that the JCS are in session, that a strike execute message is now being typed for final review by the JCS and that Sharp knows it is coming. Mustin asks that the line be held open for an immediate transmission of the strike execute message to Sharp.

4:08 PM (10:08 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): McNamara calls Sharp and asks for the latest information on the destroyer attack. Sharp responds by saying that although he has just received a sum-up situation report from Destroyer Task Force Commander Moore it "indicates a little doubt on just exactly what went on." McNamara wants to know if there is a possibility that no attack occurred, and Sharp replies, "Yes, I would say that there is a slight possibility." Sharp says he is going to ask Moore to get a definite report which "should come in within an hour." McNamara sums up the situation by stating that "We've got problems on timing here . . . we don't want to release news of what happened without saying what we are going to do; we don't want to say what we are going to do before we do it." Sharp recommends that any execute notice be held until "we have a definite indication that this happened."

McNamara then observes that the execute is scheduled "for 7 p.m. our time which is three hours from now." Sharp says this is right, it is being set for "7 o'clock local out there." McNamara says that even if definite confirmation of the attack is not forthcoming for another 2 hours, an hour would still remain and the execute order could then be issued. McNamara states: "It seems to me we ought to go ahead on that basis; get the pilots briefed, get the planes armed, get everything ready to go." Sharp agrees.

4:14 PM (4:14 AM, August 5, Saigon time; 10:14 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): CINCPACFLT transmits an alert message to COMSEVENTHFLT, the TICONDEROGA and the

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CONSTELLATION to be prepared "at 0700G" to strike targets (8:00 PM Washington time; 7:00 AM Saigon time). (See entries at 5:23 PM, 5:29 PM, and 5:33 PM, August 4) The designated targets are the PT Boat bases at QUANG KHE, BEN THUY, HON NE Island and SONG MA estuary, HON GAY and PORT WALLUT; any identified North Vietnamese PT Boats located at sea; and the VINH petroleum storage depot. The latter is labeled the number one target priority. The message indicates that it would be "desirable" that all targets be struck simultaneously, but adds that authority is granted to recycle aircraft as necessary to strike the two southern targets (QUANG KHE and BEN THUY) with a second launch if the Forces on the TICONDEROGA and CONSTELLATION are inadequate. It concludes by specifying that this is a preparatory order, and that launching should not be accomplished until an execute order is received. (TICONDEROGA receives this message at 4:55 PM.)

4:35 PM (4:35 AM, August 5, Saigon time; 10:35 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): CINCPAC transmits an official alert message to CINCPACFLT to prepare to execute air strikes with a "high level damage expectancy" at 7:00 PM (7:00 AM local time), against (1) PORT WALLUT, (2) BEN THUY (VINH), (3) HON GAY, (4) QUANG KHE, and (5) LOC CHAO. "Conventional ordnance only" is specified. The message specified that the Vinh POL should be struck with a "very high level of expected damage."

4:40 PM (10:40 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Sharp calls Burchinal and is informed that the JCS strike execute message is in the McNamara office ready to go, but that there is still a slight doubt whether the destroyers were in fact attacked. Sharp will try to get more definite information from Admiral Moore, but states that he has now seen reports of visual sightings of cockpit lights pursuing near the MADDOX and another report of the destroyers being illuminated and fired against. Burchinal then asks Sharp whether he continues to believe the launch could be

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accomplished at 7:00 PM. Sharp responds that "it will be tight," but "I think so." He adds, however, that "it may be just as well to wait an hour or so, if we have to, to be certain" an attack had occurred. Sharp then suggests it might be necessary to recycle some of the aircraft for a second strike against VINH and Burchinal says "this will be all right," if needed. Sharp estimates that about 70 aircraft in all will be involved in the strikes.

4:49 PM (10:49 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): The JCS strike execute message to CINCPAC is transmitted by direct teletype from the NMCC to the CINCPAC Command Center. (CINCPAC receives this message at 5:28 PM (11:28 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time).)

4:55 PM (4:55 AM, August 5, Saigon time): TICONDEROGA receives the CINCPACFLT alert message directing COMSEVENTHFLT to be prepared at 7:00 PM to strike the PT boats at designated locations. The TICONDEROGA is already on an alert status as a result of the PT boat attacks on the destroyers. Upon receipt of this alert message, its pilots and Weapons Planning Board commence to plan for the strikes. A message is also sent from TICONDEROGA to Naval Air Station at Cubi Point, Philippines (some 500 miles away), directing all ready-to-go A-1 and A-4 aircraft to return to the TICONDEROGA as soon as possible. This is necessary because the complement of aircraft on the TICONDEROGA has to be augmented by additional strike aircraft for the maximum strike effort. A number of the aircraft on the TICONDEROGA had been used previously for reconnaissance (Yankee Team) efforts over Laos, and could not appropriately be used for the strike.

5:00 PM: Colonel Jones of the Joint Staff, in the JCS conference room, calls the NMCC Pacific desk at Pentagon (Commander Hathaway) and says that the JCS would like a forecast of the weather over the target area at 7:00 AM local time.

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4:47 PM - 6:00 PM
TUESDAY, AUGUST 4
JCS-SECDEF MEETING TO DETERMINE IF ATTACK ON DESTROYERS OCCURRED

4:47 PM: McNamara, Vance and the JCS meet to marshal the evidence to overcome lack of a clear and convincing showing that an attack on the destroyers had in fact occurred. They conclude that an attack had taken place. In this regard five factors are considered:

1. The TURNER JOY was illuminated when fired on by automatic weapons.
2. One of the destroyers observed cockpit lights.
3. A PGM 142 shot at two U. S. aircraft. (From COMINT)
4. A North Vietnamese announcement that two of its boats were "sacrificed." (From COMINT)
5. Sharp's determination that there was indeed an attack.

Burchinal, at Wheeler's request, tells McNamara that the 7:00 PM strike time will not be met because the carriers are operating on a time which makes 8:00 PM Washington time 7:00 AM carrier time.

5:19 PM: JCS strike execute message is retransmitted FLASH precedence as JCS 7720 to CINCPAC. It states that by 7:00 PM EDT (0700 local time) a one-time maximum effort attack against PORT WALLUT (later cancelled because of weather), HON GAY, PHUC LOI, QUANG KHE, LOC CHAO and VINH, and an armed reconnaissance against PT boats beyond the three mile limit should be conducted. The message cautions that if the weather precludes meeting the above time of attack, the commander is to "proceed soonest" and to notify the JCS as soon as possible. (CINCPAC receives this message at 5:52 PM (11:52 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time).)

5:23 PM (11:23 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Sharp calls Burchinal and says there is no doubt that an attack on the destroyers had occurred, for he has intercepted a North Vietnamese

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message stating that two of its PT boats were "sacrificed." Sharp is now satisfied with all the evidence, what with several additional reports from the TURNER JOY. Sharp mentions then that the attack will be "coming off" at 8:00 PM Washington time not 7:00 PM but still at 7:00 AM local time. The reason is that the CINCPAC execute message used "HOTEL" time (Saigon time, a 12 hour difference from EDT), whereas the carriers (based on a CINCPACFLT message) were shooting for the operation on "GOLF" time (an 11 hour difference from EDT), giving them an extra hour. Sharp says that he will convert his strike message to "GOLF" time.

5:29 PM: Mustin calls the NMCC (General Smith) and indicates that some confusion exists over the time in the Gulf of Tonkin. He asks Smith to get on the teletype and straighten out the matter.

5:33 PM (11:23 AM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Smith calls McCutcheon at CINCPAC and asks for a breakdown of the times between the carriers, Saigon, and Washington. McCutcheon replies that when the Washington time is 8:00 PM, the local time (GOLF time) for the carriers would be 7:00 AM the next morning. When the Washington time is 7:00 PM, the local time in Saigon would be 7:00 AM the next morning. McCutcheon reports that Sharp, realizing that the carriers can use that extra hour, has told them to use GOLF time, so that 7:00 AM for the carriers would be 8:00 PM in Washington.

5:39 PM (1:39 PM, CINCPAC time): Sharp calls Burchinal and says that his understanding is that launch time will be 7:00 AM, August 5 (carrier time), or 8:00 PM, August 4, Washington time.

5:51 PM: McNamara, Vance, and Wheeler leave the meeting for the White House.

6:10 PM (6:10 AM, August 5, Saigon time): The TICONDEROGA receives a copy of the JCS strike execute message.

6:27 PM (6:27 AM, August 5, Saigon time): CINCPAC transmits strike execute message to CINCPACFLT. (See 4:35 PM entry, August 4.)

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6:15 PM - 6:38 PM
TUESDAY, AUGUST 4
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING
6:38 PM - 6:45 PM
SPECIAL MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT

The National Security Council* is convened as McNamara, Vance and Wheeler arrive at the White House. McNamara outlines the four-part plan:

1. The strike against the PT boat bases and the supporting installations and armed reconnaissance along the North Vietnamese coast.
2. Sending reinforcements to the area, an expression of our will to escalate.
3. Presidential announcement of these actions.
4. A Joint Congressional Resolution in support of these actions and further actions, if necessary.

The President asks the NSC members if they have any objection to the plan. All NSC members approve the plan. The President then approves the plan. McNamara informs the President that the previously estimated 7:00 PM launch time will not be met, but that the launch time is now estimated to be 8:00 PM. McNamara then recommends that no public statement be released until 9:00 PM, the estimated time over target of the first strike.

The NSC meeting breaks up at 6:38. McNamara, Rusk, and Bundy meet with the President in his office, prior to the Congressional leadership meeting which starts at 6:45. Vance returns to Pentagon and meets with Burchinal to determine what reinforcements can be moved without political clearance from other countries and to put in motion the political clearance process where required. Vance authorizes the movement of units not requiring political clearance.

* * * *

* Present at this meeting are the President, Speaker McCormack, McCone, Cline, McNaughton, Rusk, Ball, William Bundy, Dillon, Rowan, Reedy, McG. Bundy, Jenkins, Moyers, Valenti, Bromley Smith and Cater.

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6:07 PM (12:07 PM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Sharp calls Burchinal and repeats that he is satisfied that the destroyers were attacked. Sharp now has the JCS strike execute message. Burchinal says that McNamara, now at the White House, is also satisfied that the attacks on the destroyers have occurred and had made the statement just a short time ago that the "show is now on the road." After agreeing that suppressive fire "was part of the game," Sharp then states that the press should not get the story at 7:00 PM. Burchinal replies that "we will insure that nothing comes out until we know that you're off target." Sharp estimates this to be 9:00 PM, one hour after launch. Burchinal emphasizes that any announcement will be delayed so that there is "no possibility of anyone reading" the strike. The matter of deploying additional forces to the theater is also discussed.

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6:45 PM - 8:45 PM
TUESDAY, AUGUST 4
CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP MEETING

General Wheeler was one of those in attendance at the leadership meeting. In his recent testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, Wheeler stated that the President told the Congressmen that he would make a public announcement but left the time "up in the air because he did not want to make the announcement too soon." Wheeler then recalled that the timing of the announcement may have actually been settled either in a preliminary meeting between McNamara and the President (around 6:38 PM) or at the leadership meeting itself. In any event, Wheeler said that the decision was made that a statement could be released "at the time the aircraft took off from carriers, in other words when the strikes were enroute." Chairman Vinson said he would verify this because "I sat there and I heard the whole discussion." In short, Wheeler remembered that the President "was going to wait until it was safe to make the announcement . . . it would not be made prior to the launching of the aircraft." McNamara's recollection is the same as General Wheeler's.

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6:56 PM (6:56 AM, August 5, Saigon time): The CONSTELLATION receives a copy of the JCS strike execute message.

7:22 PM (7:22 AM, August 5, Saigon time): The TICONDEROGA receives the CINCPACFLT execute message.

7:30 PM (7:30 AM, August 5, Saigon time): The CONSTELLATION receives the CINCPAC message which passes the JCS strike message with instructions not to execute until directed. (Note: According to Mustin, the "hold" notice was presumably prompted by CINCPAC's desire to make certain that the second attack on the MADDOX did in fact occur. Once this was confirmed the strike execute message was issued (see the 7:50 PM entry below).)

7:49 PM (7:49 AM, August 5, Saigon time): The CONSTELLATION receives its target assignments.

7:50 PM (7:50 AM, August 5, Saigon time): The CONSTELLATION receives the CINCPAC strike execute message.

7:59 PM (1:59 PM, August 4, CINCPAC time): General Wisman, NMCC Pacific Desk at Pentagon, calls the CINCPAC Duty Officer, Lt. Colonel Lindsey, and asks for the take-off times, numbers and types of planes in the carrier strike. Lindsey replies there is nothing yet on the strikes, although there is some combat air patrol activity in relation to the earlier attacks on the destroyers.

8:05 PM: Wheeler, in the Cabinet room at the White House, calls Burchinal at the Pentagon and asks if anything is happening. Burchinal says that he has a clear line open, but no word has been received. Wheeler wants to know as soon as the word arrives that the aircraft have been launched.

8:39 PM (2:39 PM, August 4, CINCPAC time): McNamara, back from the White House, calls Sharp and asks whether the carriers have launched their aircraft. Sharp replies that he has

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received no word yet, but this probably because the carriers will provide a coordinated report when the launch is completed. McNamara, however, says that the launch is already 40 minutes after the ordered time of take-off and wants Sharp to contact the carriers directly by radio. McNamara then states: "Let's get an immediate statement from them if we can. Part of the problem here is just hanging on this news, you see. The President has to make a statement to the people and I am holding him back from making it, but we're forty minutes past the time I told him we would launch." Sharp estimates, although he does not have the launch plan, that it would take the aircraft about an hour to reach the target. McNamara asks Sharp to find out when they are launching and the time of the first flights over the targets.

9:00 PM (9:00 AM, August 5, Saigon time): The situation at this time and thereafter as reflected on North Vietnamese and [redacted] radar is described at Appendix A. NSA25X3

9:09 PM (3:09 PM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Sharp calls McNamara at his office and says that one carrier (perhaps both) would not be able to launch for another 50 minutes (10:00 PM Washington time). "In other words, they couldn't make the time," reports Sharp. Sharp explains that the compression of time and the communications lag are the reasons, and thinks that the last estimated times over target, with a 10:00 PM launch will be about 12:00 midnight, Washington time. McNamara then asks what Sharp thinks about a Presidential statement issued about the time of launch that would say this: "At this moment air action is now in execution against gun boats and supporting facilities in and near four ports of North Vietnam which have been used in support of hostile operations." Sharp thinks it would not be a "good idea" because it will alert the enemy, "No doubt about it." McNamara says that the enemy would be alerted as soon as the aircraft start coming into the coast. Sharp says, "They won't know where they're going. Of course they will be alerted as soon as they get in the air because Hainan is going to pick them up and so will the other people. But they won't know where they are going. I wouldn't recommend it."

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9:22 PM (3:22 PM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Sharp tells McNamara that PT boats (presumably those returning from attack on the destroyers) were taking sanctuary within the three-mile limit. McNamara recommends that the aircraft proceed to hit designated targets, but authorizes striking any boats sighted on the way in. He says, "Get them off . . . That is the main thing."

9:28 PM (9:28 AM, August 5, Saigon time): The CONSTELLATION submits its strike plan for approval to the Carrier Task Force Commander.

10:00 - 10:30 PM: During this period, McNamara calls Bundy to discuss the Presidential announcement. As a result of his earlier conversation with Sharp, McNamara recommends that Bundy delete the entire sentence which reads: "At this moment air action is now in execution against gun boats and supporting facilities in and near 4 ports in North Vietnam which have been used in support of hostile operations." Bundy disagrees and tries to work out some language changes that will meet McNamara's point about giving away the targets. Bundy secures McNamara's agreement to the following language, which appears in the President's statement as given over the air at 11:40 PM: "Air action is now in execution against gun boats and certain supporting facilities in North Vietnam which have been used in these hostile operations." Thus, the words "in and near 4 ports" were deleted, with the rest of the sentence allowed to remain substantially in tact.

10:06 PM: After trying to reach Senator Goldwater for several hours, the President finally gets through and informs him of the decision to retaliate.

10:26 PM (4:26 PM, August 4, CINCPAC time): McNamara calls Sharp and asks whether the aircraft are launched yet. Sharp says he has no firm word, but is "sure" one carrier (TICONDEROGA) "is going to go, or has gone" at 10:00 PM Washington time. According to Sharp, however, the other carrier (CONSTELLATION) "is not going to launch" one of its groups (the slower propeller driven A-1 aircraft) until 1:00 PM Washington time, and the other (the jets) until 2:30 AM, with a time over target for both groups estimated around 3:15 AM, apparently because "she is not able to get in position in time." Sharp explains this by stating

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that the CONSTELLATION was coming from the north and had to get into position by coming around Hainan to strike her assigned northern targets. In order to get into position, "she had to use a good many of her aircraft for refuelers." Sharp repeats that the TICONDEROGA "should have gotten off a half hour ago (10:00 PM) but "we haven't heard yet." McNamara tells Sharp to make "damn sure she got off" by getting in touch with her right away. As to the CONSTELLATION, McNamara asks how long it would take its aircraft to reach the target. Sharp replies the fartherest target will be reached in about five hours from now. McNamara then says that no announcement here "is going to influence what they think about those aircraft coming in because you will already have launched about a half hour ago against the other targets." Sharp agrees "as long as they don't know what the targets are." McNamara states that "I have cut that out of the statement," and Sharp says "there will still be the element of surprise . . . as long as you don't say what /the targets/ are."

10:40 PM (10:40 AM, August 5, Saigon time): CONSTELLATION recovers the last group of A-1 aircraft from combat air patrol over the destroyers.

10:43 PM (10:43 AM, August 5, Saigon time): TICONDEROGA launches four A-1 strike aircraft with instructions to orbit overhead. This is necessary so that the carrier deck could be free from the landing of A-4 aircraft from Cubi Point then orbiting overhead and to permit coordination of prop and jet strikes to ensure a simultaneous arrival time over the target. The A-1 launching marks the beginning of the attack, and within the hour these four A-1's depart for VINH. (NMCC receives this message at 12:36 AM, August 5.)

10:46 PM (4:46 PM, August 4, CINCPAC time): McNamara calls Sharp again, seeking confirmation of the launch times. Sharp says that he has been trying to reach the Task Force but "it is just a question of getting through this circuit and apparently the circuit is a little jammed." He reports that no word has yet been received, and McNamara suggests he radio in the clear, asking the TICONDEROGA if it did "what it said it would do at 10:00." McNamara states that the President wants to go on the air at 11:15, but should not go on "unless he has a confirmation of the launch." McNamara then wants Sharp to secure half-hourly post-strike reports, once the launching occurs.

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10:48 PM: Clifton at the White House calls General Wisman, the Deputy Director for Operations, Joint Staff and states that new launch times for the CONSTELLATION have been received which are considerably later than the TICONDEROGA's, that the President is shooting for an 11:15 PM statement, and asks how much would be revealed by the announcement. Wisman states that Sharp agrees with a Presidential announcement now that McNamara has recommended the deletion of specific portions dealing with the targets.

10:56 PM: The UPI ticker reports from Balboa, California, that Goldwater had spoken to the President and that "President Johnson read his statement on the tense situation in Vietnam to Senator Barry M. Goldwater, the Republican Presidential candidate. Goldwater expressed approval of the President's statement."

10:59 PM: The UPI ticker, in amplifying the prior story, quotes Goldwater from Balboa, California, as stating this: "I am sure that every American will subscribe to the actions outlined in the President's statement. I believe it is the only thing we can do under the circumstances. We cannot allow the American flag to be shot at anywhere on earth if we are to retain our respect and prestige."

11:05 PM: Wisman calls Burchinal and reports that nothing is airborne yet, that the CONSTELLATION is not in position, and that several more hours would be required for its first launch. There is now the possibility, according to Wisman, that the CONSTELLATION because of weather may have to scrub its operation. He recognizes this would tip our hand if one force goes in, and says that there can be no scrubbing of the mission until the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs are first notified.

11:11 PM: McNamara calls Sharp, and is told "it is just that I don't think that there is any question that they have launched. It is just a question of getting the report." McNamara, with regard to the weather conditions and possible cancellation of the CONSTELLATION strikes, states "As a nation we just can't sit here and let them attack us on the high seas and not do something . . . So I think the President has to say we are going to retaliate." McNamara

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asks if there is "any reason why the CONSTELLATION couldn't launch against the southern targets, including the oil depot." Sharp responds that this is "exactly what we would do," although he mentions that the weather to the south is not good and beginning to deteriorate.

11:20 PM (5:20 PM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Sharp calls McNamara and says it is now confirmed. "She /the TICONDEROGA/ got her planes off at 0243" (Zulu time) (10:43 PM, Washington time; 10:43 AM, Saigon time). Sharp indicates that it will take the aircraft about an hour and fifty minutes from now to reach their targets. The attack will be in two waves, both scheduled to arrive at the same time.

11:27 PM: After discussion of the matter with General Wheeler, McNamara calls the President and tells him that it is now appropriate to make his statement over radio and TV. Commander Henson of the NMCC Pacific Desk at the Pentagon notifies the White House Situation Room that the TICONDEROGA launched its first aircraft at 10:43 PM, with an estimated time over the target at 1:10 AM.

11:35 PM (11:35 AM, August 5, Saigon time): The CONSTELLATION advises the Carrier Task Force Commander of its intended launch position for strikes with a simultaneous time over target at 3:45 AM.

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11:36 PM
TUESDAY, AUGUST 4
PRESIDENT GOES ON THE AIR

The President goes on radio and TV at 11:36 PM and states at 11:40 PM:

"Repeated acts of violence against the armed forces of the United States must be met not only with alert defense, but with positive reply. That reply is being given as I speak to you. Air action is now in execution against gun boats and certain supporting facilities in North Vietnam which have been used in these hostile operations."

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The decision to go on the air is based on these considerations:

1. U. S. Naval aircraft had been in the air approximately one hour.

2. Hanoi and Hainan, through their radar, had then received indications of the attack.

3. The time remaining before the aircraft arrived over the targets would probably not permit the North Vietnamese to move their boats to sea or to alert their forces.

4. It was important that our people learn of the manner in which their government was responding to the attacks on its vessels from their President, rather than from Hanoi, which was expected to announce the attack at any moment.

5. It was desirable that the North Vietnamese government and others be told as soon as possible the limited, punitive character of the attack.

6. It was important that the North Vietnamese and Chinese Communists know that this was the firm and deliberate response of the U. S. Government to an unprovoked aggressive act, and not the act of a local commander.

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11:51 PM (11:51 AM, August 5, Saigon time): Sharp calls Wheeler and they discuss the possibilities of a restrike against VINH, with Wheeler saying that he will take it up with McNamara.

11:54 PM (11:54 AM, August 5, Saigon time): The CONSTELLATION receives a message that TICONDEROGA had launched its aircraft at 10:43 PM, with scheduled arrival over target at 1:10 AM.

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WEDNESDAY

AUGUST 5, 1964

12:00 Midnight (Noon, August 5, Saigon time): Wheeler calls Sharp to discuss the recycling of the VINH strike. Sharp indicates that the recycling may only have to be off the TICONDEROGA, but wants the added flexibility of recycling with both carriers. "The problem" says Sharp, "is that it takes so damn long to get the word out to them." Sharp also tells Wheeler that both carriers had been conducting air operations all night before in supporting the MADDOX and TURNER JOY and as a result "they are kinda pooped out." The CONSTELLATION "didn't make as much headway as she would have because she apparently had to turn in the other direction for a landing and launching . . . so that she is behind her hoped for position . . . so that's the reason she launched late." The TICONDEROGA, on the other hand, "is also quite a long run from where she is to these various targets; and she being a small carrier doesn't have as many airplanes either." Sharp indicates that the CONSTELLATION may have to scrub only the northernmost target (PORT WALLUT) and this because of a combination of factors, such as, the target's distance and the adverse weather.

12:02 - 12:30 AM: Secretary McNamara holds a press conference in which he describes the action taking place.

12:15 AM (12:15 PM, August 5, Saigon time): Six A-4s and six F-8s are launched from the TICONDEROGA flying to VINH at an altitude of 25,000 feet. The target is 320 nautical miles away.

12:34 AM (12:34 PM, August 5, Saigon time): TICONDEROGA launches six F-8s which depart for QUANG KHE, flying at an altitude of 25,000 feet. The target is 250 nautical miles away.

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12:38 AM (6:38 PM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Wheeler calls Sharp and tells him that he has discussed the recycle with McNamara. Wheeler's major concern is that the attacks must not be "open-ended" affairs. Three rules are set for the recycle: First, up to 20 aircraft may be used; second, the only target will be VINH; and third, the attack should be launched no later than 3:00 AM, Washington time. Sharp thinks that the 3:00 AM time is cutting it too short, with closer to 4:00 AM as the more realistic hour. Sharp adds that he will do his best to compress the time and will recycle as quickly as possible. Wheeler indicates that he will pass this on to McNamara.

12:43 AM: Wheeler calls Sharp and tells him that the 4:00 AM recycle time is acceptable to McNamara, but Sharp now indicates launch on the recycle could not begin until 5-6:00 AM. Wheeler says this is too late, and they arrive at an agreement that Sharp would launch what he could up to 4:00 AM and would then have to cease.

1:00 AM (1:00 PM, August 5, Saigon time): CONSTELLATION launches four A-1s which depart for HON GAY, flying at an altitude of from 1,000 - 5,000 feet. HON GAY is 360 nautical miles away. CONSTELLATION also launches four A-1s which depart for LOC CHAO, flying at an altitude of 1,000 - 5,000 feet. LOC CHAO is 330 nautical miles away.

1:11 AM (1:11 PM, August 5, Saigon time; 7:11 PM, August 4, CINCPAC time): CINCPAC duty officer calls Lt Colonel Smith in McNamara's office and says that the estimated times over target for the TICONDEROGA will be 1:15 AM for the first and 1:25 AM for the second. "Everything is on track," he reports.

1:15 AM (1:15 PM, August 5, Saigon time): TICONDEROGA's six F-8s launched at 12:34 AM strike QUANG KHE with 20 mm shells and 5" rockets. There is no AA fire. Seven boats are sighted, four are severely damaged and one moderately. There are no U. S. losses.

1:25 AM (1:25 PM, August 5, Saigon time): TICONDEROGA's four A-1s launched at 10:43 PM, six A-4s launched at 12:15 AM and six F-8s launched at 12:15 AM strike at the VINH - BEN THUY-PHUC LOI complex. They report moderate AA fire. Of the six

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sighted, four are moderately damaged and two lightly damaged. Eight POL tanks and two AA guns are destroyed. There are no U. S. losses. The ordnance used ranges from 1,000 lb. bombs to 5" Zuni rockets to 2.75 mm rockets.

2:16 AM (8:16 PM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Sharp calls McNamara's office and gives the first strike report to Colonel Moody. He states that VINH has been struck, the oil installation is burning fiercely, the four PT boats in the harbor have all been hit, with one dead in the water. Heavy flak has been experienced and one F-8 is hit, headed for DA NANG. Moody says Vance will be promptly advised of these developments. Vance is informed immediately.

2:30 AM (2:30 PM, August 5, Saigon time): The CONSTELLATION launches ten A-4s and two F-4s which depart for HON GAY at an altitude of 25,000-30,000 feet. HON GAY is 360 nautical miles away. The CONSTELLATION also launches five A-4s and three F-4s which then depart for LOC CHAO, flying at an altitude of 25,000-30,000 feet. LOC CHAO is 330 nautical miles away.

3:25 AM (3:25 PM, August 5, Saigon time): CONSTELLATION's four A-1s launched at 1:00 AM and its five A-4s and three F-4s launched at 2:30 AM, strike at LOC CHAO. They report moderate AA fire (20 mm from the boats). The boats are not under way. Of the five PT boats sighted, two are damaged seriously and three moderately. One A-1 aircraft (Sather's, third in the column) is shot down. One A-1 is damaged, but returns to carrier safely. The attacks last 25 minutes. 2.75" rockets and 20 mm strafing attacks are used.

3:40 AM (3:40 PM, August 5, Saigon time): CONSTELLATION's four A-1s launched at 1:00 AM and its ten A-4s and two F-4s launched at 2:30 AM, strike HON GAY. They report moderate to heavy AA fire. Of the five boats sighted, five are destroyed. The boats do not get under way until after the attack started. Alvarez' A-4 aircraft, the second in column, is shot down while on a second pass against boats at anchor. The attack lasts 25 minutes, with 2.75" rockets and 20 mm strafing attacks utilized.

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3:43 AM (9:43 PM, August 4, CINCPAC time): Sharp tells Wisman of the Joint Staff that it might be best to pull the MADDOX and C. TURNER JOY out of their patrol because they are low on fuel and ammunition, and the North Vietnamese have already been given a "good punishment." Sharp adds that to keep the destroyers on station might invite further attacks, perhaps even a loss. Wisman says this will require JCS approval.

3:58 AM (9:58 PM, August 4, CINCPAC time): McCutcheon at CINCPAC calls Wisman about pulling the destroyers out. McCutcheon says that these destroyers have special equipment and could not readily be replaced, but that the ships have had several sleepless nights. The relief of these ships would be temporary only, about a 24 hour rest, after the strikes had ceased. Wisman says he will talk to Burchinal.

4:03 AM (4:03 PM, August 5, Saigon time): TICONDEROGA launches four F-8s and eight A-4s which depart for the restrike against VINH.

4:15 AM (4:15 PM, August 5, Saigon time): TICONDEROGA launches two A-4s which depart for HON ME at an altitude of 25,000 feet.

4:41 AM: Wisman calls Burchinal and tells him that an A-1 and A-4 from the CONSTELLATION have been lost over HON GAY. (Note: Actually, one was lost over HON GAY, another over LOC CHAO.) Burchinal is the first to be notified, and he suggests that Wisman inform the Chiefs and the Secretary of Defense. Vance is informed immediately.

4:45 AM (4:45 PM, August 5, Saigon time): TICONDEROGA's four F-8s and eight A-4s, all launched at 4:03 AM, strike VINH. They report heavy AA fire from the additional AA guns brought into position after first strike, but they destroy two to four POL tanks and six AA guns. There are no U. S. losses.

5:15 AM (5:15 PM, August 5, Saigon time): TICONDEROGA's two A-4s, launched at 4:15 AM, strike HON ME with 20 mm shells and rockets. They report no AA fire. Of the six boats sighted, three are destroyed, three moderately damaged, and one is forced to beach. There are no U. S. losses.

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6:08 AM: Wisman calls Mustin and says the operation is just about wound up and was a "pretty good effort, highly successful." He states that Sharp was able to accomplish the recycle against VINH and that the destroyer patrol is being pulled out, with approval, for replenishment.

8:30 AM (2:30 AM, August 5, CINCPAC time): McNamara calls General Milton at CINCPAC to check on the results of the punitive strike, based on present information. Here, these facts are confirmed:

-- 64 strike sorties were launched (with 59 planes) against 4 North Vietnamese patrol boat bases, including the LOC CHAO estuary, and the supporting oil storage depot at VINH.

-- About 25 PT boats were destroyed or damaged, in addition to damage to their bases and supporting facilities.

-- An estimated 90% of the VINH oil depot, containing 14 tanks and 10% of the petroleum capacity of North Vietnam, was destroyed. Smoke was seen rising to 14,000 feet.

-- Two U. S. Navy aircraft were lost and two damaged.

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