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August 10, 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Secretary

FROM : INR - Thomas L. Hughes

SUBJECT : DOD DeSoto Patrol Chronology

Attached is the official DOD chronology for the record on the DeSoto Patrol incidents last week. It has gone forward to the White House.

This is an adequate and routine summary. The following five points do not perhaps come through this chronology as sharply as they might and I list them only for clarification.

1. The order to attack on August 2 (first Maddox incident) seems to have been given when Maddox was on the leg of its patrol closest to the DRV mainland. Shortly thereafter Maddox reached its closest point to the mainland (11 miles from shore, and 9 from Hon Me Island).

2. However, it was pursued and attacked while going in a southeasterly direction, away from the mainland. Since the attacking units were under orders to keep in close touch with headquarters at all times, it is unlikely that they pursued the US vessel out to sea on their own initiative. Furthermore, the second attack, while possibly ordered when Maddox was relatively close to shore, took place about 60 miles to sea, reflecting a high command decision to pursue the assault.

3. The command chain was Hanoi to Haiphong (Naval Headquarters) to Port Wallut (Northern Fleet base) to the PGM's in control of the attack (apparently T142 and T146 in the first assault). All this also proves it to be a DRV operation.

4. The Maddox was closely shadowed between the first and second attacks especially during daylight hours.

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5. There were about 36 hours between the OP 34A raid on Hon Me and Hon Ngu and the assault on the Maddox. It is possible that the DRV looked upon the Maddox approach to its shores as the sign of another imminent attack. But the time gap of a day and a half, the Maddox pulling away from shore as daylight ended, and DRV experience with an earlier and similar destroyer patrol in February-March 1964 make this unlikely.

July 30 -

1730 Two DRV vessels T142 and T146 report enemy attack on Hon Me. Time of attack set at 1656. Efforts to catch the foe at 1830 fail and they return to port 1900.

July 31 -

1354 T142 and T146 at port in Hon Me, ready for action.

1825 Naval headquarters communications not working.

1920 DRV base at Ben Thuy (southern base) reports sighting of "enemy" vessel - Maddox - 20 nm from Ly Hoa. This is the first DRV reflection of Desoto patrol for July-August.

August 1 -

1419-1422 T146 and T142 note Maddox course.

1627 Ben Thuy message of decision to attack Maddox.

1652 Intense coverage of Maddox reported; actual coverage close since 1000 and continuous. DRV to Iliaison protest to ICC over the attack of July 30.

August 2 -

0309-0732 DRV close track of Maddox.

0431 Maddox tracked by Raid number 5804 - Patrol boats T142 and T146 and Motor torpedo flotilla 135 (T333, T336, T339) on through torpedo attack. Raid number 5805 (unknown) was alerted.

0444 T142 reports to Port Kallut (northern base) that it received orders to attack.

0807/8 DRV attack on Maddox at 19-45 N and 106-35 E. At the time five of the seven DRV vessels in Port Kallut area were near or engaged in the attack (T142, T146, T333, T336, T339).

0830 US planes counter-attack, sinking T339, and damaging T336 seriously, T333 less seriously.

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August 2 (Cont.)

0900 T142 and T146 returned to Hon Me.

1430 DRV naval element kept close track of Maddox until this time.

August 3 -

0720 Two US destroyers noted, 25 miles from Hon Me with air cover.

0855-0859 T142 messages tracking DeSoto.

0904 Hon Me reported tracking two "enemy" vessels at 0620.

0934 T142 ordered to shadow destroyer closely.

1018 Possible DRV air surveillance of DeSoto.

Late in day: North Fleet active: an SO-1, T231; T142, T146; T333 (hit), T336(hit), 3 unidentified. T231 and one unknown boat headed away from the combat area.

South Fleet active: T164; T379; 1 unidentified.

August 4 -

0512 DRV report: tracking vessels at 19-18 N, 106E to 19-10N 106-02E around 0100Z.

0600 DRV tracking the destroyers

1140 T142, T146 alerted to prepare for battle; T333 also, if possible.

1240 Maddox says attack imminent.

1336 DeSoto Patrol reported sighting 2 surface craft and 3 aircraft. Four aircraft launched from Ticonderoga followed by 4 aircraft fifteen minutes later.

1408 Ticonderoga reported that aircraft sighted disappeared from radar screen. Surface craft maintaining 27 mile distance. Aircraft patrol over DeSoto Patrol.

1434 Ticonderoga reported two original boats opened to 40 miles. Three new boats contacted at 13 miles. Evaluated as hostile.

1440 DeSoto Patrol (USS Maddox and USS Turner Joy) reported intercepting communication that (DRV) PT boat attack imminent. Patrol position 19.7 N 107.0 E (75 miles off coast) heading southeast.