

Morse Says Destroyer Provoked the Incident Off Vietnam in 1964

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By E. W. KENWORTHY
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WASHINGTON, Feb. 21—A study prepared by the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee asserts that the destroyer Maddox was under orders in 1964 to take provocative action in order to induce the Chinese Communists and North Vietnamese to turn on their radio and radar so the destroyer could monitor them.

This finding led Senator Wayne Morse, Democrat of Oregon, to take issue today on the Senate floor with testimony by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara on Aug. 6, 1964, and again yesterday, in which Mr. McNamara said the Maddox was "on routine patrol."

"He calls it a 'routine patrol,'" Mr. Morse said. "The Maddox was a spy ship under instruction to stimulate the electronic instruments of North Vietnam to carry out a spying activity. That is not a routine patrol for a destroyer. The United States was a provocateur in the Gulf of Tonkin on Aug. 4, 1964, and history will so record."

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mittee of their mission, but
insisted the patrols were
outine."

According to the staff study, the Maddox, which had gone on patrol on July 28, was under orders from the commander in chief of United States forces in the Pacific "to stimulate Chinese/North Vietnamese electronic reaction."

The study also asserts that ships, operating under the name "De Soto," also sailed along the coast of Communist China.

The study also disputes Mr. McNamara's testimony in 1964 that "our Navy played absolutely no part in, was not associated with, was not aware of any South Vietnamese activity [against the islands of Honme and Hon Nieu], if there was any."

These two North Vietnamese islands were bombarded by South Vietnamese PT boats on the night of July 30-31 and again on the night of Aug. 3-4.

The staff study says that the United States Navy provided the advice. Crew training and the boats for these South Vietnamese raiding operations known as 34-A, which were set up in February, 1964, by South Vietnam and the United States Military Advisory Group.

The study says that on July 10 the Pacific Commander in chief authorized fleet units involved in the De Soto patrols to get in touch with the head of United States military assistance in Vietnam "for any additional intelligence required for prevention of mutual interference with 34-A operations and such communications arrangements as may be desired."

Again the study quotes a message from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the commander of the Pacific Fleet approving the Maddox mission. The message cautions that "activity in 34-A operations has increased."

The study also says that on

Aug. 4 the Pacific Fleet commander sent a message to the Maddox, saying:

"The above patrol will (A) Clearly demonstrate our determination to continue these operations (B) possibly draw NVN (North Vietnamese) PGMS (patrol boats) to northward away from area of 34-A OPS, (C) eliminate De Soto patrol interference with 34-A OPS."

Disputing Mr. McNamara's contention in 1964 and yesterday that the destroyers had "absolutely no knowledge" of the South Vietnamese attacks and "were not connected" with them, Mr. Morse said in his floor speech today:

"Why, it was a decoy operation. That is what the message means. You follow the course that will draw the North Vietnamese navy northward and eastward away from the direction of the bombing of the islands of North Vietnam."

Messages Are Cited

Although Mr. McNamara insisted in 1964 and again yesterday that there was no doubt about the Aug. 4 attack, the staff study notes that only a few hours before the retaliatory air strike ordered by the President on North Vietnam, the Pacific commander in chief was still sending messages to the boats asking, "Can you confirm absolutely that you were attacked?" and "Can you confirm sinking PT boats?"

The Maddox cabled back that "entire action leaves many doubts except for apparent ambush at beginning. Suggest thorough reconnaissance by aircraft at daylight."

The study concludes:

"Therefore, Secretary McNamara misled the committee by not telling the committee [on Aug. 6, 1964] how increasingly ambiguous the reports on the second incident became as the hours wore on. What he described in such positive terms was actually a highly confused event."

"On the basis of the evidence from the communications traffic it would seem that the facts increasingly demanded caution—but the operational requirements of the retaliatory raid and the bureaucratic and press momentum that developed after the first reports came in were just too strong."