

M'NAMARA TELLS OF SECRET DATA ON TONKIN ATTACK

He Says Intelligence Source
Confirmed Navy Reports
—Radio Monitor Hinted

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Excerpts from the McNamara
statement are on Page 12.

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 20 —

Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara disclosed today that the Administration had "highly classified and unimpeachable" intelligence information establishing that two American destroyers had come under North Vietnamese attack in the Gulf of Tonkin in August, 1964.

He made the disclosure in a statement to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as it began a politically sensitive re-examination of the crucial Tonkin incidents—an Aug. 2 attack on the destroyer Maddox and an Aug. 4 attack on the destroyers Maddox and Turner Joy.

In reprisal, the Administration ordered the first air strikes against North Vietnam and got Congressional approval of a resolution endorsing "all necessary measures" to "prevent further aggression."

Fulbright Advice Ignored

The statement was handed out by the Pentagon press office after a closed session at which Senator J. W. Fulbright, the committee chairman, had advised Mr. McNamara against making the statement public immediately.

Mr. Fulbright, though obviously annoyed, declined to make an immediate rebuttal statement.

The committee, reopening the Tonkin incidents three and a half years later, is questioning the whole decision-making procedure followed by the Administration in reacting to the reported attacks by North Vietnamese PT boats.

It is generally accepted by the committee that the daylight attack on Aug. 2 occurred. But questions are being raised as to whether the nighttime engagement on Aug. 4 occurred, and more important, whether the Administration had conclusive proof of the attack before ordering reprisals.

Underlying these questions is a suspicion among some committee members that the Administration interpreted inconclusive and circumstantial evidence of the Aug. 4 attack in light of a predisposition within the Executive branch to carry the war to North Vietnam.

In concluding his statement, Mr. McNamara emphatically denied that the United States

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had somehow provoked the Aug. 4 incident or used it as a pretext for attacking North Vietnam.

He characterized any such insinuations as "monstrous."

Mr. McNamara acknowledged that "some uncertainty" existed then and exists to this day about "some of the precise details" of the second attack. But, he said, "there should be no uncertainty about the fact that an attack took place."

At the time the decision was made to order retaliatory air strikes against Vietnam, he said, "sufficient evidence was in the hands of the President to establish beyond any doubt then or now that an attack had taken place."

In reaching this decision, it was apparent from the McNamara statement that the Administration placed considerable reliance on secret intelligence information obtained by monitoring North Vietnamese radio command circuits.

Shortly before the Aug. 4 engagement, he said, "an intelli-

gence report of a highly classified and unimpeachable nature" was received stating that North Vietnamese naval forces intended to attack the Maddox and Turner Joy.

Then during the attack, he continued, another intelligence report was received stating that the North Vietnamese patrol craft had reported they were involved in the engagement.

And finally, he said, there was another intelligence report stating that the North Vietnamese forces had reported losing two boats in the engagement.

Mr. McNamara never identified the source of the intelligence reports except to say they came from "a highly classified and unimpeachable source." But Pentagon sources indicated that the intelligence information had been obtained by monitoring radio communications between the North Vietnamese patrol boats and their commands ashore.

Until the McNamara statement today, the Defense Department has repeatedly declined to discuss whether it had electronic intelligence informa-

tion confirming the north vietnamese attacks on the ground that such information was secret.

It was also understood that the Defense Department had declined to make such information available to the committee staff in its study of the Tonkin incidents.

The fact that Mr. McNamara has now chosen to make the information public and to make such prominent use of it in defense of the Administration's case seemed likely to add to the tensions between the committee and the Executive branch over the Tonkin incidents.

But perhaps even more exacerbating to the committee was the manner in which the Administration chose to make the McNamara statement public—in defiance of the longstanding protocol that witnesses' statements should be released only with the approval of the Congressional committee.

While it succeeded in striking the first blow, the Administration may also have contributed to the prolongation of the in-

vestigation. By the end of the day, some angered committee members were suggesting that Mr. McNamara should be recalled and other witnesses summoned.

He said the Defense Secretary had been subjected to "searching examination of the details of the decision-making process" in the Tonkin incidents.

One indication that the investigation may take on the flavor of a partisan attack on the Administration was the presence during the hearings of Senator Thruston B. Morton, Republican of Kentucky, who is not a member of the committee.

A leader in G.O.P. circles, Senator Morton has taken an intense interest in the Administration's handling of the Tonkin incidents and reportedly is preparing a critical article for a national magazine.

Despite more than six hours of testimony, Mr. McNamara apparently did not change any views within the committee. Such supporters of Administration policy as Senators John J. Sparkman of Alabama and

Frank J. Lausche of Ohio found his case compelling. Critics of Administration policy, such as Senators Wayne Morse of Oregon and John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky, found his arguments unpersuasive.

After the hearing, Senator Fulbright told reporters that "the McNamara statement does not tell the whole story by any means."

On some important points, Mr. McNamara modified or elaborated upon his testimony of Aug. 6, 1964, before a joint meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services committees.

In that testimony, as finally cleared for publication by the Defense Department, Mr. McNamara repeatedly made the point that the Maddox and Turner Joy were on "routine patrol" in international waters.

In his statement today, however, Mr. McNamara disclosed that the two destroyers had also been on an intelligence gathering mission and that one purpose of their patrol had been "visual and electronic surveillance of the area."

Disputing conclusions drawn in the committee's staff study, Mr. McNamara contended that at no time during the patrol did either destroyer "leave the high seas and enter areas claimed by North Vietnamese or recognized by the United States as national waters."

In making this contention, however, Mr. McNamara disclosed that in the United States view, North Vietnam only claimed territorial water of three miles. When this point was raised in the 1964 hearings, it was removed from the published testimony by the Pentagon.

Only after the Tonkin incidents, Mr. McNamara contended, did North Vietnam claim territorial waters stretching to 12 miles. The Maddox, he said, was under instructions not to approach closer than eight nautical miles to North Vietnam, and after the first attack, the two destroyers were instructed to remain at least 11 miles off the coast. On their own initiative, he said, they came no closer than 16 miles.

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