

CAPTAIN CONFIRMS ATTACK IN TONKIN

Commander of 2 Destroyers Denies Any Provocation in the 1964 Incidents

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By United Press International

WASHINGTON, Feb. 23—The commander of the two United States destroyers in the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident said tonight that his ships were definitely attacked by the North Vietnamese and he denied that the attacks were provoked.

The Tonkin incident led to the first United States bombing raids against North Vietnam and an overwhelming Congressional approval of a resolution requested by President Johnson in support of his war policy.

Critics of the war, particularly the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, have questioned the Administration version of what happened.

Senator J. W. Fulbright, Arkansas Democrat who is chairman of the committee, has accused the Administration of suppressing information that casts doubt on whether the destroyers were attacked. Others have said that the destroyers provoked the North Vietnamese into attacking them.

'No Doubt' of Attack

Capt. John J. Herrick, 47 years old, of Warren, Minn., who was aboard the destroyer Maddox and in command of her and the destroyer Turner Joy, said in an interview that there could be "no doubt" that his ships were attacked.

Captain Herrick denied a charge by Senator Wayne Morse, Democrat of Oregon, that the mission of the ships was to "stimulate" North Vietnamese radar or radios into activity.

"I don't know how you would stimulate an electronic reaction," he said. He said his ship carried only "passive" radio equipment. She could only listen, he said.

The naval officer, now stationed in the Norfolk, Va., area, denied that a secret Navy mes-

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sage made public this week by Senator Wayne Morse, Democrat of Oregon, was an order to his ships.

The message, as published by Mr. Morse, said: "The above patrol will (A) clearly demonstrate our determination to continue these operations. (B) Possibly draw NVN (North Vietnamese Navy) PGMS (patrol boats) to northward away from area of 34A-OPS. (C) eliminate De Soto patrol interference with 34A-OPS."

The designation "34A-OPS" referred to South Vietnamese naval bombardment of some North Vietnamese islands.

Senator Morse said on Wednesday the cable had been sent by Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, then United States naval commander in the Pacific, to the Maddox.

But Captain Herrick and Administration officials said Admiral Moorer had actually sent it to his superior, Adm. U. S. Grant Sharp, commander of all United States forces in the Pacific area.

There had been a suggestion after the Maddox incident Aug. 2 that the destroyer patrols should leave the area. Admiral Moorer's cable recommended to Admiral Sharp that the patrols be moved in location but that they be continued for the three purposes he outlined.

Officials said the message had been sent by Admiral Sharp to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who did not approve it. They said it never became an order.

Informational Message

Copies of the message were sent for informational purposes to both the Maddox and Turner Joy. Captain Herrick said he did not really remember receiving it and he would not have been impressed by it since it was not an order.

The captain said there was never any doubt aboard the ships that sonar reports showed torpedo firings. The only doubts, he said, were over how many torpedoes had been fired.

He also said it "never occurred" to him that he was acting as a "decoy" or luring North Vietnamese boats north, and had denied he was. He said he had heard the term "34 Alpha," which was used to describe South Vietnamese naval bombardment of North Vietnamese islands "but I had no prior knowledge of what they did."

Did his ships "provoke" attacks on themselves?

"No," the captain said. "As a matter of fact it started out as a sort of a Sunday cruise. People were waving at junks as they went by. Everything was serene until the afternoon of the second of August."

This was the day of the first attack involving only the Maddox.

'A Very Nice Day'

"We were cruising in our assigned patrol track in the vicinity of Hon Me island," Captain Herrick said. "It was mid-day. A very nice day. Personnel were topside sunbathing and enjoying themselves."

"We got a report of a radar contact. I think three PT-boats and a small oiler is what it appeared to be. They proceeded south. We paid them very little mind. We expected both Navy and junk traffic up there."

He said that an hour or two later the boats appeared to be on an "intercept course" at speeds of 40 to 50 knots. The Maddox sounded general quarters and got up more steam.

"They continued to close. We began to surmise that their intent was hostile."

The Maddox radioed the air-

craft carrier Ticonderoga, which dispatched planes.

Captain Herrick authorized the skipper of the Maddox to fire a warning shot if the boats came within 10,000 yards. They did and the warning was fired, he said.

"They continued in without hesitating at all, and we commenced fire to hit."

The captain said torpedoes were fired and "we observed one that passed close to the Maddox." He said that the boats turned under the destroyer's stern and fired machine guns. The planes from the Ticonderoga were authorized to open fire and did, Captain Herrick said, and the incident ended with one boat apparently dead in the water, and another of the boats apparently towing the third.

Headed Into Gulf

Captain Herrick said the Aug. 4 incident began late in the day. The ships had been patrolling along the coast and were heading out into the center of the Tonkin Gulf, he said. They intercepted the radio message indicating a planned attack. They picked up radar contacts, which seemed to be some boats "waiting to spring a trap on us after nightfall."

The same precautions were taken—general quarters and firing up additional boilers to make more steam, and the ships change course.

"We wanted to determine if these people were just sitting there or if they were going to follow us."

Darkness was falling and it became a cloudy, overcast night.

From here on, what Captain Herrick observed we see through the eyes and ears of radar and sonar.

"As we changed the course the boats repositioned, or closed on us, and we tracked them on in. There seemed to be some boats which tracked up to 40 knots and others farther away at slower speeds.

"[Our] two ships were approximately in column, with the Maddox ahead and the Turner

Joy astern. The lead boat kept closing. They got into range around 6,000 yards. They made a sort of button-hook turn away from the Turner Joy. The Turner Joy was convinced she was under torpedo attack and commenced firing at the boat."

The Maddox at this time picked up torpedo noises on her sonar. For what seemed "a number of hours"—he no longer recalls exact times—Captain Herrick said the boats "seemed to make multiple attacks." He said sonar heard "a number of torpedoes."

Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara has described in testimony before Senator Fulbright's committee how naval authority ashore had some doubt about the validity of the sonar contacts and sought confirmation.

Captain Herrick said that as far as he was concerned the only doubts were "as to number—I had no doubts of the initial ones and I had no doubts that numerous ones were torpedoes."

The captain said the Maddox entered the Gulf of Tonkin the previous July 31. He said the primary mission was "surveillance of North Vietnamese junks and any other naval or merchant traffic in the area." He said another purpose was to "conduct passive intercepts" of radio and radar emissions from North Vietnamese.

Before starting the mission, he said, the Maddox took on board additional radios, so that she would be able to monitor more frequencies.

The patrols, he said, were routine and dull.

"You had a track to follow, a slow track. You would do it all at seven or eight knots. You have time to loiter around. We probably would have had a swimming party overboard if it [the Aug. 2 incident] hadn't happened."