

0. THE TRUTH ABOUT TONKIN - Story Preface

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Monday August 4th

- On Monday August 4th, McNamara calls Johnson to inform him that the North Vietnamese have apparently sent ships and aircraft towards the U.S ships.
- Later that day, McNamara calls Johnson to inform him that a second attack on the Maddox has "apparently" occurred in the Gulf of Tonkin.



An alleged incident, between U.S. Navy vessels and North Vietnam torpedo boats on 4 August 1964, resulted in massive American military forces being sent to Viet Nam. People involved in the war-escalating alleged incident, however, reported that it never happened.

What did President Johnson say about the alleged second attack the year after the Tonkin Resolution? What do the Pentagon Papers reveal? How about first-hand accounts from reliable eyewitnesses?

Navy pilot Commander James O. Stockdale (Viet Nam prisoner of war, Medal of Honor winner, Navy Vice Admiral and Ross Perot's Vice Presidential running mate in 1992) was flying in the skies above the Gulf of Tonkin that August night. He had also been there two nights before - on August 2, 1964 - when U.S. Navy ships had been attacked by the North Vietnamese.

Admiral Stockdale recalls there was no attack the night of August 4:

I was out there...I took it upon myself to get out there where they thought the boat was and try to kill it if they didn't. But it was fruitless and as time went on, one guy said...I think I got a PT boat trailing me. I said, I have you in sight, I'll fly up from behind and I'll take care of him if I see him. And there was nothing there.

During the 1992 presidential campaign, Admiral Stockdale told reporters:

I had the best seat in the house to watch that event and our destroyers were just shooting at phantom targets - there were no PT boats there...There was nothing there but black water and American fire power. (For the Stockton quotes, see his book *In Love and War*, originally published by Bantam Books, in New York, during 1985 at page 17.)

The year after Congress passed the Tonkin Resolution, President Johnson joked with reporters about what really happened. He told his press secretary, Bill Moyers:

For all I know, our Navy was shooting at whales out there.

Pentagon Paper researchers concluded that the Gulf of Tonkin incident was important to the American public:

The Tonkin Gulf reprisal constituted an important firebreak and the Tonkin Gulf resolution set US public support for virtually any action. (New York Times, Pentagon Papers, Bantam Books, 1971, at page 269.)

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