

Hello everybody and welcome again to another episode of Presidential Archives Uncovered--the podcast that brings to you cool clips from the collections of the Presidential Libraries of the U.S. National Archives.

For this episode, I'll be featuring a number of audio clips from the Johnson Presidential Library and Museum.

After World War II, the people of Vietnam, a French colony, sought liberation from France. When the French withdrew in 1954, the region was split into North and South Vietnam. The United States supported the government of South Vietnam in their struggle against Communist North Vietnam as well as against the Communist Viet Cong in the South.

After taking office in November 1963, President Johnson concentrated on domestic issues such as civil rights and the war on poverty while continuing the course on Vietnam set by his predecessors. This policy of modest support for the government of South Vietnam was to change in the summer of 1964.

On August 2nd, the United States Navy destroyer *Maddox* repelled a North Vietnamese attack in the Gulf of Tonkin without American casualties. The President issued a warning to the North Vietnamese on August 3 to refrain from another assault on an American ship or be subject to swift retaliation.

Tuesday, August 4, 1964, was a day of startling news in the White House. The President planned to work on his legislative program, particularly by using the tactic many called the "Johnson treatment" to encourage passage of the poverty bill, which was signed on August 20th as the Economic Opportunity Act. But two crises interrupted work that day.

At 11:06 AM on August 4th, while the President was meeting with Congressman George Mahon about the poverty bill, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara called to report that the *Maddox*, along with another destroyer, the *Turner Joy*, was once again under torpedo attack.

[Telephone Beep]

[LBJ in office conversation with Mahon:][unintelligible] came along today and pass my farm bill and I made them stand up to some of them that were very doubtful on the foreign aid [unintelligible]. But I think that we can say if we're spending 600 or 700 million right here in Latin America on underdeveloped schools or underdeveloped [unintelligible] we can spend a little on our own people, our own boys that are there to work and then not give them something for nothing, make them work for every dime of it and we take the tax eater that's now on his daddy's relief roll and make a tax payer out of him by making him work to earn [?] part of that check.

LBJ: Hello?

Secretary: Secretary McNamara, Line 0

LBJ: Yes, Bob.

McNamara: Mr. President, we just had word by telephone from Admiral [U. S. Grant] Sharp that the destroyer is under torpedo attack.

LBJ: Oh, no

McNamara: I think I might get, uh, [Secretary of State] Dean Rusk and [National Security Advisor] Mac [McGeorge] Bundy and have them come over here and we'll go over these retaliatory actions and then we ought to...

LBJ: I sure think you ought to agree with that, yeah.

McNamara: and I've got a category [?] here. I'll call the two of them...

LBJ: Now, where are these torpedoes coming from?

McNamara: Well, we don't know; presumably from these unidentified craft that I mentioned to you a moment ago. We thought that the unidentified craft might include one, uh, one PT boat which has torpedo capability and two Swatow boats which we don't credit with torpedo capability although they may have it.

LBJ: What are these planes of ours doing around while they're being attacked?

McNamara: Well, presumably the planes are attacking the, the ships. We don't have any word from Sharp on that. The planes would be in the area at the present time; all, all eight of them.

LBJ: Okay. You get them over there and then you come over here as soon as you can.

McNamara: I'll do that that, yeah.

A series of meetings about the U.S. responses to the attack followed throughout the day. At 12:35 PM the President presided over a thirty-minute National Security Council meeting in the Cabinet Room of the White House to discuss the appropriate United States response. At 1:36 PM the President joined an eighty-minute lunch meeting with his major foreign policy advisers. The National Security Council resumed deliberations at 6:15 PM. Then the President, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy met briefly before they began a 6:45 PM meeting with the leadership of Congress.

The 6:45 PM meeting with congressional leaders about the Tonkin Gulf incident was interrupted when FBI Assistant Director Cartha "Deke" DeLoach called the President at

8:01 PM. DeLoach reported that three bodies had been found in Mississippi, and that the FBI thought that the bodies were those of civil rights workers last seen on the evening of June 21, 1964: James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman.

Operator: Yes, please.

LBJ: [to people in meeting] I think we ought to follow, if we can, not just leave it in limbo.

Operator: Yes, sir?

LBJ: Yeah, get me Deke DeLoach.

Operator: Who?

LBJ: Mr. DeLoach. [He's] talking to [White House Chief of Staff] Walter [Jenkins].

Operator: Oh, thank you.

[Office Conversation]

Female voice: [Unintelligible.]

Male voice: ...right and [unintelligible]. Commander in Chief took [unintelligible] and if the mission calls for it, I'm all for doing what you say[?]

[more unintelligible conversation].

LBJ: [Secretary of State] Dean [Rusk], are you following him down there?

Operator: There you are.

LBJ: Yeah.

DeLoach: Walter?

LBJ: No. Lyndon Johnson.

DeLoach: Mr. President?

LBJ: Yeah.

DeLoach: Mr. [J. Edgar] Hoover wanted me to call you, sir, immediately and tell you that the FBI has found three bodies six miles southwest of Philadelphia, Mississippi, the six miles west of where the civil rights workers were last seen on the night of June 21st.

A search party of agents turned up the bodies just about 15 minutes ago while they were digging in the woods and underbrush several hundred yards off Route 21 in that area. We're going to get a coroner there right away, sir, and we're going to move these bodies into Jackson, Mississippi, where we hope they can be identified. We have not identified them as yet as the three missing men. But we have every reason to believe that they are the three missing men. They were under a--they were at the side of a dam that had been constructed near Philadelphia, Mississippi. We wanted to let you know right away, sir.

LBJ: When are you going to make an announcement?

DeLoach: Within ten minutes, sir, if it's alright with you.

LBJ: Well, how are you going to make it? Where? From there? From--?

DeLoach: I plan to make it from Washington. Here, sir.

LBJ: Alright, alright.

DeLoach: Just indicate that the FBI has found three bodies, but not identified them.

LBJ: [Sigh] Okay. If you can hold it about fifteen minutes, I think we ought to notify these families.

DeLoach: Well, Mr. President, the only thing I—suggestion--I'd have there is do you wish to do that prior to the time that they are identified? We think they're the ones, but—

LBJ: Well, I think we could tell them that we, we don't know but we found them and that, that'd kind of ease it a little bit.

DeLoach: Yes, sir. Alright, sir. Shall I wait until I hear--?

LBJ: Yeah. I'll get right back to you.

DeLoach: Very good, sir.

After talking with DeLoach, the President immediately called White House Associate Counsel Lee White to relay DeLoach's report.

[Telephone clicks while LBJ calls telephone operator].

Operator: Operator.

LBJ: Get me Lee White and if he's not there, [White House Chief of Staff] Walter Jenkins, right away.

Operator: Yes, sir.

LBJ: Lee, Lee White.

Operator: Lee White? And do you want Walter Jenkins also?

LBJ: No. Lee White. Lee White.

LBJ: [to others meeting in the room] They found the three bodies in Mississippi. Hoover did.

Operator: There you are.

LBJ: Lee

White: Yes, Mr. President.

LBJ: They found those three bodies six miles south, southwest of Philadelphia, Mississippi. Six miles west from where they were last seen. They don't know that these are the bodies. They're moving them into Jackson to identify them. They're off Route 21. Ah, they,--it's right near the site of a new dam that's been built. They have every reason to believe they are the bodies. So, call the families and tell them that there'll be an announcement in the next 10 or 15 minutes, and as soon as we get proper identification we'll let them know further.

White: Alright. I'll call three of them right now. Alright.

LBJ: Tell them I asked you to.

White: I will, Mr. President.

After consulting with his advisers and the congressional leadership, President Johnson decided to order retaliatory air strikes against selected targets in North Vietnam in an operation named "Pierce Arrow." He recognized, however, his responsibility to protect the American military forces involved in the operation by delaying his public announcement of "Pierce Arrow" until the bombers were safely away from the targets. He also wanted to notify Republican presidential candidate Senator Barry Goldwater before making the announcement.

*Telephone conversation between President Lyndon Johnson and Secretary of State Dean Rusk, August 4, 1964, 10:02PM*

Operator: Thank you, sir.

[Telephone Beep]

LBJ: Yes?

Operator: Secretary Rusk on Line 0.

LBJ: Yes?

Rusk: Mr. President, I feel, myself, that it is quite important that your statement be delayed until we have the action program to announce, and that can't be announced until the fellows have had a chance to be on target and away. If you make the statement without the reference to the specific action, it will simply create great confusion all over the world for quite a few hours and among our own people. I don't know what your own problem is about air time and that sort of thing, but I would hope that you could make your statement when it's safe to do so from the operational point of view.

LBJ: Well, have you talked to [Secretary of Defense Robert] McNamara about this?

Rusk: I haven't on this particular point, no. I just talked to [National Security Adviser] Mac [McGeorge] Bundy.

LBJ: Oh, well—

Rusk: I'll call him and call you back, if you wish.

LBJ: Yeah, y'all better--everybody's got a different idea, Dean. They're just running all over the lot—

Rusk: Alright, I'll call him and we'll—

LBJ: I told Mac to get with McNamara. What does Bundy say?

Rusk: Ah, which, --McGeorge Bundy?

LBJ: Yeah.

Rusk: Um, I think he tends to agree with me on this. But let me get a hold of Bob McNamara. I didn't--I haven't had a report on how much of an operational problem is involved.

LBJ: Well, the last--the planes are just starting to get off now and it'll be after midnight before you can have any statement, so he suggests that you make a statement that "action of a military nature is now underway." And he doesn't say that you give the name of the town or the kind of airplane that you're driving or the size of the bomb but to just say "appropriate military action is now underway."

Rusk: I see. Well, let me--uh, I'll check with him and we'll get coordinated on this.

LBJ: Bye.

At 11:36 PM the President went on television and radio to announce the retaliatory air strikes.

In that same statement, the President announced that he was asking Congress to consider a resolution stating that the legislative branch joined the executive branch “in its determination to take all necessary measures in support of freedom and in defense of peace in Southeast Asia.”

As August 4th drew to a close, the President turned his attention to his schedule for the next day. At 11:59 PM he spoke with Ambassador and former Governor Averell Harriman of New York about the President’s trip to Syracuse, New York on August 5th.

LBJ: Averell?

Harriman: Yes, Mr. President.

LBJ: I hate to call you this late but I –

Harriman: That’s alright[?]

LBJ: -- got your note and they had me busy all day and I was going to get away early in the morning and I thought I’d better call you.

Harriman: Well, I didn’t really mean to bother you. I wanted to talk to you about what you thought about Bob Kennedy’s future in New York –

LBJ: Good, good.

Harriman: and one or two things about Syracuse. I think you can help there. The, the Democrats have been fighting. We’ve got a good country chairman in Don Nagin [?],

LBJ: Yeah

Harriman: though it’s worthy, he’s worthy of your support.

LBJ: Alright.

LBJ: Some of them thought I ought to cancel, but I don’t think I will.

Harriman: You’ll do what?

LBJ: Some of them thought I ought to cancel it tonight, but I don't think I will. I think it'd create too much attention.

Harriman: Yes. I think if you – when, when are you going to make your statement?

LBJ: In, --on, on Vietnam?

Harriman: Yes.

LBJ: I've already made it.

Harriman: Oh, you already made it.

LBJ: I've already made it, yeah. So --

Harriman: We were just at the Indian Embassy and we just got in.

LBJ: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I just made it about ten minutes ago.

Harriman: Oh, good.

LBJ: And, well I'll call you—

Harriman: Well, I think you're doing the right thing in this case, sir.

LBJ: Well, thank you. I'll, I'll call you when I get back and we'll get together. How's that?

Harriman: Can I do that?

LBJ: That's fine.

Harriman: Because I'd like to know when you want to—I think I have a little influence on Bobby Kennedy—

LBJ: Fine.

Harriman: and I'd like to do it in a way that you think would be what's good for you.

LBJ: I'll be very happy to and I'll call you tomorrow or the next day just as soon as I can get back.

Harriman: These people up there in Syracuse, they ought to control that city. It went, the city went for, [for] the first time in a long time for you and President Kennedy, and we



ought to carry it again, but these—you out to tell these Democrats they ought to get together and quit fighting with each other.

LBJ: I'll sure do it. I'll do it.

Harriman: Okay, well I'm sure they'll appreciate your going very much.

LBJ: Thank you, Averell. Bye.

In his speech at Syracuse University during that trip, the President's attention was once more focused on "...the Communist Challenge in Southeast Asia." He spoke of the unprovoked and deliberate attack upon the United States military by the North Vietnamese. He assured the world, buttressed by his telephone conversation with Senator Goldwater and his meetings with congressional leaders the previous day, that the United States government and people were united in their commitment to repel aggression from the North Vietnamese.

On August 7th Congress passed the Tonkin Gulf Resolution which authorized the President "to take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression." The House approved the resolution unanimously and the Senate passed it with only two dissenting votes. The President signed the resolution on August 10th.

If you'd like to learn more about the Gulf of Tonkin or any of these audio clips that you've heard today, please visit the Presidential Timeline, [www.presidentialtimeline.org](http://www.presidentialtimeline.org).