



ON THE RIGHT TRACK

1st Battalion 50th Infantry Association



NEW CLUES ON THE ORIGINS OF THE VIETNAM WAR

Decision to begin strikes prompted by belief that U.S. ships were hit, tapes released by LBJ Library show.

Tapes can be found on the web at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library & Museum www.lbjlib.utexas.edu

By Dick Stanley

American-Statesman Staff

(512) 445-3629

dstanley@statesman.com

One of the lingering controversies of the Vietnam War concerns its instigating incident: North Vietnam's 1964 attack on American destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. Did it really happen, or was it fabricated by government officials, hell-bent for war?

Recorded telephone conversations made public Friday by the LBJ Library and Museum show the military and then-Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara struggling to confirm details of what sailors halfway around the world were reporting on Aug. 4, 1964.

The recordings, among thousands secretly made by the Johnson administration, are the latest in a continuing series of public releases by the library and museum.

IN THIS ISSUE	
Cover Story	1
From the Editor	2
Chaplin's Corner	4
Reunion 2003	4
These Colors Don't Run	5
Random Thoughts	6
American History 101	7

The reported attack was the second in two days, and Washington needed to determine the facts before deciding on the extent of American retaliation. That night, President Lyndon Johnson would go on television to tell the nation about the aerial bombardment he had ordered.

The incident was important because it led to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution approved by all but two members of Congress. The United States had long had advisory forces in South Vietnam helping to defend it against indigenous revolutionaries backed by communist North Vietnam. American warships were patrolling the coastlines of the two countries, including the northern gulf, and warplanes made reconnaissance flights.

The resolution would become an unofficial declaration of war, leading eventually to the introduction of millions of American troops.

"You can tell the military people are convinced they were attacked," said John Wilson, an LBJ Library archivist who transcribed the two hours and 15 minutes of recordings. "The tapes back up that there was, indeed, an attack. And (we) struck back almost immediately."



MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to publish a newsletter and to maintain an internet homepage.

The Association will use these publications to inform its general membership about events within the Association and about current or proposed legislation that might affect veterans of all wars.

Members of the Association will strive to preserve the memory of those who served in the "ICHIBAN" Battalion and to publish only the facts concerning any particular battle, person or situation.

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR

THOUGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS

Chance Encounters

While at work one day, I was crossing the parking lot, leaving the main building and heading back to my office, I noticed a visitor leaving the parking lot. His car had a 'Vietnam Veteran' bumper sticker on it.



ROBERT
MELENDEZ

So as he passed by I flagged him down. As it turns out, he was with the 1st Cav. and had 2 tours 65 and 67. He said he was wounded slightly and I did notice that he walked with a limp. He finished his 20 plus years as an E-8.

As we talked, I became aware that he was genuinely interested in hearing about our organization, newsletters, reunions and, most of all, our return trip to Binh Dinh. He not only wants to join our association but knows of other veterans who are looking exactly what we have already established.

Walking in the Woods

Have you walked out in the woods, forest or mountains and still recall how you felt those many years ago walking in the dense vegetation? Remember how you constantly watched where you placed your feet? Do you find yourself watching where you place your feet even today as you're out hiking or camping with family or friends?

Remember the silence at night? Have you been camping or hiking and stopped momentarily just to listen to the silence? Does it take you back to other times and other nights?

How about when you now hear a local radio station's helicopter flying above your commute? Does the sound take you back?

Last, can you recall the first time you heard 4th of July firecrackers after just returning back from Vietnam? If you're like me, you hit the ground immediately after hearing the loud, rapid succession of the pop! pop! pop!

A Night at the Movies

Have you had a chance to see any of the current and recent 'war' movies? Recently, *Blackhawk Down* was popular. Prior to that, *Saving Private Ryan* was out and proved to be a great movie. *We were Soldiers* just finished its showing. As of this writing, *Wind Talkers* is just being released.

Though I've seen the first three movies I have not seen the latest movie. But I must admit that the standard by which I measure all 'Vietnam War movie' is *Platoon*.

How about your choices? Which 'Vietnam War movies' do you prefer? Tell me which war movie you like the best and why you like it. We'll publish your choices in a future newsletter.



Most of the conversations are between McNamara, in Washington; Navy Admiral Ulysses Grant Sharp Jr., commander of Pacific Forces in Honolulu; and Air Force Lt. Gen. David Burchinal, the staff director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Washington. Sharp died in December 2001 at age 95.

The discussions began about 10:00am EDT, several hours after the USS Maddox and USS Turner Joy reported pre-dawn torpedo attacks by North Vietnamese patrol boats. The destroyers fought back, although it was dark. The weather was overcast and rainy even after the sun came up, and there was confusion about what had happened.

"I guess you know they've started shooting at them," Sharp told Burchinal shortly after 11 am.

"Yep," Burchinal said. "Both ways," Sharp continued. "One of them is—said they've dodged five torpedoes, and he's firing on the PT and one—we had one message that said he was going to try to ram one. So they must be pretty close."

An hour later, Sharp reported: "The Maddox says she has evaded about 10 torpedoes. Two (Vietnamese) craft are sunk."

But by 1 p.m., he said it was just possible the American sailors were exaggerating the extent of the attack.

"Whenever they get keyed up on a thing like this," Sharp said, "everything they hear on the sonar is a torpedo."

"You're pretty sure there was a torpedo attack?" Burchinal asked.

"No doubt about that, I think," Sharp said. "No doubt about that."

Still, by 4 p.m., even McNamara wasn't entirely satisfied that he had all the details. He had spoken to Sharp several times throughout the day and seemed eager to hit back at North Vietnam.

But hours after the initial reports, the defense secretary was still quizzing the Pacific Forces commander on the events in the fog and rain 13,000 miles away.

"There isn't any possibility there was no attack, is there?" McNamara asked.

"Yes," Sharp said. "I would say that there is a slight possibility." Subsequently, however, they decided the attacks had occurred, and they began struggling to coordinate air action from an aircraft carrier in the vicinity, the USS Constitution, and another, the USS Ticonderoga, which was on its way. But the weather got worse, which frustrated jets' efforts to get to their targets.

By 11:11 pm., twenty-five minutes before Johnson went on television from the Fish Room of the White House, McNamara still was hammering Sharp for confirmation that the air strikes the president had by then ordered were, in fact, occurring.

"I think the point is," McNamara said. "that as a nation we can't just sit here and let them attack us on the high seas and not do something."

"My fellow Americans," Johnson began in his characteristic way, going on to say that the Aug. 2 attack had been repeated that day with torpedoes against the Maddox and another destroyer. He said officials believed that two of the attacking boats were sunk.

"Air action is now in execution against the gunboats and certain supporting facilities in North Vietnam which have been used in these hostile operations," Johnson said. "We Americans know, although others seem to forget, the risks of spreading conflict. We seek no wider war."

But on Aug. 10, at Johnson's request, Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which authorized the president "to take all necessary measures" to defend American forces and South Vietnam from aggression.

1st Battalion



50th Infantry
Association

PLAY THE GAME





CHAPLAIN'S

Toby Jordan

**O
R
N
E
R**

Hello to everyone, and I hope everyone is in good health and doing O.K. The weather has already started to heat up and it seems to rain every other day. I'm looking forward to the July get-together and it is going to be here before we know it. I was visiting with my oldest son this past weekend and went to a National Guard meeting with him. And it happened to be the day that they had the ceremony to give out the War World II medals to the surviving veterans in that area. It was a very good ceremony but it really hit home about how the Veteran is forgotten as for the service he has preformed for our Country. It was a sad sight to see the Missouri Veterans that have waited for 50 some odd years to be recognized. One of them made the comment to me, "Just think, in 20 more years the state will recognize the Viet Nam Vets that are still alive."

So let us all support each other as we have in the past, and be available if one of our fellow vets needs assistance. Always remember that we have a Loving God that is always there for us. May God bless and keep you safe.

**R
E
U
N
I
O
N**



REUNION 2003

April 24-27, 2003

(Thursday to Sunday)

**Courtyard Marriott
Columbus GA**

ROOM RATES

**King rooms \$69.00/night
Double rooms \$79.00/night**

Contact

**Michelle Cross
Courtyard Marriott Sales Dept.
3501 Courtyard Way
Columbus Ga. 31904
Phone (706) 323-2323
Fax (706) 327-6030**



THESE COLORS DON'T RUN

After hearing that the state of Florida changed its opinion and let a Muslim woman have her picture on her driver's license with her face covered, I believe this is even more appropriate. Read on, please! This is an editorial written by an American citizen, published in a Tampa newspaper. He did quite a job, didn't he?

IMMIGRANTS, NOT AMERICANS, MUST ADAPT

I am tired of this nation worrying about whether we are offending some individual or their culture. Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, we have experienced a surge in patriotism by the majority of Americans. However, the dust from the attacks had barely settled when the "politically correct" crowd began complaining about the possibility that our patriotism was offending others.

I am not against immigration, nor do I hold a grudge against anyone who is seeking a better life by coming to America. Our population is almost entirely comprised of descendants of immigrants. However, there are a few things that those who have recently come to our country, and apparently some born here, need to understand.

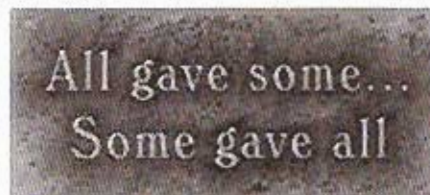
This idea of America being a multi-cultural community has served only to dilute our sovereignty and our national identity. As Americans, we have our own culture, our own society, our own language and our own lifestyle. This culture has been developed over centuries of struggles, trials, and victories by millions of men and women who have sought freedom. We speak English, not Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Russian or any other language. Therefore, if you wish to become part of our society, learn the language!

"**In God We Trust**" is our national motto. This is not some Christian, right-wing, political slogan. We adopted this motto because Christian men and women, on Christian principles, founded this nation, and this is clearly documented. It is certainly appropriate to display it on the walls of schools. If God offends you, then I suggest you consider another part of the world as your new home, because God is part of our culture.

If Stars and Stripes offend you, or you don't like Uncle Sam, then you should seriously consider a move to another part of this planet. We are happy with our culture and have no desire to change, and we really don't care how you did things where you came from. This is **OUR COUNTRY**, our land, and our lifestyle.

Our First Amendment gives every citizen the right to express his opinion and we will allow you every opportunity to do so.

But, once you are done complaining, whining, and griping about our flag, our pledge, our national motto, or our way of life, I highly encourage you to take advantage of one other great American freedom; **THE RIGHT TO LEAVE**.





Random Thoughts

John Topper



There is a saying in this part of the country – Cowboy Up! – it indicates a rider is on a bull, bronc or some other critter that is trying its best to unseat him. It also implies that the cowboy has decided to take on a particular task. So it is as I sit down to write this the thought occurs that perhaps we need to assess the state of the world's affairs and fix some of them – on second thought, maybe not. We can, however, address some of the issues facing our Association, those that we can do something about, and perhaps shed some light on others.

Random Thought #1. The upcoming pig roast hosted by Bob Gold and Jim Edwards is in the throes of last minute planning. Here are a couple of Ichiban Troopers who have cowboied up and are tackling a rendezvous for the benefit of those who choose to attend. If you do intend to show up, please let them know soonest so the necessary arrangements can be made. And send them some money – they are much more liberal with their time than their money, I expect. Although, I would bet they have sunk more into this soiree than those of us attending will likely pay. Benefits over and above expenses will go to the Association treasury.

Random Thought #2. The ballot box has spoken and we are looking to Fort Benning for our next "official" reunion in 2003. Thurman Olan Pike, notorious Bravo Brave of yore, has taken on the task of Chairman of the Reunion Committee. A dubious distinction, but nonetheless, he has strapped on his spurs and intends to ride this puppy until the whistle blows. I know Thurman, (or Olan,) would gladly welcome any assistance anyone would care to throw his way. Cowboy Up, Ichibaners.

Random Thought #3. The Reunion Committee was chosen not so much because they knew more about this sort of thing than others, but because they volunteered. So it is that we who are coming up with ideas about the activities of the reunion are doing so because we have to, it does not exclude others who simply have good ideas. This is your reunion, so if you have good ideas let us know. We are discussing the possibility of a couple of tours of the Post and having lunch with trainees of the battalion and a dinner with the battalion where we will present some mementoes. Plans are being made and while we have a good deal of flexibility as I write this, we will have less in the future, so let your wishes be known now. If you can't take the time to help in the planning, don't make time for complaining later for it will fall on unsympathetic ears.

Random Thought #4. The reunion at Fort Benning will be the time for electing new officers. Anyone wanting, or willing, to serve is invited to Cowboy Up. All offices are eligible for election except the Chairman Emeritus. We should probably try to convince some of the incumbents to accept reappointment as they are doing such a great job and it would make the transition much easier for the new president if they were to remain in place.

Random Thought #5. Membership is climbing, but we still have a number who haven't paid their dues. Please let us hear from you by sending a check to the Treasurer or, should you decide you no longer want to be a member, let us know so we can drop you from our books.

Random Thought #6. To the Association Officers who provide all the support and assistance that keeps our organization alive and well, thank you. To the volunteers like Ray Sarlin (website), and Dotty and Jim Edwards, Billie McGregor and Robert Melendez thanks for all your effort, time and love you pour into these projects.

For those of you who will be at the pig roast, I look forward to seeing you. For the remainder, please enjoy the summer and be safe. Let me hear your ideas, complaints and thoughts in general. God bless.

He commanded the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific from 1964 to 1968.

- a. Victor Krulak
 - b. Lucien Conein
 - c. George Patton, Jr.
- answer on page 8**



AMERICAN HISTORY 101

Billie McGregor

THE PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

On September 8, 1892 a Boston-based youth magazine "The Youth's Companion" published a 22-word recitation for school children to use during planned activities the following month to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America. Under the title "The Pledge to the Flag", the composition was the earliest version of what we now know as the PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.

The October 11, 1892 Columbus Day celebration of the 400th Anniversary of the discovery of America was planned for years in advance, and anticipated much as modern Americans look forward to and plan for the advent of a new century. The United States had recovered from most of the effects of its Civil War that began 30 years earlier, and people from around the world were flocking to the "Land of Opportunity". The previous year almost a half million immigrants had entered the United States through the Barge Office in Battery Park, New York and on New Years day of 1892 the new Federal Bureau of Receiving's station at Ellis Island had opened.

Two men interested in both education and planned Columbus Day celebrations around our Nation's 44 states were Francis Bellamy and James Upham. To this day it is still unknown which of the two men actually authored the words that were to become the Pledge of Allegiance. It was published anonymously and not copyrighted. James Upham was an employee of the Boston publishing firm that produced "The Youth's Companion" in which it first appeared. Francis Bellamy was an educator who served as chairman of the National committee of educators and civic leaders who were planning the Columbus Day activities. What we do know for certain is that the words first appeared in the September 8, 1892 issue of "The Youth's Companion", and a month later more than 12 million school children recited the words for the first time in schools across the nation. Our Pledge of Allegiance was born, but like anything new, it took many years to "reach maturity", and underwent several changes along the way. That first Pledge of Allegiance read:

October 11, 1892 *I pledge allegiance to my Flag, and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.*

After the Columbus Day celebration the Pledge to the Flag became a popular daily routine in America's public schools, but gained little attention elsewhere for almost 25 years. Finally, on Flag Day - June 14, 1923, the Pledge received major attention from adults who had gathered for the first National Flag Conference in Washington, D.C. Here their Conference agenda took note of the wording in the Pledge. There was concern that, with the number of immigrants now living in the United States, there might be some confusion when the words "My Flag" were recited. To correct this the pledge was altered to read:

June 14, 1923 *I pledge allegiance to my the Flag of the United States, and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation indivisible, With Liberty and Justice for all.*

The following year the wording was changed again to read:

June 14, 1924 *I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States **of America**, and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation indivisible, With Liberty and Justice for all.*

The Pledge of Allegiance continued to be recited daily by children in schools across America, and gained heightened popularity among adults during the patriotic fervor created by World War II. It still was an "unofficial" pledge until June 22, 1942 when the United States Congress included the Pledge to the Flag in the United States Flag Code (Title 36). This was the first Official sanction given to the words that had been recited each day by children for almost fifty years. One year after receiving this official sanction, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that school children could not be forced to recite the Pledge as part of their daily routine. In 1945 the Pledge to the Flag received its official title as:

The Pledge of Allegiance



ON THE RIGHT TRACK

June, 2002

page 8

The last change in the Pledge of Allegiance occurred on June 14 (Flag Day), 1954 when President Dwight D. Eisenhower approved adding the words "under God". As he authorized this change he said: *"In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource in peace and war."*

This was the last change made to the Pledge of Allegiance. The 23 words that had been initially penned for a Columbus Day celebration now comprised a Thirty-one profession of loyalty and devotion to not only a flag, but to a way of life...the American ideal. Those words now read:

June 14, 1954 *I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation under God, indivisible, With Liberty and Justice for all.*

In 1892, 1923, 1924 and 1954 the American people demonstrated enough concern about the actual words in the Pledge to make some necessary changes. Today there may be a tendency among many Americans to recite "by rote" with little thought for the words themselves. Before continuing with our tour, let's examine these 31 words a little more thoroughly.

**I Pledge Allegiance
to the flag
of the United States
of America
and to the Republic**

I Promise to be faithful and true (Promise my loyalty)

**for which it stands,
one Nation under God,**

to the emblem that stands for and represents

all our states, each of them individual, and individually represented on the flag

yet formed into a UNION of one Nation,

Indivisible,

And I also pledge my loyalty to the Government that is itself a Republic, a form of government where the PEOPLE are sovereign,

this government also being represented by the Flag to which I promise loyalty,

These individual states are united as a single Republic under the Divine providence of God, "our most powerful resource" (according to the words of President Eisenhower)

With Liberty,

and can not be separated. (This part of the original version of the pledge was written just 50 years after the beginning of the Civil War and demonstrates the unity sought in the years after that divisive period in our history)

And Justice,

The people of this Nation being afforded the freedom to pursue "life, liberty, and happiness",

And each person entitled to be treated justly, fairly, and according to proper law and principle,

For All

And these principles afforded to EVERY AMERICAN, regardless of race, religion, color, creed, or any other criteria. Just as the flag represents our individual states that can not be divided or separated, this Nation represents millions of people who can not be separated or divided.

Thus it is that when you Pledge Allegiance to the United States Flag, You:



- *Promise your loyalty to the Flag itself.**
- *Promise your loyalty to your own and the other States.**
- *Promise your loyalty to the Government that unites us all,**
Recognizing that we are ONE Nation under God,
That we cannot or should not be divided or alone,
And understanding the right to Liberty and Justice belongs to ALL of us.