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UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
HEADQUARTERS OF THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF
FPO SAN FRANCISCO 96610

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3000
Ser 33/ 001473
20 DEC 1967

REGISTERED AIR MAIL

[REDACTED] - Unclassified when enclosure (1) is removed

From: Commander in Chief U. S. Pacific Fleet
To: Chief of Naval Operations (OP 33)

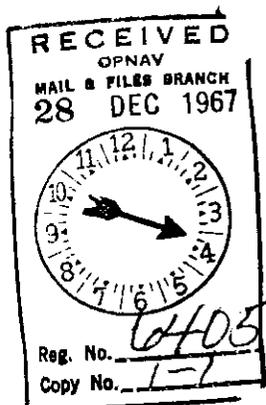
Subj: Report of Night Action of DESOTO PATROL; forwarding of

Encl: (1) COMDESDIV 52 SEC ltr CDD52:JWP:my 3000 ser 002
of 22 Sep 1964

1. As requested via telephone conversation with CNO Duty
Captain on 18 December, enclosure (1) is forwarded.



BRIAN McCAULEY
By direction



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**UNITED STATES PACIFIC FLEET
COMMANDER SEVENTH FLEET**

FF/7/KWW:sy
5720

Ser: N12- 00261

12 DEC 1967

- Unclassified when enclosures are removed

From: Commander SEVENTH Fleet
To: Chief of Naval Operations (Op-33)

Subj: Combat Action Reports (U)

Ref: (a) COMSEVENTHFLT Msg 081426Z DEC 67
(b) CNO Msg 052230Z DEC 67
(c) CNO Msg 062136Z DEC 67

Encl: (1) Narrative Chronology USS MORTON (DD 948) and USS EDWARDS (DD 950)
September 1964
(2) Composite Track of USS MORTON (DD 948) and USS EDWARDS (DD 950)

1. In accordance with reference (a), enclosures (1) and (2) are submitted herewith in response to references (b) and (c).

K. W. Wade
K. W. WADE
By direction



OP-33
CONTROL NO.
2019-07

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GULF OF TONKIN ACTION - 18 SEP 1964

NARRATIVE CHRONOLOGY

I

BACKGROUND

On 2 August, 1964 USS MADDOX (DD 731) was attacked by North Vietnamese PT boats in international waters in the Gulf of TONKIN, while conducting a surveillance and intelligence (DESOTO) patrol. The torpedo attack took place in daylight hours. MADDOX successfully evaded the torpedoes, and drove off or sank the attacking craft.

Two days later, on the night of 4 August, MADDOX and TURNER JOY (DD 951) had completed a similar patrol in international waters in the Gulf of TONKIN, off the coast of North Viet-Nam. While retiring to the center of the Gulf to their night steaming area, they were attacked by PT boats in the darkness. A two hour running battle ensued, during which MADDOX and TURNER JOY evaded torpedoes, and are believed to have sunk three attacking craft.

Following this second unprovoked attack in international waters, the President ordered the SEVENTH Fleet to "reply," by conducting air strikes against certain DRV PT boat bases and their associated supporting facilities. The strikes (PIERCE ARROW) were carried out by aircraft from the USS CONSTELLATION (CVA 64) and the USS TICONDEROGA (CVA 14) on 5 September 1964. Numerous DRV PT boats and SWATOWS were sunk or damaged, and the POL stowed at VINH was 90% destroyed.

Following the engagement involving MADDOX and TURNER JOY on the night of 4 August, no further DESOTO patrol activity took place in the Gulf of TONKIN until 17 September, 1964. On that date the USS EDWARDS (DD 950)

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and the USS MORTON (DD 948), with COMDESDIV 52 (CTU 77.6.6) embarked in MORTON, conducted, in company, an uneventful DESOTO patrol in the Gulf off the coast of North Viet-Nam, returning to an area in the South central portion of the Gulf during the night. The patrol along the coast (about 12 miles off shore and paralleling the coast line) resumed on the morning of 18 September, and was completed without event by nightfall. The two destroyers then proceeded on a South Easterly course (130°) toward the center of the Gulf to their night steaming area, from which they intended to return to conduct their final day of the patrol the next morning.

II

CHRONOLOGY (all times HOTEL)

18 SEP

- 1916 MORTON and EDWARDS were in column at 2,000 yards, course 130°, speed 20 knots. Visibility was 4 to 5 miles, sea state 1, with wind from the North West at 8-13 knots. It was a moonlit night, with scattered clouds obscuring 40 to 50% of the sky, and a dark cloud obscuring part of the horizon.
- 1943 When in the vicinity of 18° 45'N, 106°45'E (about 45 miles off the North Viet-Nam coast) MORTON and EDWARDS detected a radar contact at 20,500 yards to the east (118°T)
- 1950 The range had closed to 11,500, with the contact tracking at 17 knots on course 213°. The destroyers changed course to the South to 160°, and increased speed to 25 knots to keep clear of the contact. Almost immediately thereafter, course was changed further to the right to 220°.
- 1952 MORTON plotted a definite turn toward by the contact, with

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- an increase in speed. EDWARDS also had some indication of turn toward, but not as marked as that plotted by MORTON.
- 1955 With the range to the contact heving continued to close, to about 7,800 yards, and "hydrophone effects" having been reported on the port bow of the MORTON, the destroyers turned further to the right to 280^oT, after which the range began to open.
- 2004 MORTON detected a second contact ahead and to the West of the formation, at 297^o(T), 13,700 yards. This contact gave an initial indication of closing on a south easterly course at high speed. [Post incident reconstruction appears to indicate that this contact, a few minutes after inittial detection, steadied down on a course of about 215, with a speed of about 20 knots]
- 2005 The destroyers turned back to the South, to course 160^o, to pass between the two contacts, and to clear the batteries of both ships. Following this turn, the range to the contact on the East again began to close.
- 2014 The destroyers turned right to 190^o in view of the closing range to the easterly target, now bearing 139^o(T) at about 9,700 yards from MORTON.
- 2016 MORTON fired a 5" warning round over the eastern contact. [Note: the post-incident reconstruction indicates that this contact, about 5 minutes after the indication of a turn toward the destroyers noted earlier, turned back to the South West and settled down on a generally consistent

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course of approximately 210°. Thus the destroyers, when they changed course to 160° to pass between the two contacts, and then to 190°, were actually closing the eastern contact, rather than vice versa.]

2021

The range to the eastern contact having continued to close [see note under 2016 above], MORTON opened fire with her 5" battery on the order of CTU 77.6.6.

At about this time, EDWARDS fired a warning shot over the contact to the West, [range undetermined, but probably in the order of 15,000 yards] EDWARDS had the contact on her fire control, but not surface search, radar.

2023*

CTU 77.6.6 reported to CINCPACFLT, COMSEVENTHFLT, etc. in plain language, by flash precedence, that he was "under attack by 4 craft," and had taken all targets under fire, with one believed hit. [CTU 77.6.6 18/1223Z]

2025

EDWARDS opened fire on the eastern contact, bearing about 270°(T), range about 11,000 yards.

From this time until about 2155, the destroyers proceeded in formation at speeds varying from 20 to 30 knots and on south westerly courses, between the two contacts. MORTON fired periodically on the contact to the East, with EDWARDS firing on the contact to the West.

At about 2155, the destroyers turned to the South East

* All times of reports, etc. throughout this chronology are the Date Time Group times and will, of course, vary from the actual time of transmission to an unknown extent.

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and picked up several other contacts closing their track from the North at speeds of 18 to 30 knots. Warning shots were fired at each, and, with the range continuing to close, two were taken under fire.

Unlike the initial two contacts, however, the subsequent contacts picked up during the destroyers' run to the southwest persisted for only short periods. [With respect to the two which were fired upon, their short duration could, of course, have been the result of hits]

The CPA of any contact was about 3,200 yards, on one contact held briefly by EDWARDS. Generally, however, the CPA was substantially greater.

A more graphic picture of the track of the two destroyers with their contacts, warning shots and firing points may be gained from attachments 1 and 2. Detailed courses and speed changes are not included, but may be ascertained from large scale reconstructions made by the Operations Division.

2029 CTU 77.6. requested air cover (CTU 77.6.6 18/1229Z)

2050 COMSEVENTHFLT received the initial flash precedence unclassified report of attack.

2137 All firing ended, a period of one hour and 25 minutes having elapsed since the first warning shot by MORTON. The destroyers continued on an easterly course to clear the DRV coast, which they had closed to within about 20 miles.

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No torpedo attack on either destroyer were observed during the incident, nor was there any solid evidence of enemy gunfire. Two wakes paralleling that of the EDWARDS were noted by a GAP aircraft from BON HOMME RICHARD, at about 2115. No definite, confirmed visual contacts were made, though glimpses of surface contacts were believed to have been gained by some eyewitnesses aboard the destroyers. Hits on 4 contacts were believed to have been observed on the fire control radars of both destroyers, with 3 or 4 targets considered to have been sunk, based on such observations, with subsequent fading or disappearance of the targets. No explosions or fires were observed on any target.

Possible light to severe jamming of the fire control radars was noted during the early part of the incident, until about 2105. A possible skin head radar was detected by ECM during the latter half of the engagement.

Some Fire Control Director contacts were detected closer in than the DRT plotted contacts, from time to time, but these resulted in no significant pattern.

MORTON fired 56 5" and 128 3" rounds. EDWARDS fired 152 5" and 36 3" rounds.

2155

COMSEVENTHFLT received from CTU 77.6.6 a flash unclassified report of having taken under fire a new target to the South of the original firing area. (CTU 77.6.6 18/1337Z)

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2209 COMSEVENTHFLT urged CTU 77.6.6 to collect "any and all evidence of attack," submitting a detailed situation report as soon as possible.

2233 COMSEVENTHFLT ordered CTG 77.6 to send one watchdog destroyer to the area of engagement to search for evidence of the attack, and to have RECCE aircraft over the area at first light to assist in the search and to cover probable retirement tracks.

He ordered CTG 76.6, UNODIR, to resume the DESOTO Patrol as previously planned. [The previous plan called for the destroyers to return to the Patrol track at daylight on the 19th, at a specified point on the track]

2244 COMSEVENTHFLT received a very brief flash SITREP from CTU 77.6.6, which covered in general terms the opening of the incident. No data on ranges, bearings, visual sightings, speeds of contacts, etc. was submitted (CTU 77.6.6 18/1327Z - 2126H)

2255 COMSEVENTHFLT received a flash order from CINCPACFLT to make all preparations for possible reprisal air attacks to take place after daylight the next morning (CINCPACFLT 18/1431Z - 2231H)

2317 COMSEVENTHFLT requested, by flash precedence, CTU 77.6.6 to provide ASAP

- (a) Assessment of type of contacts
- (b) Verification of radar or visual
- (c) Range of first contact

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(d) CPA of targets

(e) Target reaction

(f) Target speed before and after the turn to starboard.

CTU 77.6.6 was ordered to search for evidence of attack, reporting findings immediately, and to pursue and identify contacts.

2323 COMSEVENTHFLT received CINCPACFLT immediate message advising that the POL at HAIPHONG was the most likely target if reprisals were ordered (CPF 18/1454Z - 2255H).

2330 COMSEVENTHFLT received CINCPACFLT flash message stating, "Imperative that we establish beyond any doubt ASAP fact that DESOTO Patrol was overtly attacked" (CPF 18/1514Z - 2314H).

2342 CTU 77.6.6 made flash SITREP covering entire incident, but very briefly and in insufficient detail to permit reconstruction, and, most importantly, not establishing whether or not the destroyers had in fact been attacked. (CTU 77.6.6 18/1542Z) TOR* 19/0245H.

2348 CTG 77.6 ordered RUPERTUS from watchdog station to assist MORTON and EDWARDS in search for evidence of attack, in response to C7F 18/1433Z - 2233H (CTG 77.6 18/1548Z)

2352 COMSEVENTHFLT ordered CTGs 77.7, 77.6 and 77.4 to review strike plans for HAIPHONG POL and PHUC YEN A.F, revising deck loading to achieve maximum strike capability. 77.4 in RANGER was ordered to close POINT YANKEE at best speed.

*All TORs in the chronology are TORs by COMSEVENTHFLT

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77.6 was directed to coordinate strike if a reprisal was ordered.

2354 CINCPACFLT, by flash precedence, informed COMSEVENTHFLT that "we must have answers" to question relating to whether or not there had been an intentional attack on the destroyers. (CPF 18/1554Z) TOR by C7F was 19/0009H.

19 SEP

0003 COMSEVENTHFLT alerted all 7th Fleet Task Force and Task Group Commanders to the TONKIN Gulf incident. (C7F 18/1603Z)

0010 CTG 77.6 ordered aircraft from CONSTELLATION to be over engagement area at 0515H [First light] to search for evidence.

0015 COMSEVENTHFLT received immediate message from CINCPACFLT directing that RANGER be sent to POINT YANKEE (CPF 18/1549Z - 2349H). [COMSEVENTHFLT, however, had anticipated this order, by his action of 18/2352H.]

0102 COMSEVENTHFLT, by flash message, advised CTU 77.6.6, "If there is any doubt in your mind that you did in fact encounter surface targets, now is the time to admit same. Otherwise every shred of evidence should be forwarded immediately." He was also advised that the DESOTO Patrol would continue as scheduled (C7F 18/1702Z)

0111 JCS flashed that, except to protect life, all DESOTO messages were to be classified (JCS 18/1711Z) TOR - 0134H.

0122 CTG 77.7 reported that BON HOMME RICHARD CAP pilot had observed two wakes parallel to that of EDWARDS at 18/2115H. Pilot also saw gun flashes from EDWARDS but observed no

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- hits (CTG 77.7 18/1722Z - TOR 0202H).
- 0159 CINCPAC, by immediate precedence to CINCPACFLT, asked a number of further questions as to wakes, photos, ECM, sightings, fire control lock-ons, and whether or not the targets could have been a flock of birds. (CP 18/1759Z). TOR 0505 (over 3 hours).
- 0224 CTU 77.6.6, in answer to COMSEVENTHFLT's advice to admit doubt if it existed, stated that he had no doubt that surface contacts had been encountered. (CTU 77.6.6 18/1824Z) This flash message was not received by COMSEVENTHFLT until 0430H, over two hours later than its DTG.
- 0227 CINCPACFLT advised COMSEVENTHFLT, by flash that he "required positive evidence of attack and that urgency of your reply cannot be over emphasized." (CPF 18/1827Z). TOR 0240H.
- 0254 COMSEVENTHFLT received CTG 77.6.6 summary SITREP described under 18/2342H entry in the chronology.
- 0334 CINCPAC, by immediate precedence, directed CINCPACFLT to modify DESOTO Patrol schedule as to starting point on the Patrol track that same morning. (CP 18/1934Z, TOR 19/0415H)

From this point, throughout the morning, a most confusing series of directives relating to the resumption of the DESOTO Patrol ensued. It will be recalled that the destroyers had been ordered to conduct the patrol as previously scheduled. This required their departure from the area of engagement at about 0615. At 0437, the JCS, by message 18/2037Z (immediate) ordered CINCPAC to further vary the

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Patrol as to sequence of points on the predetermined track (TOR 0647). At 0452, CINCPACFLT by message 18/2052Z (Immediate) ordered COMSEVENTHFLT to take the 0334 CINCPAC message for action (TOR 0543). At 0601, CTG 77.6 ordered CTU 77.6.6 UNODIR, to return to the Patrol at 1200, vice 0615 (TOR 0635). At 0605, CINCPAC directed CINCPACFLT, by immediate precedence, to cancel the CINCPAC 0334 message in view of the 0437 JCS message. (TOR 0914Z). At 0758, the JCS canceled their 0437 message, and ordered the patrol to proceed with a different sequence of Patrol points, and with a CPA of 15 miles from the DRV coast line, retiring one hour before sunset (TOR 0858). At 0847 CINCPAC canceled his 0605 message, directing compliance "as practicable" in accordance with the 0758 JCS message (TOR 1100). At 1007, CINCPACFLT directed, by flash precedence, COMSEVENTHFLT to comply with the CINCPAC 0847 message (TOR 0956). The CINCPAC 0847 message was sent with immediate precedence, however, and, as noted above, did not reach COMSEVENTHFLT until 1100, over an hour later. At 1050, CTU 77.6.6 advised that, by this time, he could not make the designated points and still reach the point of termination by sunset, and that he would commence the Patrol at a point which would enable him to do so (TOR 1243). At 1118 CTG 77.6 directed CTU 77.6.6 to comply with the CINCPAC 0847 message, and stressed that the terminal point should be cleared one hour before sunset (TOR 1141). At 1203, CTU 77.6.6, who had commenced his

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return from the engagement area at 1000, advised as to the point he would intercept the patrol track, and his intended speed of 29 knots. (TOR 1340). At 1208 COMSEVENTHFLT directed CTG 77.6.6 to comply with the latest CINCPAC directive, proceeding at a 20 knot SOA . At 1310, CTU 77.6.6 advised COMSEVENTHFLT that he was committed prior to receipt of the COMSEVENTHFLT 1208 message, and had to make 29 knots to reach terminal point on time, referring to his 1203 message, which had not reached COMSEVENTHFLT until 1340.

The above sequence is isolated from the remainder of the chronology, and presented separately in the thought that it may be of interest from a command and control point of view.

0349 CINCPACFLT, by flash precedence, advised COMSEVENTHFLT that in the event a reprisal was ordered, SEVENTHFLT targets were to be HAIPHONG POL, plus armed RECCE of HAIPHONG CAT BI airfield. Other instructions as to flak suppression, etc. were given, with a time over target to be about 1200 (CPF 18/1947Z).

TOR was 0445

0400 CTU 77.6.6 reported RUPERTUS in area assisting in search and recommended that RUPERTUS join MORTON and EDWARDS on DESOTO leaving area at 0615, rather than being left alone in area.

TOR 0542Z

0430 COMSEVENTHFLT received the CTU 77.6.6 message expressing "no doubt" as to presence of surface contacts, sent at (or having a DTG of) 0224, over two hours earlier.

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- 0505 COMSEVENTHFLT directed CTG 77.6 to take the CINCPACFLT 0349 target assignment message for action (C7F 18/2105Z)
- 0525 CTU 77.6.6 reported that he was conducting search with aid of RUPERTUS and 3 aircraft, but was hampered by frequent rain squalls. (CTU 77.6.6 18/2125Z). This message was sent by immediate precedence, and was not received by COMSEVENTHFLT until 1521.
- 0613 CINCPACFLT, superceding the target assignment of 0349, assigned as new targets the VINH Army Supply and BEN THUI Port Facility, requesting the submission ASAP of a plan, including time from launch to TOT for each target. (CPF 18/2213Z). TOR was 0635. [Note: If the TOT still to be about 1200, less than 5½ hours remained at this point]
- 0625 CNO, directly to CTG 77.6, addressed by flash message a number of specific questions regarding hydrophone effects, verification of hits, fire control lock-ons and phosphorescence in water (CNO 18/2225Z). CINCPACFLT readdressed the message to COMSEVENTHFLT for information. TOR 0903.
- 0640 CNO, again direct to 77.6 and without COMSEVENTHFLT as information addressee, asked by flash message more questions as to radar performance, correlation between contacts held by each ship, etc. The readdressal by CINCPACFLT was received at 0908.
- 0643 CINCPACFLT, by immediate precedence, addressed additional specific requests to CTU 77.6.6 relating to hydrophone effects, weather, ECM etc. (CPF 18/2243Z). TOR 0843.

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- 0955 CTU 77.6.6 reported by immediate precedence, that 2/3 of the area had been searched with negative results, and that he was departing to resume DESOTO Patrol at 1000 (CTU 77.6.6 19/0155Z). TOR 1501
- 1008 CINCPACFLT advised CTG 77.6 that the reporting of the incident had been "entirely unsatisfactory." (CPF 19/0208Z). TOR 1052.
- 1034 CINCPACFLT directed CTU 77.6.6 by immediate precedence, to submit direct to CNO, by 20/1000Z (1800H of the next day), sufficient data to permit complete and accurate reconstruction. (CPF 19/0234Z). TOR 1216.
- 1448 CINCPACFLT by flash message informed CTU 77.6.6 that the above information was required to reach CNO 24 hours earlier, or at 1800 of this same day. (CPF 19/0648Z). TOR 1510.
- 1520 CTU 77.6.6 answered CNO's earlier questions of 0640 (CTU 77.6.6 19/0720Z)
- 1541 CTG 77.6 reported that the search of the area had been completed with negative results (CTU 77.6 19/0741Z) TOR 1622.
- 1547 CTG 77.6 concurred with CINCPACFLT's 1008 message that the reporting was "entirely unsatisfactory," and gave certain communication equipment deficiencies, etc. as partial reasons therefor. (CTU 77.6 19/0755). TOR 1715.
- 1631 CINCPACFLT informed the JCS that the search had been completed at 1100 with negative results. (CPF 19/0831Z).

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1929 CTG 77.6 advised CINCPACFLT that the reply to his 1034 request for complete data is "now being transmitted" (CTU 77.6 19/1129Z).

2057 CINCPACFLT informed CTG 77.6 that the requested data referred to above had still not been received (CPF 19/1257Z).

2205 CTU 77.6 commenced submitting his detailed data, in 14 parts, the times of receipt by COMSEVENTHFLT of the various parts being as follows:

20 SEP

Part 1 - 0012	8 - 0158
2 - 0049	9 - 0341
3 - 0059	10 - 0135
4 - 0106	11 - 0136
5 - 0117	12 - 0113
6 - 0442	13 - 0234
7 - 0148	14 - 1232

III

CONCLUSION

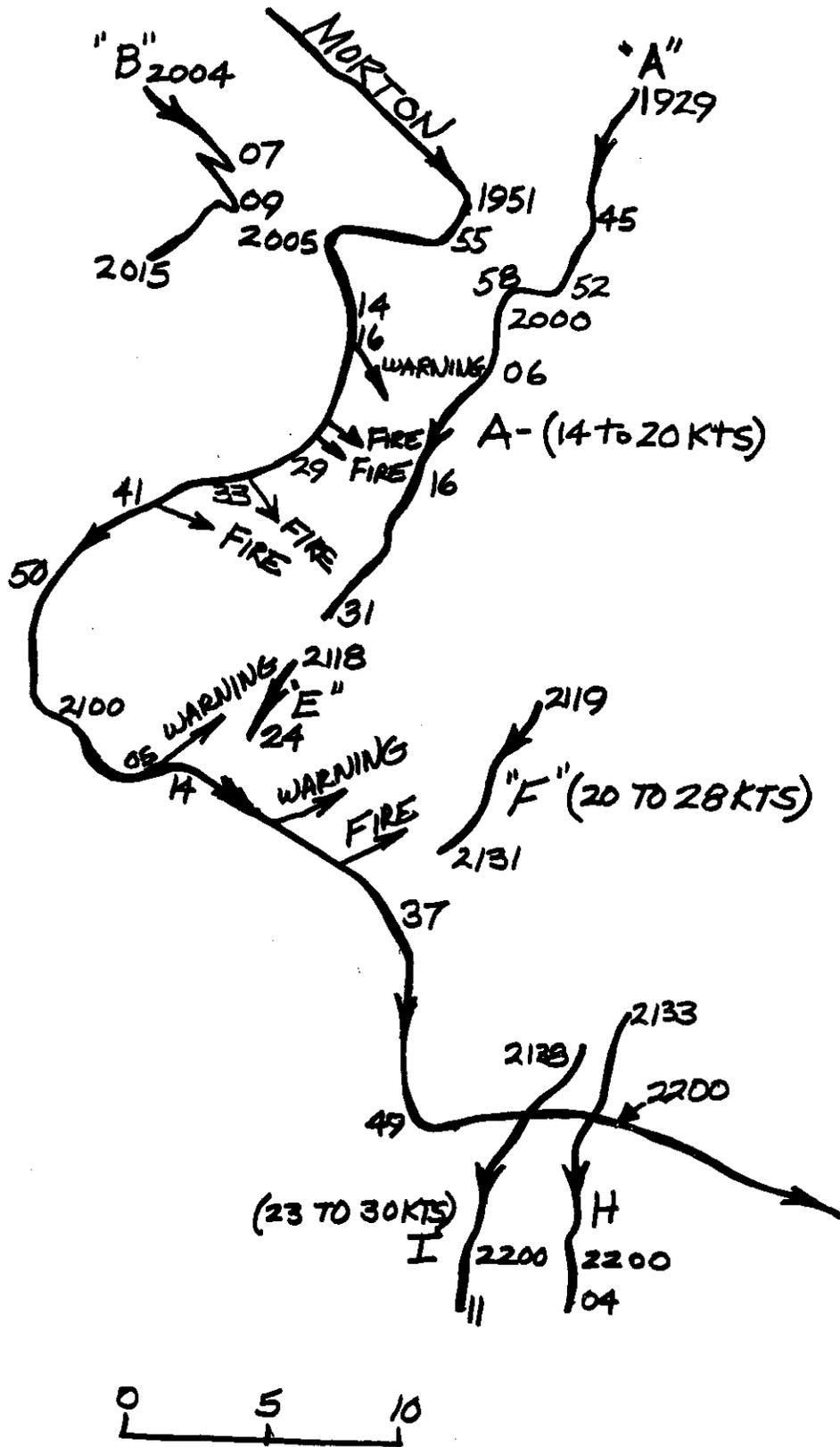
The above chronology presents an incident which would seem to afford a rich source for study in four areas:

- (a) Surface target tracking and identification.
- (b) Incident and engagement reporting.
- (c) Communication equipment and procedures in situations similar to those encountered by the DESOTO Patrol.
- (d) Command and Control philosophy and methodology.

The incident affords an excellent real life situation in which problems involving all four of the above areas are graphically illustrated. The opportunity to analyze these areas, and to evolve appropriate answers, should not be missed.

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Reconstructed track and targets
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