Frederick Frick: One was sunk. Another one was dead in the water burning. And a
third one was damaged. I call them one, two and three. One was; sunk or sinking. I
visually observed that. It was quite a ways separated from the other two. The other two -
one of them was burning and the third was trying to help number two and the third
appeared to me to be damaged. And at that time I rolled the F-8's in. It turned out; I
learned years later, that the section leader - the squadron commander, was Jim Stockdale.
Subsequently he was to write, in fact, the inflection of what he wrote in the chapter in the
book he and Sibell wrote, was essentially that his F-8's saved the Maddox. That's a bunch
of crap. Again, one was sunk or sinking, one was damaged and dead in the water and the
third was helping him. It was over. About the time the F-8's rolled in for what I would
call mop up. And, to give them a piece of the action if you will. The thing was essentially
over. And the F-8's did no damage that we could tell at all. They reported they took a hit;
later, we think, the hit was a ricochet off of one of their own 20 Mike Mike's back up into
the wing of the wingman.

Jeff Gardner: They'll never say that....

FF: Probably not ....if they'd have gotten there earlier maybe they would have
done all the damage. Point is, the surface action was done by the time the F-8's got there. They wouldn't have participated at all except that they happened to be in the air when I called down to the *Ticonderoga* when we were under attack. It was my understanding they were just up for a normal bump ....after all they were F-8's. They were fighters. They were not attack aircraft. They weren't suited for this kind of thing. So the fact that it says earlier in this article *Ticonderoga* was there specifically in support of Desoto ops. Maybe.... that was completely unknown to me and I suspect to Commodore Herrick. To us, TYCO (*Ticonderoga*) was down there and TYCO was running the old YANKEE TEAM ops. They were doing surveillance over Laos. Air surveillance. That was it.

**JG:** If that was the case, that they were there as he says in the article, it would have been unconscionable that you couldn't have known that, as ops officer.

**FF:** More than that. If they were there in support of us then I should have an air plan. I should have had all their frequencies. I mean, that's just the way we operate. If airplanes are going to support surface ships or vice versa, we know how to communicate with each other. We know when each other is going to be on station, and what our roles and missions are. None of that existed. What really happened here is, these events happened in quick sequence. The action was over, except for mop up. The F-8's were rolling in. A message was received - I don't remember if it was COMSEVENTHFLT or CINCPACFLT - in response to my initial message, which said we were being approached - my memory said pursued - whatever ....their immediate flash response was to essentially, to paraphrase it, if they break it off then you break it off. All these things happened almost coincidentally. When the F-8's made their one pass and I sent them back, the admiral, Admiral Moore - I'm pretty sure it was him personally on this HF circuit we had - and I was on our end, said he was sending - he was loading up – a number of other airplanes, sending them up there and he wanted to sink'em all.

[^1]CAPT Frick will refer often to a synopsis article by Steve Edwards, ‘Stalking the Enemy's Coast,’ *Proceedings of the U.S. Naval Institute, 118* (February 1992),] number of other airplanes, sending them up there and he wanted to sink'em all.

**JG:** On *Ticonderoga*. The admiral on *Ticonderoga*?

**FF:** Yes, on *Ticonderoga*. And I'm listening to him on one hand and reading this if they break it off you break it off' message from higher authority than Admiral Moore on the other. Subsequently, about ten minutes later we talked again. Apparently he had just
been handed the message too and so he didn't send that second wave or whatever he was
going to send. And the reason we did not - Lyndon Johnson I later was supposedly
incensed that his destroyer couldn't sink three quote ‘little PT boats’. Well, we got the
message. We could have easily sunk them. It was a mop-up I think. It would have been
target practice. But it would have been unnecessary, except for maybe political reasons.
We could have taken them all prisoners. It all would have been very easy. But we didn't
do it because we were told if they broke it off we broke it off. Now they didn't break it off
voluntarily. It was broken off by the fact that the engagement was over.

JG: Which is why President Johnson changed the rules of engagement by the time
of the second attack? The president himself.

FF: To what?

JG: Hot pursuit.

FF: It's easy to change the rules of engagement. But I will tell you - and I
think I have my share of aggressiveness.... I have a reputation for it as a matter of
fact - When you're up in the Tonkin Gulf you are surrounded on three sides by
hostile or potentially hostile forces in the case of the Chinese mainland and
Hainan Island, and your nearest support in three hundred miles away
approximately, the *Ticonderoga* initially, and you're talking about a minimum of a
half hour flying time response, and we're not at war.... You've got to understand
when you're at war the rules change. When you're at war with a country it's your
mission to seek and destroy. We weren't even sure why it happened, much less
did we think we were at a state of war or that we had carte blanche to go,
historically, peacetime rules of engagement you're limited to defending yourself.
This follow 'em into their ports and blow them up in their homes sounds good in
rhetoric, but it’s not very practical.

JG: It served a good purpose for the president on the fourth.

FF: I've always resented that Lyndon Johnson quoted all over the place - I didn't
see his quotes until I got home months later; my wife had saved all the papers, Time,
Newsweek and all that stuff - that he'd said that. CINCPACFLT or a staff officer didn't
step up to the bat and say they didn't do it because we told them not to do it. We were
classic scapegoats.
JG: I have every word Lyndon Johnson said in public over those three days and you're right. None of that ever came up.

FF: There's something in here about one aircraft that was hit, the F-8. It says 339 was sunk, 336 was heavily damaged. That's consonant with what I said. And the third one made it back. And here it says Admiral Johnson, seventh fleet, ordered a second flight out to pursue. That's kind of cutting a corner there. Actually what happened is that we both got the message at the same time to break it off if they broke it off. This guy claiming that 339 wasn't sunk, years afterwards, is baloney. As far as I'm concerned it was sunk.

JG: He said it was towed in by the remaining craft.

FF: The second boat, the damaged boat which is identified in this article as 336 might have been towed back by 333. I don't know. We left the area. But I think if you talk to people on the bridge, and again, I spent eighty per cent of my time in CIC and radio, and not that much time on the bridge, I only went up to the bridge to talk to the Commodore to say I'm sending this message, what do you want me to tell the world now? But my memory is that one of them was sunk. I saw it was sunk on a trip to the bridge. You feel lonely up there. Can tell you unequivocally that if its my mission - if we're at war with somebody and its my mission to go in somewhere with my ship, no matter what the odds - and it's clear what my mission is - my mission is to inflict as much damage on the enemy and the least amount on my crew and me and my ship, I have no problem with that philosophy. But you see, we didn't have that mission. That did not exist. This thing about Captain Herrick expressing concern for the safety of the force.... if we're up there to do something let's get adequate forces up there and do it. But when you always have to wait for the other guy to fire the first shot and you're fairly confident he's going to fire the first shot. That's just an untenable position to be in.

JG: Isn't he reflecting there the same concern you had about being out there on Maddox instead of Berkeley.

FF: Actually, Maddox, uh, the 5.54s on Turner Joy were the same as on Berkeley. The Berkeley would have put out a couple of more rounds a minute and perhaps their system was a little more accurate. But Berkeley only had two gun barrels to bear. On Maddox, we had six. This is all in hindsight, but for surface action against PT boats Maddox turned out to be the better. The only reason I bring up the Berkeley-Maddox
issue is that, was it going in, did they deliberately take us off a new missile destroyer and put us on an old World War II destroyer because there was some concern that the ship and its crew were going to be lost and it was better to lose the Maddox than the Berkeley?

JG: Because you were physically on Berkeley....

FF: We were physically on Berkeley when we were given tasking for the patrol. If it was high authority - MACV level, CINCPAC level, DoD level, JCS level, whatever it is - if they felt that there was risk to the Maddox - and on hindsight with reflection I think they did feel that way - you owe it to your crew, you owe it to people you send into harm's way to tell them they're in harms way. Don't tell them they're on some kind of routine baloney. Not only because they'll be better prepared to be in harms way - theoretically they shouldn't but in practicality they will - but during the Cold War phase, knowing that in our lifetime almost every war the United States has been involved in has been precipitated by a naval action - when you get involved in something like this and you know there are nuclear weapons on both sides, and you know you can't control escalation necessarily, you don't want to be the guy that's responsible for pulling the trigger, making a mistake and pulling the wrong trigger that escalates into something that bad. That's all playing in the back of your mind, even when you're in a little, seemingly insignificant like this. Why are these guys attacking us? What did we do? More importantly, what are the ramifications of this?

JG: At Keelung, what did they tell you? What was the scope of things, that aren't SI? I mean, I'm focusing on what they didn't tell you, but my gosh, what was the impression you were left with about what you were going into?

FF: It was a routine Desoto patrol. Now let me define that. I had personally been on one before, I think on the Pritchett. I was an ensign and the CIC officer. This was off of: Ting Tao. And of course I'd read about a lot of other ones. It was a routine occurrence. It was intelligence gathering around the periphery of Communist countries there. Generally, you took fingerprints of their radars with your intercept gear and so forth. We knew which radars were, and we were trying to triangulate to locate exactly where those radars were. Did a lot of oceanographic stuff, in case we ever had to do ASW in those waters, we wanted to know what the typical water inversions were and what the salinity was and all that stuff. And you did counts of traffic, of fishing junks. It was all rather
mundane intelligence. That's what Desoto patrols did. Probably more importantly, Desoto patrols were there to challenge the excessive territorial limits claims of these countries. And I don't know this, but I've been told over the years that it is necessary that we do this from time to time because the World Court, if somebody makes a claim of, say, 200 miles territorial waters and it's never challenged it becomes de facto law eventually. And we do this routinely. We did it routinely in the mid-80's as part of the *Enterprise* battle group. We went through Lombok Strait in Indonesia without notifying them deliberately. It wasn't to insult them, it was just to say this is an international strait and we're not going to notify you for routine operations.

JG: Would you have known in this case there was a record of communist country’s' considering ocean bays inland waters?

FF: That can be debated. I have never known that, for instance, the Gulf of Tonkin would be considered something like that. The point being, mariners have to have the right of innocent passage. If we didn't have that the Singapore Strait. Could be closed for political activity. So could the Sunda Strait and Lombok Strait going to the southern Indian Ocean. So could Tushima and all those straits up north around Japan. So it’s necessary to challenge these from time to time. And I know this article says we were told we could go within five miles..... My memory is twelve miles from the coast and four or five miles from the islands, Hon Me and Hon Mat. Three to four to five, something like that. I'm confident we were never - we were very diligent about not getting inside because they claimed these excessive limits and we claimed three off the United States. We generally recognize twelve and we didn't want a legal challenge to that one. So we were very diligent. I'm reasonably confident we never got inside of twelve miles from the coast, and three, four, five from the islands, whatever they were stipulating.

JG: Most of the press reports were saying thirty miles out on the first attack and sixty miles on the second.

FF: Our distance from the coast? That's not the distance we started at. We were within, as I recall, when those three PT’s identified as 333,336 and 339, when they came around from the other side of lion Me or lion Mat, it was lion Me I think, those two islands were right near each other, we visually saw them so we were within seven or eight miles at the most at the time. The actual attack happened about thirty miles from the
coast simply because we took off at flank speed to open the distance.... there have been
navy professionals and others, Lyndon Johnson hinted at it, this was not bravery, or
whatever. That we were running away. When actually the intent. Was to buy time to
report to the world. Again, this was in the time of not such great communications. It's not
like we were always picking up the red phone and going up by satellite to tell
CINCPACFLT `Oh, by the way Admiral, this is what's happening: right now. We did
have a dedicated CW circuit to NAVCOMMSTAPHIL and through them to Hawaii and
the rest of the world.

JG: And things did get backed up on the circuit very quickly.

FF: Yes. And, because we had to get it out fast it all this went out in the clear.
These were the days of the old crypto machines, we had to set everything and, you know,
it took you half an hour to get the machine ready. Then you had to back check it. It might
take an hour to get off that message. Many times those messages came out of my mouth
and the radioman wrote down the draft by memory. Maybe accurate, maybe not. Of
course, whoever received a message we wrote it down so there was a more accurate
message for what was said. Back to your question about what happened at Keelung. We
want in there to load the van and its people. The commodore, Ogier and I, and probably
others, I just don't remember who or how many others, went to Keelung. We went to
what was then called Taiwan Defense Command Headquarters. There was a three star. I
don't remember his name. And his other hat was Commander, Patrol Forces, Pacific
Fleet. Which was logical, because most of the patrols were done in the Taiwan Straits. As
I recall, the admiral was not there. I didn't read any significance into that or out of that.

I don't know who Commodore Herrick or Captain Ogier met with separately. I
know at the level of the one-on-one briefing I got one of the staff officers. I was told do
not interfere with 34-A ops, and I said ‘What are they?’ I had an SI clearance, and I was
told it was beyond my clearance level. And I remarked at the time, ‘How could I not
interfere with something when I don't know what it is?’

JG: Herrick, Ogier and yourself were cleared SI. Is that right?

FF: That's correct. This was in the days before, you know, we got to the point I
guess in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s where most senior naval officers were routinely SI.
In case you had to deal with that information. But in the ‘60s, outside the intelligence
community it was unusual for anyone to have an SI clearance. Those SI clearances were
done on all three of us in about a week. They were done in the interval from when we
were selected by Seventh Fleet or whomever to do the patrol, and the time we were in
Keelung.

JG: You would have had an SBI and then some more investigation on top of that
for that level. I'm guessing.

FF: Normally you fill out a bunch more forms for the SI, but this was done by
message. It was a hurry-up SBI. And it was only done on the three of us. I clearly
remember who did and who did not have access to SI information during that patrol.
Herrick, Ogier and I. An of course, the van folks.

JG: What was your relationship to the COMVAN? Were you Operations Officer
for the COMVAN?

FF: No. The van operated as a separate unit. They would get power and
everything from us. As I recall, they used a couple of our radio circuits although they did
have an organic capability. The officer in charge of that van was a lieutenant. I don't
remember his name. The command relationship was that he reported to the commodore
through me.

JG: But any of the information you were cleared to get wasn't coming from that

JG: O.K. O.K.

FF: Oh, here I am!

JG: There you are. I thought you were in this one.

FF: ‘The watch officer had already evaluated the maneuvers’.... I'm going to draw
some diagrams for you that, to me, make a compelling case that..... I've got to go back to
where this thing started here. It says something's in here that I didn't know. I'm surprised I
haven't read this article. I've been a subscriber to Proceedings for a long time.

‘COMSEVENTHFLT said that the Desoto Patrols be ended after the fifth, and Admiral
Moorer overrode him. He believed we could possibly draw the enemy away from 34A’.

Well Admiral Moorer, if you read this and I'm quoted I want to tell you something. If
you're using the Maddox as bait and you're using me as bait, God, you ought at least let
me know that my mission was to be bait. Whew!
FF: There's a section that says that apparently from the very start the *Ticonderoga* was specifically directed to supply air cover for the *Maddox*. That may be so. But as division Operations Officer I was totally unaware of that. Now I knew *Ticonderoga* was down there and I called them when we were under attack, but that was the first time we'd communicated with the *Ticonderoga* since we'd been in the area. First time. Maybe *Ticonderoga* knew it. I didn't know it. Maybe the commodore knew it. But I didn't know it.

JG: *If Ticonderoga* did know it, it's a big breakdown in communication somewhere.

FF: Well, that would indicate someone at some level thought we were vulnerable to attack. But we on the *Maddox* were not told that. Maybe they didn't want us to think we were, so they didn't tell us *Ticonderoga* was ready to support us. I didn't call *Ticonderoga*; we were not in the same chain of command, we were not in the same task organization. They were just another naval force in the area that I happened to know was in the area because of the communications plan I had. So that's why we called. Going by what's in this article, and we can go more in depth later, with respect to the night attack. My memory is a little hazy on some sequencing, but I want to tell you my perspective on how this thing happened. First of all, because of the attack on the second, and with *Turner Joy* joining us, we were told we didn't have to stay close to the coast at night. This is particularly significant because regardless of a ship's size and capability, if your steaming in or around a lot of junks for example, or small craft, or even merchant vessels for that matter where the enemy can work. And he gets to shoot at you first. All of your advantage has been overcome. And there were large junk concentrations. At any given time, day or night, we probably had 100 junks in sight. And we came very close to a lot of them. Some of those were large enough where a PT boat could have been alongside on the other side and we wouldn't even seen him. We could have passed him and all of a sudden had a torpedo with no time to react. That's bad enough in the day time. In the night time.... I'm reminded that the first night we went into the Gulf, before any of us had any idea this was going to happen, the commodore was particularly jumpy because, unlike I, he had served in the Korean War. He said a favorite trick of the North Koreans was to load a junk up with dynamite and get it in alongside of you, and either sacrifice
themselves. He was very leery being around all these junk in this kind of environment. Particularly at night. So after the attack happened on the second week, and as I recall we initiated it. We said we wanted to go seaward at night to be clear all these junk formations. We were going to night steam. And our original prescribed track had been cut off; there wasn't any more going all the way up there. It was all going to be patrols in the vicinity of Hon Me and Hon Mat the rest of the time. We wanted to night steam thirty or forty miles out so we were in clear waters, and if anything came near us we could see it. We did get permission to do that, and we did it on the night of the third. As I recall we went to an area forty miles due east of say, Hon Me. Out in the open sea, as open as it gets in the Gulf of Tonkin. When we started out there on the fourth, at some point in time, on surface search radar, that there were three or four contacts in the area. Same exact area we'd steamed the night before. These contacts, we tracked them over time and they were dead in the water. They might have been going two or three knots in circles, but on the radar you essentially have them in the same area. We figured it was a trap laid for us out there. That they were sitting out there waiting for us. At the same time we got an intercept, an electronics warfare intercept from a Skinhead radar out there. Skinhead or Pothead, my memory is not clear. These are small navigational radars that are on the Swatows. They are not on the PT boats that participated in the attacks, they had no radars. So we knew there was a bad guy sitting there. And we knew there were three or four more of them.

JG: Three or four more right there?

FF: Yes. Right there. And we detected that for about twenty miles and we had correlating electronics intercept at the time. So we knew these were not fishing junks. At least one of them wasn't a fishing junk! It was a bad guy. Or what we determined was bad. So instead of proceeding right on into that we decided it was a trap and there was a conversation between Ogier and myself and Herrick and maybe others. I don't remember if others were involved. We were in a column formation at the time, Maddox in the lead, Turner Joy astern, probably 2000 yards. We decided we would go southeast since we thought we were about to be attacked again and it was dark. And I want to say something about darkness, because this will lead to why Stockdale and I diverge so much. I've had many years at sea. I know of which I speak. On a very dark night it is virtually impossible
to see something on the water unless it is looms over the horizon or backlit in some way... Starlight or moonlight or something. But you can't see something with your naked eyes when it's a dark night. You've got to have the moon, you've got to have something and this was a dark night. There was no light out there that night. The accounts in the papers of thunderstorms and raging seas is embellished. There may have been a thunderstorm in the area, I didn't personally observe it. But the seas were fairly flat, as they almost always are up there except when a typhoon goes through. But the point here is just because you didn't see something with your eyeballs on a dark night, particularly when you consider when you're on a ship you're elevated. Also the people on the lookout, everyone else, even the gun mounts are elevated and you're looking down on the water. These PT boats are smaller than you are. So unless they have some kind of light on them you're not going to see them. Now you take a guy like Stockdale up there in an F-8, who has no electronic sensors whosoever, he has no radar, he has only his eyeballs. And he says because he didn't see anything with his eyeballs it didn't happen. Baloney. I didn't see anything with my eyeballs either. But I sure saw a lot of electronic stuff. And another difference between Stockdale and I was that I accessed information he didn't and I suspect never has had access to. Which is really the clincher. So anyway, on this dark night and knowing those contacts were there and having electronic intercept confirmation that there was at least one bad guy there.... [FF proceeds to make a drawing.] Here's the coast and here's Hon Me and Hon Mat. And we're out here, say twenty-five or thirty miles. Going that way. And here's these contacts. We figured it was a trap so we did a column movement and started heading southeast, say one three five or one four zero. Somewhere in there. The carriers are way down here. We immediately send out flash messages to the world, now including the carriers because now they were supporting us. Or at least we felt they were. So we turned, because we felt this trap was happening here. We proceeded the first three or four miles of this journey southward, southeastward, at thirty knots and these guys stayed in their same geographic position.

JG: What time is this, captain?

FF: I don't remember, but it was after dark. Times, you know, I am not in a position to dispute any of the times in here. Let's say things started happening about 2100. Something like that. We sent a message about 2030 saying we had, according to
this, we had received information. And that's the other part of the puzzle here. Well after
we'd gone maybe ten miles down this track, these guys all of a sudden, these guys who
were later called birds, birds that I would remind the listener or reader had radars
mounted on them that we intercept all of a sudden went on parallel, slightly closing
tracks. These birds which had been in orbit, and had been observed in orbit in one
position for some thirty minutes, maybe as much as an hour, were all of a sudden going
fifty knots. Which also happens to be the top speed of P4's and P6's. As we proceed down
here, eventually, two or three of them as I recall got to a position - because they could
outrun us and they caught us - here's Maddox in the lead and Turner Joy is behind us
2000 yards, maybe 4 miles equidistant on the track of Maddox's bow. All of a sudden,
they all - you could get hold of the DRT plot which gives you a true picture - you could
see all of those boats - those birds - turn right at us and almost coincidentally, exactly - no
this is all radar and electronics intercept before. Now we have radar throughout this and,
by the way - we're still getting the electronics intercept, where before it was on this
bearing to that Skinhead or Pothead, now it was n this bearing. So he stayed up here. One
or more of them stayed up here. Or at least didn't close at the rate that the P4's and P6's
did. That's why I think their tactic was to use the radar to vector the little guys. All this
coincidence was within thirty seconds of seeing on the DRT the plot of this turn toward
our bow. For the first time there were hydrophone effects in the water on that bearing.
Hydrophone effects come from torpedoes.

JG: For the first time....

FF: For the first time. Coincident with this turn! They turned and they launched
torpedoes. Well, after that first torpedo was launched I think the commodore, or I, one
of us sent out a message telling both ships they weren't our tactical control right here,
we told both ships to maneuver as necessary to....Then the 'fog of war' sets in, and it
sets in for two three hours. There was mass confusion. I've seen it written that Maddox
almost shot Turner Joy out of the water. Some gunner's mate on the Maddox made
himself a hero. Don't know if that happened or not. There were reports coming from
various people on the Maddox, 'I see this'. Shortly after this happened planes arrive on
the scene. One them is Stockdale's. Although I didn't know who he was at the time, I
didn't even know he was squadron commander up there. I knew his call sign. Don't
remember it. But we had F-8's up there, A-4's and A-1's. Maybe we're fortunate we didn't have any mid-airs. I don't know. Maybe we're fortunate Maddox didn't shoot Turner Joy or vice versa. On reflection, a lot of the hydrophone effects recorded subsequent to that were probably not really hydrophone effects but they were bubbles put in the water by going thirty knots at lard rudder. Knuckles put in the water. Sometimes you can get some beat off of them. So probably, I don't know how many torpedoes we reported that night, it was probably, from hindsight, grossly exaggerated. But I know one thing: the first one wasn't.

JG: How do you know it?

FF: How do I know it? I was on a radar contact that makes this turn toward me and I get a hydrophone effect on the same bearing. Within seconds.

JG: Couldn't you have that with a bubble knuckle?

FF: Who put the knuckle there?

JG: The boats turning.

FF: No. You need a deeper draft. We're getting them off of Turner Joy. Turner Joy is getting them off of us. It wouldn't have come from those boats. This report alluded to overeager sonar men. We probably had that. There was mass confusion. As far as the aviators up there, I do not know. If Stockdale himself ever called into his microphone on one of his frequencies ‘I see it in your wake’ or whatever. I don't know if he did it, he says he never did. But I know that some of them did it.

JG: Some of them saw something.

FF: Some of them saw something. And they were later to deny it all. Combat, I was watching the DRT, I kept running the radio which was only a few paces away. I don't recall going to the bridge that night at all. I think I was totally between Radio and CIC. And that was the night the messages went out fast and furious and most of them were not drafted. As soon as I walked into radio and RM1 Weaver was on the CW. y, I don't know. That night, I was in

JG: You didn't see a torpedo on this attack.

FF: No. On the second of August I'd visually seen a torpedo. It came very close down the side of Maddox. Not dangerously close, because it didn't have any homing capability. But when you put everything together....and I will tell you again: I
was an experienced CIC/Operations Officer when this started, and have gotten a lot
more experience over the years, and I will change nothing. I change none of my
evaluations or my judgments of what I saw and the conclusions I reached that night.
People said this was birds. Again, birds don't have radars. Birds do not orbit and then
when you turn away from heading toward them all of a sudden decide they would like
to accompany you. Birds don't come to what is a classic torpedo launching position,
and then execute a classic torpedo launching maneuver and then cause hydrophone
effects in the water. When you look on a radar, I've seen flocks of birds on a radar.
Occasionally you see them. Not often. It has to be a pretty concentrated flock to get a
return. They have to be flying fairly close together. But the return is kind of fuzzy, like
it is on a cloud. Then it disperses. It's a very sporadic thing. We had almost continuous
contact on these all the way through. They were not fuzzy. They exhibited
maneuvering characteristics. To satisfy me 100% I need nothing other than what I
personally saw that night. What I personally saw was those radar contacts where we'd
been the night before. I personally saw the intercept and evaluated the intercept of the
WLR-1 of that Skinhead or Pothead radar. I personally observed the track of these
contacts coming after us. And, as strange as it seems, I personally heard hydrophone
effects because when the sonar man in a different location put his feed on the 29MC to
announce it you could hear it behind him coming over his report. We both executed
radical maneuvers and from then on who shot what and how many ....I really don't
know.

JG: You were on the 29MC with sonar.
FF: Sonar to CIC. And to the bridge.
JG: The sonar man you had onboard. Did you know them? Did you work with
them?
FF: No they were ships company. I didn't personally know any of them.
JG: The contacts you saw, Captain.... was there any other clutter out there at all?
FF: Later on when the airplanes got to us, you could see an airplane on surface
search radar if it's flying low enough. We had a lot of low flying airplanes out there. In
my judgment, blessed with hindsight and a lot more experience it is an absolute
miracle.... you see we were shooting star shells. That's a vertically elevated barrel. We
had airplanes all over the place and no one was really coordinating anything. It was my job but it was mass confusion and I didn't have the tools to do all that. I didn't have the modern systems we have now. But it is an absolute miracle that neither ship shot each other and we didn't shoot down any of our planes and the planes didn't have mid-airs. I suppose they were all operating at different altitudes.

JG: In that next two or three hours, you ere doing everything. That would have encompassed

FF: Being a jack of all trades, but I couldn't be the master of any at that time. But until that first torpedo was shot I was virtually glued to what was happening. There was no confusion at all until the first torpedo caused the first maneuver and we operated independently. From the on I tried to keep track of where Turner Joy was, but I wasn't giving orders to Maddox telling them what bearing they could or couldn't shoot on. It was impossible to keep track of the airplanes because they were in the minimum range of the SPS-40 air search on the Maddox. Sometimes they showed up on surface radar sometimes they didn't depending on the altitude they were doing. But I heard, and I was not controlling any of it. There were air controllers on the Maddox, OS's, talking to the airplanes. But one of the circuits was on a speaker. And I distinctly heard ‘I see one in your wake’ and I heard another time ‘There's one there’.

JG: And who is on that circuit?

FF: In those days it was called the fleet air defense circuit was used to control airplanes.

JG: In CIC, you did not have contact with the sonar man. The sonar man physically is in another part of the ship. So at the time you are seeing the North Vietnamese torpedo maneuver -

FF: The sonar man did not see that turn.

JG: He didn't see the turn, but he called the hydrophone action right then?

FF: That's right. There was no correlation internally. It wasn't as if the sonar man sees the turn and expects to hear a torpedo and therefore he hears one because he expects to hear one.

JG: Exactly.

FF: Now after that, after he'd heard the first one he expected to hear a lot more
and maybe they did hear a lot more because they expected it. But that case cannot be made for the first one. And it could have been multiple torpedoes the first time. I just can't hear the hydrophone.

JG: How much time was there between here and here?

FF: A couple of hours. That's an estimate based on my memory. The time stuff I have no reason to dispute. After it was all over, there were no more contacts to shoot at, maybe because some had withdrawn, some had been sunk, it was my understanding a couple of them were sunk. The airplanes had bingoed back and I can't recall if we had another launch of them coming that we then canceled. Anyway, calm was restored finally. I mean calm from I think the most hectic environment I've ever been in. For those couple of hours. The commodore called me in his cabin. Captain Ogier was there. A lot of messages flying back and forth, about every five or ten minutes I ran into radio and sent another one. 'Four torpedoes fired. Three got 'em.' I don't even remember everything I sent. And a lot of it wasn't even recorded on our end. And he had, as you've seen in some of these documents, he had some severe reservations. He made the point - he's the one - I have never personally heard a hydrophone effect generated from a rudder at high speed. Never personally heard one of those. But apparently he and Ogier - both of them were at the naval academy as instructors, both were weapons types. Experts in that area. I wasn't going to dispute that; a lot of it we generated ourselves. At the time, you know, he'd drafted this message and wanted me to go in and send this message. And it was a message that's been quoted a lot. It was one that cast doubt. We cast the doubt. We're the ones; Commodore Herrick is the one, who cast doubt on it all happening. He was the first one who cast the doubt. I'm certainly not criticizing Commodore Herrick. He didn't know what the heck this was going to cause. Let's make sure we're absolutely sure before we cause something drastic to happen. He was just being cautious. Boy, did he get slammed for it. And I'll get more into that in a minute. But I tried to make the point at the time, 'Commodore, I don't know if it was - a lot of confusion in the last couple of hours. No doubt about it. I don't think anyone can say with any certainty how many boats were there, who shot at whom, who sunk whom. I made the point at the time and I'm just as certain today as I was then that at least one torpedo was shot at us. Probably more. They didn't come out there to shoot just one. How many more, how many boats after we started
getting the multiple contacts, many of which were airplanes. Some of it was weather return. I really don't know. But I know those boats were not weather return, they were not birds. Everything put together very nicely and neatly. No question it happened.

JG: For the record, let me get into how you were qualified to know that. You had five years enlisted at an ET. Working on SPS-10?

FF: SPS-10, SPS-40. I didn't just work on those. On my own I stood watches in CIC.

JG: So you worked on these systems and operated them. You knew the nuances inside and out. You know the difference between a bird and a boat...

FF: (Laughter) Absolutely.

JG: You are the Operations officer for the division and you are reading scopes with more experience than probably anyone else on the ship.

FF: I wouldn't go so far as to say that. That era, as I've discussed with you before off the record, was when officers tended not to get their hands dirty. I hate to use that expression, but, you know. Enlisted people operated things and enlisted people made reports to officers. Officers evaluated those reports and did what they did. But I've always been a hands on guy. My first two years at sea as an officer were as Electronics Maintenance Officer and then CIC officer on a 2100 destroyer. Frankly, it was a surprise to everybody that a lieutenant junior grade went to division. I relieved a lieutenant commander. And a guy selected for lieutenant commander relieved me. So I was essentially ahead of myself at the end of this tour. But I'd had a lot of experience on radars.

JG: Because your capability was recognized.

FF: I suppose.

JG: It's O.K. You can say it. Everyone seems to know! Your surface warfare specialty.... by the time you retired, was what?

FF: Command and control.

JG: And what was your next assignment before you opted to retire?

FF: I was slated to be Commanding Officer, Fleet Combat Direction School at Point Loma.

JG: And you were going there to essentially overhaul NTDS?
FF: I wouldn't say overhaul it. It was to teach how to use it. We would have been involved in upgrades to it, and also very involved in teaching flag staffs in battle groups, commanders of staffs, how to use the tools and tactics that were available.

JG: And why were you slotted for that position instead of

FF: Because I had a unique capability in that area.

JG: They recognized your excellence in that area, where you had been slated to return to sea as CO of a cruiser or battle wagon?

FF: You've got it reversed there. I was put on the shore list. If I had not opted to retire I had the opportunity to be shipped to the sea list. But it would have been a personal favor type opportunity. One of the reasons I didn't do it would have meant somebody else would have gotten the personal opportunity to go from the sea list to the shore list and probably wouldn't have liked that.

JG: What an opportunity. (Laughter)

FF: Back to what Herrick wrote. I respect what he did and I didn't agree with him at the - I won't say I didn't agree with him. I didn't agree with the flavor that one could read into that message that because a lot of what we reported may not have happened, therefore none of it happened. Which is the conclusion a lot of people had. I agree a lot of what we reported did not happen. At least it didn't happen the way we perceived it happened because of the confusion of the time. But that doesn't mean make the events leading up to the first torpedo.... that all clearly happened. There's never been any doubt in my mind. I understand Admiral Stockdale for instance claiming it didn't happen because he didn't see it. I didn't see it either. But I had tools available that Admiral Stockdale did not have. The fact that because he didn't see something on a dark night - water is dark at night by the way! - And these boats were operating with no lights on. You'd be insane if you were driving a PT boat against a big ship.... absent radar, your advantage is being able to see them above the horizon when they're looking down into the water and can't see you. We had on marine guy aboard the Maddox that said he saw a real thin light going around us. I suspect that was on a compass, a real dimmed down light. If he saw that. A lot of the recorded sighting from people on Turner Joy, I don't know if they're true or not. I have no idea. No idea. But Commodore Herrick laid the groundwork for the doubt. Again, I'm not critical of that. I'll state for the record too that my
perception, again this was my perception at the time, bulwarked by a lot of experience since then including having served in the same grade he was in at the time, and had the same responsibilities. The treatment of Commodore Herrick by the Navy was absolutely atrocious. Absolutely atrocious. Let me give you some examples. After that attack, - I might be slightly off on the time, it might have been after the second attack but I think it was after the August fourth attack - we were low on fuel. I mean here we are, running around at thirty knots. Both ships were low on fuel. By low, by tradition the Navy doesn't like to get below 50% because you don't know what contingency is coming up tomorrow. And, we were low on ammunition. We knew we were going back in the Gulf. We didn't know for how long. By that time we'd changed operational control to CTF 77. Moore, on Ticonderoga. Herrick said he wanted to refuel and rearm before we went back up there. Not only a logical request, but an absolutely necessary one. We joined 77 and we went alongside on arrival. Maybe we even refueled with the carriers, I don't remember. Both ship refueled. Maddox refueled - this is an unusual thing - destroyer to destroyer from the Samuel Moore as I recall. We took some of their ammunition, their 5 inch ammunition. Now the normal administrative commander was a gentleman named Groverman. Rear Admiral Groverman. He's sitting on his butt in Sasebo, Japan. No doubt at the Officer Club, with all its amenities. While we're in the middle of this stuff. And because he's our administrative boss he's `copy to' on a lot of these messages. In a response to our request that we stay out of the Gulf for the couple of hours it would take to refuel, he sends a scathing message - I don't know if it was `personal for' or not - but he sent a scathing message to Herrick saying that 'that request was not in conformance with the traditions of a destroyer man. Or words to that effect. A scathing attack on Herrick. My first CO on the Pritchett, second CO actually on Pritchett, my tour before this, was a guy by the name of Corlis Nugent and by that time he'd become the ops officer for CRUDESFLOT 3, which was Groverman. I ran into him in an 0 club sometime later and he and I had a conversation about that message. I mean, it was just terrible. And then after all this was over, then we get around to talking about medals and awards, all of which were downgraded, automatically downgraded at least one step. And there weren't that many down there. And you can confirm this with one Captain Kelly. He used to write extensively for Proceedings. Lives in San Diego. He had a cruiser. Had a squadron as I
recall. And he worked at Personnel Support Activity in San Diego. I think his first name
is Jim as I recall. Shouldn't be that hard to run down.

JG: K-E-L-L-Y?

FF: I don't know if it was Y or E-Y. But he was the destroyer squadron ops officer
at the time. The way we were organized then was a squadron commander and a division
commander. Division commander worked for the squadron commander. The division
kept the, in this case it was 19, DESRON 19, also owned DESDIV 191 and then you had
another captain serving as commodore for 192, which was our case. But he was the
squadron ops officer; I was the division ops officer. And he told me ‘don't even write a
letter of commendation up for Commodore Herrick. We don't even want to see it.’
Commodore Herrick subsequently went to some innocuous job in Mechanicsburg and
then went to Naval Ammunition Depot in Portsmouth, VA. CO. Then as I recall he was
told to retire and get out of his house in short
Order - he had a base house. He was just treated horribly. No excuse for that. All's I can
figure is because some of the messages he sent - some of which I had a hand in - were
what would now be termed ‘politically incorrect'. All's he did was report what he saw and
his judgment as the on-scene commander.

JG: He was being pressed immediately to verify because Johnson needed
ammunition to go before the American people and he wasn't responding they way they
wanted him to.

FF: Let me speak to that. I don't know what Johnson's perception of how fast
you can respond is, but as soon as we were told to do this, those of us who thought we
could provide proof, as I recall Herrick didn't write one of these, but I did. There were
four or five of us. Maybe more. Again, now we had time so, these were top secret
messages so you encrypt them. It takes a long time. But all of us wrote why we thought it
happened. I don't remember what I wrote. Probably very similar to what I've just said
about the sequence of events. Then I had to encrypt it all. And it went off. And how many
communications channels and how many COMMSTA's I don't know. I will say when we
were told to do it there wasn't anybody saying 'I think I'll take a nap first.' We understood
the critical time element. We did it immediately. That's the first time I've heard that
(about Johnson) but it's just another unfair criticism of the on-scene command.
JG: You had initially been put in for a Bronze Star. That was downgraded to
FF: The first level as I recall. I don't remember.
JG: Still, you ended up with the only on awarded, is that right.
FF: I don't remember. The two CO's were put in for Silver Stars and they were
both downgraded to Bronze Stars. It's almost like it was a rank pecking order.
JG: I see. And your award. Was it a result of your position? How is it you
came to be the only one awarded that Navy Commendation Medal?
FF: You'd have to ask Commodore Herrick. I was in a lot of places doing a lot of
things, probably performing on a level not expected of a lieutenant junior grade. I can
almost say I got no sleep at all for eight days.
JG: Commodore Herrick. Any other way he was chastised....
FF: Well, the message from Groverman. He was totally out of favor with the
entire surface warfare community. It's like he was on the opposite spectrum from John
Paul Jones. Like he was a coward, like he'd done something wrong. With the benefit of
all this; hindsight, I don't think he did anything wrong.
JG: Even at the time you thought he'd acted appropriately.
FF: The only thing I would have differed with him was I think that one message at
the end of the night of the fourth of August. It conveyed. As I recall, the message
probably conveyed doubt on the whole thing rather than it should have conveyed doubt
on some starting point away from the actual start of it. That's the only place I would have
differed. Some of the messages and some of the language in some of the messages was in
the heat of battle and a lot of that was attributed to me. If I could see those messages now,
I don't remember them all, maybe there was language I used which hurt him. I don't
know.
JG: Mostly, that was the decision to head out to sea at flank speed?
FF: Yes. I think there was an impression, I gained from talking to people in O
clubs and just talking to people over the years about the event, I think there was a
widespread impression that instead of rearing up and meeting the enemy head on, that we
were running away from it. Well that's ridiculous. If your ship goes thirty knots and he's
starting five or six miles away, well that's not going to do you any good for starters. All's
we were trying to do was to buy time to let the world know. And those were the days of
what would now be considered archaic communications. It was buy time, let the world
know what's going on, and once we decided to fight, once we fired those warning shots
and they didn't stop. Let me say something about warning shots. Because I know there's
been some question over the years, lawyers question whether warning shots are legal or
not and I guess understand the question. Let me just say mariners understand warning
shots. I mean, they've been around since the days of the Barbary pirates or whatever.
Lawyers may not understand it and they can argue about it forever. But mariners
understand warning shots. And those were warning shots. There was considerable offset
put in the weapons. There was a big delay between those shots and opening fire for
effect.

JG: And a good mariner is clearly going to understand them to be warning shots.
FF: Absolutely.
JG: Would you consider the North Vietnamese good mariners?
FF: I don't know that, but the fact that we fired and then we didn't fire again for an
interval, you'd have to be an idiot to think that, you know, ships don't fire at each other
for no reason at all. We fired in their direction, but it was offset well ahead of them. They
saw those splashes. They must have understood we consider that if they continued on
their course of action we considered it would be hostile.
JG: The next day you were ordered back into the Gulf to search for debris, to
pickup debris, and none was found. What do you think?
FF: Let me just say that the fact that we found no debris, I don't draw any
conclusions from that. Navigational accuracy in those days was not as accurate as it is
today by along shot. And where did we have to go? After it's all said and done we have
this long DRT track. Paper being changed. It wasn't my job it was an OS's job, but I don't
think people were being very diligent about labeling things on that DRT track. The
quartermaster who could have or should have or whatever been keeping a log of our
navigational position at certain times might have been worried about other things at the
time. I'm not even confident we went back and searched in the same area. Maybe the
same area, yeah, but small debris in the water such as - if you got a direct hit. On a small
boat that's all you're going to get is small debris - you're going too have to be within a
mile or less to see it. I don't recall there having been any search, much less a concentrated
search by aircraft. Those are the guys who can do it. They can cover a large area. They're
looking over the water. In the day time. They can see it a lot better than at eye level on
the bridge. I draw no conclusions from that.

JG: I was struck by how little time Maddox spent in the area. It didn't seem to me
like it was long enough to do any kind of a search. I believe you arrived late in the
morning and left at one or two in the afternoon. Something like that. It was two or three
or four hours doing a search. Do you think that was enough time?

FF: Probably not. In that time we could only cover a couple of square miles.
Inaccuracies in navigation and confusion in the night, again, and remember, this was a
running battle. It took place over two hours; it was about sixty miles of track because
there was a lot of zigging and zagging going on in there. It was certainly thirty or forty
miles of track. I a couple of hors you can cover that track. But are you displaced off that
track by a couple of miles from where you actually were? That's certainly within the
navigational accuracy of the time.

JG: Because the OS's are changing the DRT plot. How long does that take?

FF: If you're good at it, a couple of seconds. It's just whipping off one piece of
onionskin paper and putting another and labeling both papers where one starts and
another one stops. I've seen DRT's forever. If you look at a DRT it will tell you what your
latitude and longitude is. A DRT gets its info from the gyro and from the pit log. Pit logs,
if anyone wants to depend on a pit log to show you your speed, ostensibly through the
water, for a DRT trace and expect it to be accurate over a long period of time is nuts. I
mean, you'd never rely on a DRT to tell you where you are.

JG: Especially when you're doing zigzags, course changes, and the like. Plus OS's
are busy too at this time, is that right.

FF: Yes. They're plotting all the contacts they have. By then we had multiple
contacts. It was mass confusion and probably the Maddox CIC and Ops officer, once we
told the ships to do their own thing it was my job to tell the rest of the world what was
happening to us. It was the ship's CIC officer and ops officer who were running
operations up there. In one sense it. Gave me time to stand back and watch, and not
have to be directly involved. But again, I could hear the radio speaker on one of the air
control circuits was on. I heard the 29MC with the sonar hydrophone
JG: It seems not inconceivable that a DRT plot - let's say it's fifteen seconds
between changes and you're doing thirty knots....

FF: Just the plot is going to be off. What the instruments on the DRT are going to
read is not going to be off. But how often, for instance, were the OS's looking down to
label a point on the DRT paper with our latitude and longitude at that time. It's
questionable to me right now. And that DRT trace, you use that to try to reconstruct what
happened. But to use that paper it has to be labeled frequently enough so that one, you
know where you were and you can extrapolate that to know where you were at some
point in time. Hopefully there's enough on that plot for you to test the accuracy of the
whole thing. To see if everything is consistent. I doubt if: we had either circumstance
then.

JG: Would it be within reason to think the plot could have been a couple of miles
off?

FF: Absolutely. With the navigational equipment we had in those days, when
you're out in open ocean and if you're not using the radar to take fixes with - and I don't
think the radars were being used that night to take cuts on Hainan Island - I mean even
then, the further you are away from land the radar is painting cliffs so far inland instead
of the beach. But the beach (switch) shown on your charts may not be (). I mean there's
always a one or two - that's why there's so many navigational aids when you go in and
out of port. We had some LORAN coverage in there, but we didn't have satellite
navigation. Not on Maddox in those days. There was no way for us to know within two
miles or three miles or maybe more, where we started much less where we ended.

JG: A lot of people pin a lot on there not being any debris. The fact is, the chance
you had to find anything with the assets you had were slim to start with.

FF: I wouldn't say slim, but on the other hand the fact that we didn't find any
didn't bother me because we weren't where we thought we were. It doesn't mean
anything. If we'd have had some P-3's, or even a whole day's worth of slow moving A-1's
to do the whole area, I'm talking now probably about, at least 300 square miles. 300
square miles. That's an area thirty miles long and ten miles wide. Maybe forty or fifty
miles long. That's a big area of ocean to look for small debris. And as I recall the
airplanes did not participate. Not to any extent.
JG: They were busy too, doing other things that day. Another technical question.
Is there any way to account for the differences in observations and impressions between
those on the Maddox and those on the Turner Joy?

FF: There seemed to be a lot more visual stuff that surfaced from the Turner Joy
than there were from the Maddox.

JG: A lot more. How can you account for that?

FF: I can't.

JG: You're both using SPS-10....

FF: Remember, the visual stuff is what people saw with their eyeballs. Maybe
Turner Joy people were just in a better position to see that. Maybe they scored hits on
what they were looking at and Maddox didn't. I don't know. I don't know. They had a.
different fire control radar. The weapons officer on the Maddox, as I recall his name was
Connolly, he also didn't believe that attack happened. He was in gun plot as I recall. And
he never saw anything on the fire control radar. You've got to remember fire control
radar, you've got to remember if this is a rotating beam of a surface search radar.... this is
a fire control radar. Not only that, but it doesn't just freely rotate. You tell a fire control
radar where to go. Then it looks for it. It's looking down on that water. It's a high
frequency, high PRF, and the fact that he says he never saw anything on his radar is like
Stockdale saying he didn't see anything. I would have like for him to see it. I would have
like for him to be able to say he locked up on something, but from hindsight years later
reading what he said - and I didn't hear that at the time until weeks afterwards - then I
wonder what the hell they were shooting at. Because the Maddox was clearly shooting. If
they didn't have fire control contact on something then what were they shooting at?

JG: I think Connelly had been told by Ogier, I think, over the phone, Ogier said
shoot. Connelly said he didn't see anything. Ogier said to shoot at something anyway. I
think Connelly fired a stair shell at that time and was firing....

FF: Well, yeah, if you don't see anything you shoot a star shell but I mean I think
he was shooting VT (variable time) frag and other stuff too.

JG: That's why he started with the star shell because he was told to fire and he
didn't know what to fire because he didn't see anything.

FF: You'll have to ask Ogier if that conversation happened. That doesn't sound
like a comment a commanding officer should make. If you say shoot something it might
end up being Turner Joy. I don't put a lot of stock in that story. That's some guy trying to
make himself a hero. One the one hand I say it's a miracle it didn't happen, but to say it
possibly didn't happen because of this one individual is....it's conceivable that happened
that night. Again, both ships were operating independently at that point in time. But to me
what we're seeing is Connelly and his fire control officer and Ogier all failed in their
duties to check that bearing and make sure Turner Joy wasn't in that bearing before they
told him to shoot. Every one of them would have to make that mistake. Conceivable?
Yeah. But likely? No.

JG: Supporting that, the gunner's mate heard it entirely differently.
FF: But it was an enlisted guy on the scope that, I don't remember his name, that
claimed credit for not shooting the Turner Joy.

JG: One or the other down there, I can't remember who now,
FF: It wasn't Connelly.

JG: Somebody gave orders to fire and somebody refused to fire. They refused to
fire, looked up, and it was the Turner Joy in their sights. Something to that effect.

FF: Makes a helluva good story. That guy should have gotten the Silver Star. We
should have known about it at the time and written him up. Somebody's embellishing.

JG: Where's the last you knew of Commodore Herrick?

FF: He left the division and was relieved by a real gentleman named Patillo.
That's when Herrick went to, it wasn't necessarily Mechanicsburg, it was someplace in
Pennsylvania. It was a weapons depot. I finished out my tour on 192 and went to XO of
the Pledge. That was another two years. It was actually quite a. period of time because I
made another deployment in 192. We were on the gun line then. We were doing GFS and
everything else the following year of 1965. In 68-70 I was at BuPers. I was the
Electronics Technician/Data Systems division control officer. I was in BuPers and
Herrick called me. This is really unusual when a captain calls a lieutenant and asks me
for some help for where he was being detailed. I was amazed when he called me.
Captains don't ask lieutenants for help. I don't remember what the circumstance was of
his at the time, but I remember it left a bad taste in my mouth for how Herrick was being
treated. I just don't remember the circumstances. What he asked me to do I did. I went
over to the captain detailing section of the bureau and I just don't remember the details. I
just remember it leaving a bad taste in my mouth. A couple years later, then I went to PG
school. Then I went to the staff college. And I think it was when I was in staff college,
because that's the only time I was stationed there. And he had the ammo depot at St.
Julian's Creek. My wife and I visited with he and his wife there a couple of times while I
was in staff college. He was relieved of command there and as I recall retired there. I
even remember when he was relieved, I was amazed, he was given something like two
days to get out of his house or something like that. But it was like this black cloud
followed him around from then on, ever since the Gulf of Tonkin. There was no reason
for it to be that way. If somebody had sent Herrick a message, somebody with authority,
77, 7th Fleet, CINCPACFLT Admiral Sharp or whoever, actively seek out and destroy
the enemy, he would have done it just as fast as anyone else. But that isn't what we were
supposed to be doing. You've got to remember the mood of the times. This was right after
the Cuban Missile Crisis; it was right after everyone envisioning the world being
incinerated. There was a loose alliance between North Vietnam, Russia and China. Closer
with China, but over the years it became closer with Russia, less so with China. Is this the
first rung of a ladder where we don't even want to think about the top rung? If he'd known
what this was all about, whatever Washington was trying to accomplish with this, if he'd
have known about it, whatever it was, and we can all speculate on that, I'm sure he would
have acted quite differently and his messages would have had quite a different tone. But
that just wasn't the case. I don't think there was - I don't want to speak for him - but I
want to get back to this issue of provocation. Other than being told in Taipei not to
interfere with 34A ops and being told I wasn't cleared to know what those were that I was
not to interfere with, I had no notion no knowledge, no nothing, and I can say
unequivocally since I had none that I think the only people who could have are Herrick
and Ogier, their equivalent clearances they may have been told more than I, but I don't -
I'm relatively certain Ogier didn't and less certain Herrick didn't, but still I'm comfortable
that he probably didn't.

JG: Why did you think Herrick may have known something more?

FF: Only because he was very quick and able to identify the Norwegian Nastys
the day we refueled and they came out. He had a stronger sense of danger on the 31st and
JG: Hostile fishermen and hostile junks?
FF: Just the whole environment up there. Like he, even from hindsight, like he anticipated something where I anticipated nothing. Maybe that's just because of experience, I don't know. Maybe it's because he'd been in combat before in Korea and I'd never been in combat. He was CO of an LSMR in Korea, so I mean he was inshore shooting rockets.
JG: And he'd seen North Koreans using the tactics -
FF: Dynamite junks alongside. You know, when he told me that story I thought well, that's interesting, but I wondered why he was telling me the story. We're on an innocent Desoto patrol. We do these all the time. They might claim territorial waters and tell us to leave, but that's about the extent of it. I was amazed when they attacked us on the second. I wasn't that amazed when they attacked us on the fourth because, you know, you reach out to hit a guy and he gives you a bloody nose maybe you're going to come back the next day and see if you can give him a bloody nose. I wasn't that surprised on the fourth. But I was really surprised on the second. And I was very impressed with the courage of those three boats. *Maddox* was laying down a very effective and intense barrage of fire and it didn't deter them at all. You had to hit 'em to stop 'em.
JG: Were you in CIC on the second’
FF: On the night of the fourth I was almost exclusively in CIC except for trips to Radio Central. On the second, a lot in CIC, some in radio, and some on the bridge. But I'm talking about what I saw personally on the bridge with my eyeballs so far a courage and seeing that one torpedo. Those happened at the times I was on the bridge. I probably spent more time on the bridge on the second than I remember. Because Herrick was up there on the second. Every time I prepared to sent a message I'd go find him and he'd say O.K. We didn't take time to draft messages then. We normally did.
JG: The three boats on the second - did you see them on the scope?
FF: Oh yeah.
JG: O.K. And that was very much the same thing you saw on the fourth?
FF: Radar contacts are radar contacts are radar contacts. Unless it's fuzzy. We
poked a little fun at these guys seeing birds, maybe pelicans looked different than seagulls. I don't know, I'm not an expert on birds on radar. I can tell you that as far as I know, after thirty years of navy experience, 15 years at sea and expert experience on command and control and radar systems, I don't think I have ever seen a bird on a radar. I don't think I ever have. But for those people who think they have I give them that. It's just something I've missed. When we were finally told what 34A ops are on the fifth, it like all of a sudden this big jig saw puzzle came together like poof! Right into place.

JG: And you could then understand how the North Vietnamese could might have put the two together.

FF: Absolutely. They were defending their homeland. There was no question in my mind since we were told that there was an attack on the 1st in the vicinity of Hon Me, and to me, I tried to put myself in their shoes. They get rocketed or whatever from the sea at three or four o'clock; in the morning or whenever it was. But it was in the middle of the night. And when the sun comes up the next day they see a U.S. Navy destroyer sitting there, what the hell? You know, what conclusion are you going to draw? And if he didn't do it then he was supporting those who did. And, we've got to show them we're not going to tolerate that. Now whether the order to attack us was issued from Uncle Ho or Giap the Defense Minister or some local naval commander I have no idea. It makes no difference. They came out and attacked us because they'd been provoked. As far as I'm concerned they were provoked. The fault for this whole thing, which I would remind the listener or reader, was the genesis - I'm not saying absent this there wouldn't have been some other genesis. This was the genesis of our involvement in Vietnam. It was provoked. We provoked it. Maddox didn't knowingly or deliberately provoke it. I don't blame the North Vietnamese. For Lyndon Johnson to say, to tell the American people it was an unprovoked attack, based on State Department stuff I've read and other National Security Council stuff you've provided me here, it's obvious that they were having discussions then that indicate they felt the North Vietnamese felt they were provoked and the North Vietnamese provoked the two events. The president was having discussions with McNamara and others before he told the American people it was unprovoked. And so it was just another case of the government misleading the American people. This one had tragic consequences. Again, there may have been some other reason we'd have gone into
Vietnam. But this was THE reason. THE excuse. The Gulf of Tonkin Resolution gave the president a free hand. And down the road we went.

JG: As you pointed out in our first correspondence, Giap, in his recent meeting with McNamara.... that was the only question McNamara asked about the Vietnam War. Giap denied the attack took place on the fourth. Why would he do that? What would he have to gain by doing that now?

FF: It would have to be pure speculation. Maybe he didn't want to acknowledge that. They did something to provoke us into our retribution on the fifth and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. Other than that, I: don't know why he would do that. But for McNamara to act like, for him to now say it was all a mistake, we should have known that at the time I suppose. Hindsight is always 20/20. But McNamara clearly knew, from what I knew then and what I've reviewed now, McNamara knew at the time. Johnson knew at the time. Senator Morse knew at the time and he was the only one speaking with clarity then.

If we're going to go into North Vietnam to save the world from communism, we subscribe to the domino theory and that's what we're going to do and tell the American people that's what we're going to do. Tell them the truth. The only questions in my mind about it, there are three points I really want to underscore here. The first two are: were 34A ops and Maddox operations, I've wondered about this over the years and I don't have any wonder today. But I did over the years. Were they kind of accidentally married together? Was somebody at a high level who knew about both operations careless? Or did somebody at a high level that knew about both operations just wasn't able to see the risk of putting these kinds of operations in proximity of time and place? Was it a careless mistake? Or were they deliberately married in order to hope to provoke and to hope the North Vietnamese did something like this which could then be used to turn around American public opinion to pursue a foreign policy the administration wanted to pursue? Based on the stuff I've read today from the National Security Council meetings and other stuff that you've provided me I lean very heavily if not unequivocally toward the latter. The third point - this is going to tie back to some of the things I said about Commodore Herrick - American sailors, soldiers, Marines, whatever, we're trained to fight. We're prepared to die if necessary. I didn't see overt heroism in the Gulf during that period of time. I did not see any cowardice in the Gulf at that time. These people who think that
Maddox opened the range initially or at least avoided action initially in both cases, on the second we bought time and on the fourth we turned away from this in order to get this so-called air cover we always had which we didn't have. I mean, you can write volumes about the air cover we had. It was sporadic at best. And we bought time to get air support up there. And any commander who is so worried about being called a coward by some people sitting bars somewhere in front of a fireplace smoking a cigar away from the action. So worried about their perception that he doesn't take the opportunity to bring back force to bear in his favor is not a professional. And that's all Herrick did. In order to get maximum force to bear. It had no thing to do with being afraid of anything. Any commander, whether he's the sitting president of the United States or whether he's the four star CINCPAC or CINCPACFLT or the three star COMSEVENTHFLT, who sails naval forces in harms way without giving them adequate preparation for the risk they face and adequate support is also not a professional. And we had all of that. Of course, all those non-professional people were the ones who criticized Herrick for not being professional. Arid I am bitter today, I was bitter then, and I'll remain bitter that Maddox and Turner Joy were essentially left hung out to dry up there. As I told you before, there was every indication, including indications from the intelligence centers in Washington that we were going to be attacked. I don't remember if it was the eight or the ninth. It was the last day we were scheduled to be there. North Vietnam had just got fifty MiGs and two Beagles from China, with the pilots and the bombs and whatever, and every indication was we were going to be attacked with those MiGs and those Beagles and every PT boat they had left. We just wouldn't have been able to withstand it. This wasn't a missile destroyer out there. These are two World War II gun boats - Turner Joy's was better - but they're all gun systems and there was just no way we could have withstood that. Commodore Herrick and the people who were aware of the intelligence reports - I will tell you that at four o'clock that morning, those officers who were not on watch TAPE TWO FF: the officers were all issued 45's and morphine and we were absolutely convinced that was it for both ships. There comes a time in combat when it's your time, and we just had to accept that. The Commodore and I accepted that, except for one thing..... If the establishment - the Washington establishment, the Pearl Harbor
establishment, the Seventh Fleet establishment: - who have the same message in hand we have.... are not doing anything either to extract us or beef us up, then what the heck is this all about? Fortunately for us, that intelligence assessment was wrong. But we didn't know from foresight that it was wrong. We know from hindsight that that for some reason - I don't even know what the source were for that intelligence assessment, but I know it wasn't a local assessment. It came from Washington. So everyone in the chain of command knew of that assessment. One of the things I did that night was to send a message down to CTF 77 asking for continuous and massive air support. We got a sarcastic response. ‘You've always had it and you'll continue to get it.’ Something along those lines. Totally uncalled for. We hadn't always had it. When we were up there, particularly at night, we would have one A-4 or two A-1’s.... They'd go back to the carrier when it was; time to go back for their recovery time. And where were their reliefs? They might show up a whole cycle later! The North Vietnamese had an air defense network. They knew when we were covered and when we weren't. Besides, that coverage - one or two airplanes - what much good could that do anyway? So I don't know if the Washington establishment wanted us sunk to put an explanation point on this whole thing and make sure we had absolute, unequivocal public support. I don't know that, and I hate to guess at it. But that's the only answer for the actions that night and that early morning. We resumed our patrol, came back to the middle of the Gulf where we were supposed to be, steamed south, and nothing ever happened. I personally sat at the air scope that morning, even though I hadn't been to bed for eight days. It was kind of getting hard to focus on everything, but nothing happened.

JG: At that time you were with Turner Joy, and there was nobody else around.
FF: A couple of airplanes. A couple.
JG: Berkeley was in the area, if I remember right.
FF: She was a couple of hundred miles away.
JG: Were you issued .45s on the second attack? Had you broken out the .45s before the sixth or seventh?
FF: After the attack on the second we did. I remember that clearly because when Turner Joy joined us I remember a lot of the messages the commodore sent to the Turner Joy which said essentially to stay at condition three, be ready to go to general quarters at
a seconds notice, these people up here are mad. He didn't say why they were mad, just
that they were mad and appear to want to attack us. Issue your officers 45's was part of
that message. So we must have done it on Maddox when Turner Toy joined us on the
third. But we'd never issued morphine before, and we did that morning. That shows you
the extent to which we thought this thing was really going to happen. And I'm sure most
of the officers and men on the Maddox had no idea what we knew - or thought we knew.
They didn't know why we issued morphine.

JG: So you were issued .45s on the second, but .45s and morphine on the sixth or
seventh.

FF: Morphine was added that night, the last day of patrol. It's not clear in my
mind if that was the eighth or the ninth. We went in on the thirty-first and it was nine
days so I suspect it was the eighth. It was our last day there, it was our last morning there.
We were essentially out of harm's way by 1400 or 1500 that: afternoon. But that morning,
say from 0630 or 0700, first light that morning, until noon or one anything could have
happened and we expected it to.

JG: What are your official or standing orders when you're issued .45s in that
situation?

FF: You know, I want to tell you with thirty years' experience, I don't know what
they are. I really don't. I think it's tradition more than anything else. You're not going to
shoot a plane out of the air with a .45. I think it's the officer's symbol of authority, like a
baton is for some services. That's all it is. I've seen movies where supposedly some
enlisted guys need to know that maybe you'd shoot them if they didn't follow orders. I
don't know that that's the case. I don't think I'd ever - myself - shoot someone because
they didn't obey my order. If he thinks I might that's fine with me. It's a symbol of
authority, and tradition. Maybe I'm missing the boat, but my impression

JG: Most important, the reason wasn't clear cut for you. That there is no written
black--and-white reason why that happens.

FF: Not that I'm aware of. There may be. I just don't know what it is.

JG: Clearly, it wasn't made evident to you in this case.

FF: No, it wasn't. I think that's the only time in my career when I've had occasion
to have a .45 strapped on around the clock.
JG: Technical question on the fourth.... When you had the Skinhead that stayed behind at the initial position....

FF: One of the problems - it's not a problem, but it's a characteristic of electronic intercepts - is that you know he's on his bearing, but you don't know how far along he is on that bearing. You can tell the difference between fifty miles and two hundred miles because of signal strength. But you can't tell the difference between, say, forty and seventy because of signal strength.

JG: But he was separated from the other three craft that were now chasing you.

FF: He had to be, because he didn't have the speed to catch us. P4's and P6's had no radar capability. The Swatow did, but he didn't have the speed capability. All those things fit together to tell you that.

JG: Things went to hell. Soon thereafter, but did you ever notice what happened to the Swatow?

FF: We weren't worried about him anymore! We were only worried about the guys close to us who could shoot. Machine guns and launch torpedoes - torpedoes were the big worry. The threat of a torpedo just cannot be overstated. Especially today's torpedoes which have intricate homing capabilities. But even in those days, as we knew from World War II, hot, straight and normal aimed at the right point.... there was one incident I remember, you take a torpedo hit in the fire room in particular. You've got these very hot boilers. Those are six hundred pounders, but it doesn't make any difference.... you hit the exterior of those hot boilers with cold sea water and you're probably going to have another explosion. And that explosion is going to break you in half. The engineers. It was hot, as you can imagine, in the Gulf of Tonkin in July and August. Those were the days when engineering plant weren't what they are today; we didn't have the engineering inspections then that we have now. There's a lot of steam leaks here and there so there's high humidity in those spaces. It was very uncomfortable down there. We had guys passing out from heat exhaustion. Maddox people.

They're not my responsibility, they're Maddox's. But the Maddox's doctor was the staff doctor. I was a JG, he was a lieutenant. But he's a lieutenant, staff corps. I was the only line officer on the commodore's staff so I was theoretically the chief-of-staff. And I functioned as chief-of-staff. He had asked me - he didn't know anything about warfare, as
you expect a doctor wouldn't. He's a young doctor - a lieutenant doing his time - but he asked me what would happen if a torpedo hit. I said it depends on where it hits. Generally, you could take one or two hits if your damage control was good, and you could survive. But if it hits a magazine, you’re in trouble. If it hits the fire room you're probably in trouble. I told him about the boilers. That was one day. A couple of days later we were having heat exhaustion cases. I would say it was around the fourth or the fifth. He refused to go down to the fire room to treat them. That was one time I was tempted to pull out my .45, but I just let it go. But I remembered it. And he subsequently wrote a book. I didn't pay much attention to it.

JG: He wrote about the incident?

FF: Yeah! I've never encountered the book, but I read in Proceedings or somewhere that there was a book. I never bothered to run it down, figuring it had about as much validity as if Captain Kangaroo wrote it. That doctor - he got plenty of sleep, I'll tell you that. He probably didn't even know where CIC was; he didn't know what was going on. So how he could have written a book, I don't know.

JG: I'm trying to imagine.... if you knew throughout your career what you know now.... I don't mean what you knew during the incident, but what you've learned since.... you had twenty-five more years of supporting and defending a system which had more than just let you down. It had turned tail and ran on you. Seemingly by design? What do you think? How does it make you feel?

FF: Let me respond to that first by saying it's not the system and it's not the United States Navy and it's not the United States government: as a whole and its not the United States citizens that let me down. It was some individuals that let me down. You're always going to get some bad individuals. But don't indict the whole system. Because we were perhaps hung out to dry and not treated right in this whole Tonkin mess by some individuals it doesn't mean next time in the same situation you're going to be treated the same by different people. From reading some of this, some people have their own agendas, including some people in uniform. And I'm disappointed that - if I get: the impression, and I have, somewhat - that several of these individuals were ready to sacrifice the men of Maddox and Turner Joy to promote their own agenda.... then I'm disappointed in that. At least in the context of the way you do it. When it's a dilemma to
them they can't tell Maddox to go in there and start attacking everything to provoke the
North Vietnamese in order to get American public opinion to give the president a free
hand. So you do this surreptitiously, but it's a great disservice to the people you have
executing the plan for you. A good commander never sacrifices more than he has to.
Never sacrifices anything, really. He has to invite some risks, and there's going to be
casualties, but you don't preordain any casualty. You want to avoid every one you can.
To deliberately risk several ships, which may have been the case.... you know, we could
have accomplished the same things.... certainly after we were attacked the second time...
you know adding another destroyer and occasional air support, it was gratuitous. It had
no meaning.

JG: President Johnson called it ‘doubling the naval presence’ and adding air cover
- something to that effect. But he called it ‘doubling the naval presence’.

FF: It's like a guy batting .050 who's batting .100 all of a sudden and we're
supposed to celebrate it. That was baloney. You know, if we wanted to.... there's one
thing about ships.... something that airplanes can accomplish and something submarines
can't accomplish and something Tomahawk missiles can't accomplish, and that's
presence. You're mere presence, you can be seen. You are a military force - not
necessarily a threat - but a military force that can be seen. The common thread, reading a
lot of this, is we wanted to show our presence and to show they weren't going to drive our
presence away. That's fine, I understand that. Totally in conformance with our national
goals and objectives; the United States is not going to be driven away from innocent
passage anywhere in the world. We just can't abide by that. We cannot exercise the
responsibilities we have in the world and accept that. But my God, if you want to show
presence and we have the threat, then let's show presence. The carriers, Constellation and
Ticonderoga, had a number of destroyers and a couple of missile boats. They didn't need
all those. They needed a plane guard. They weren't under any threat down there. What the
hell was threatening them down at sixteen north one ten east - Yankee station?
Traditionally, Yankee station would live through another eleven years almost. Nothing
was threatening to them down there. They didn't need the Berkeley and all these other
ships that came out of Hong Kong with the Constellation, the Sammy Moore and others.
You want to show presence? Put ten destroyers up there, including a couple of guided
missile destroyers. That'll show 'em some presence. Then if they come out to attack you, you not only attack them back but you chase 'em into the damn harbor. There's no such thing as violating someone's territorial waters when they attack you. It's a weird concept.

JG: But you never know you were authorized to pursue after the first attack on the second?

FF: One, I didn't know we could do it and two; the thought didn't cross my mind. Just because my mind doesn't work that way. To me, someone smacks me in the face there's no such thing as a sanctuary. This is a concept that got up to a real high level in Nixon's term. Nixon bombed Cambodia. The press and the congress thought that was horrible! Are you supposed to let the guy come over and attack you at night and then go back into Cambodia for safe haven? To me, that's analogous to the guy from across the street coming over to rape your wife, going back to his house and he's safe. He's gonna come back and rape your wife tomorrow! This whole notion... listen, war is not fought by some rules made up by lawyers somewhere. It just can't be. You know, circumstances the night of the fourth and the confusion that existed and the fact that this whole thing kind of evaporated maybe earlier than we even thought it evaporated. I don't know. So far as our operations, there wasn't anything left to shoot at and there was nothing left shooting at us. If it hadn't been where we had our eyeballs on it, we had some certainty, and I'd have been the commander and I wasn't.... and if I was going to get strung up tomorrow for doing it, if some guy came out and attacked my ship and he wounded one of my sailors - wounded one of 'em - there's no sanctuary. If they want to courts-martial me tomorrow, fine. I don't even think in those terms. Maybe that's why I'm not an admiral today. That's just the way it is. If you want to do a show of force then do a show of force. This notion that we're not going to violate their territorial waters when we're bombing them is crazy. It's like MacArthur being told the bridges over the Yalu - he could bomb them, but could only bomb the south half of the bridge! This whole thing started in Korea. You won't find any responsible commander in any service that likes collateral damage. By collateral damage I mean unintended casualties to civilians. Primarily. But it's unavoidable. Look what we did during World War II. We dropped atomic bombs on two nonmilitary targets. Killed tens of thousands of non-belligerents. I happen to have disagreed with that decision. I wasn't around to disagree with it, but in hindsight I think it was a horrible
decision. But the point is we did it, we firebombed Tokyo, we firebombed Dresden. Is that horrible? Of course that's horrible. Is it a part of war? Yes. Is it a necessary part of war? We can argue about it, but I'd like to think it's not. But let's say we did go in after World War II, into Korea.... what are we going to say, bomb only the south half of the bridge? We get into what's a war with Vietnam, once you get into a war you get into a war. I don't care if Congress declares it or not. You go bomb the Red River dikes above Hanoi and it's probably over. Can you tolerate fifty thousand American dead in Vietnam? Do you tie our guys' hands? Send them over there with limited force, limited capabilities, under crazy rules of engagement? A year after the Gulf of Tonkin I was on the Vietnam gun line. Different ships. In fact, the division, what was 192 became 132. We had some different ships.... McKeen, a couple of others, but I think we were on the McKeen at the time. And this whole thing about working naval gunfire support in support of the Army, and in our case it was the Marines up around Cape Batangan south of Chu Lai. This was crazy! You'd get a call for support from Marines being overwhelmed and you'd have to clear it with Saigon. And again, this was not the days of fast communications. Maybe the guy you played high school football with, is over there being overrun. And all it takes is a. few rounds from you that's going to stop it. But you don't have the authority to shoot. Crazy rules. Crazy rules. Everyone talks about the lessons of Vietnam. Generally when they talk about it they talk about not getting involved in a quagmire, maybe like we're doing in Bosnia. There are a whole bunch of lower level lessons that are equally important that I hope we don't lose sight of. If you're going to put American lives on the line, then put every bit of support short of nuclear weapons - let me make that perfectly clear - we never should use nuclear weapons in Vietnam. I've never known any commander that advocated it. Even tactical nukes. But short of that you do everything you can to avoid losing every American life. None of them, none of them, no American soldier's life is taken for granted. Unnecessary. Got a little far a field in the Gulf of Tonkin.....

JG: Some ways yes, some ways maybe not. I think it all applies in this sense: Can you say that in the same circumstances we might make the same mistakes that were made in the Gulf of Tonkin? Or, the same agenda, whether mistakes were made or not?

FF: Every time now when I see perhaps some foreign policy objective of ours
where American people may not support it, and they put naval forces in the immediate
vicinity, I feel déjà vu. And I just wonder again if anybody's deliberately manipulating
and prepared to sacrifice.... Bosnia's really far a field, but my worry there is...the thing
about war, the thing about any conflict, and war is the most severe of all conflicts, is that
you get on the bottom rung of the ladder and you can have every intention of staying on
the bottom rung. Problem is, you can't control it. I don't care how powerful you are or
how weak the other guy is. If he does something that causes you to get to the next rung,
and then the next rung, then you're not controlling your own destiny. That's what worries
me about Bosnia. The Serbs or anybody kills a few Americans and then we have to
retaliate and then they retaliate. Next thing you know we're in another Vietnam. And I've
not seen this in any of the public dialogue. To me, that's the biggest worry. It's
uncontrolled escalation. We'll just have to see.