

1964

Tuesday, August 4th

Today was a momentous day, and yet so many perfectly ordinary things happened in it. You know great decisions are being shaped, some completely beyond the control of any of us, some that have to be decided by the man closest to me, and yet you go right along doing necessary and frequently rather trivial things.

First in the morning was a nice goodbye to the Russell family on the Second Floor. It had been a wonderful visit! Bobby really didn't look as ill as I had expected, and they are rich with those five darling children.

Then I had a session with dear Robin Duke and Candi Ohno, her dressmaker, to help plan something for me to wear to the Convention, which is so fast approaching.

This was Tuesday, the day when Lyndon always has the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State, and McGeorge Bundy for lunch. They stayed a very long time. As McGeorge Bundy passed me in the hall as they were leaving after lunch, he was looking extraordinarily grave. <sup>3</sup> ~~My~~ <sup>ed</sup> asking something which brought a portentous answer -- it left me thinking we might have a small war on our hands. I can't think of anybody I would rather go into battle with than those three.

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But I had no time, really, to ponder how serious it might be, for some old friends were coming for a visit and a tour -- Delle and Sherman Birdwell, just recovered from surgery, Harvey and Mary Payne and their daughter who works, or did, in Homer Thornberry's office and now is in Jake Pickle's, and lovely Mary Pearl Williams, young lady lawyer, and her professor husband.

We had a visit and refreshments in the Yellow Oval Room. Lyndon came in -- I am so glad he did. It was about 45 minutes of real, oldtime Texas visiting. And then when they left I went up on the roof in my bathing suit for some sun and to dictate mail, always against the background of what I thought McNamara and Rusk and McGeorge Bundy and Lyndon must have been discussing.

Some time during the afternoon I took two hours off for a nap. I can relax at the most amazing times ofcasionally, almost as though you'd have to wake me up in order to get me to the execution on time.

In the course of the late evening, cars began to come and go, Lyndon had an hour and a half conference with Congressional Leaders, with the Cabinet and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. There was discussion about when to issue a statement to TV. The dinner hour grew later

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and later. Specifically, Lyndon's problem was when to tell the people of the Nation what had happened today.

It was this. Word had come that two of the United States destroyers -- the MADDUX and the SEA TURNER JOY, had been attacked in the Gulf of Tonkin by North Vietnamese PT boats. The MADDUX had already been attacked on Sunday, and <sup>then</sup> that had been let go. This, the second attack, we felt we had to respond to. Lyndon had ordered air action against gunboats and certain facilities in North Vietnam. The question was, had our planes gotten over their target, dropped their bombs? Communications were slow coming through. The report was that our planes were certainly within their radar range.

At first there was talk of giving a statement at seven o'clock, then at 8 o'clock. Lyndon kept on wanting to be sure that we had clear word about where our planes were before word was released to the world.

Finally at ten-forty I brought him, McGeorge Bundy who is temporarily a widower, Jack Valenti, in the same situation, over to have dinner. I sent three dinner trays to some of the girls in the office. Bless the staff here for being so cooperative. George dropped in for desert, and finally at something after eleven,

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I believe it was, Lyndon went on the air to make his statement.

Frightening as the situation is, it was an excellent statement. I liked the lines, "Yet our response for the present will be limited and fitting. We Americans know, although others appear to forget, the risk of spreading conflict. We still seek no wider war."

He also said he had instructed Ambassador Stevenson to raise this matter immediately and urgently before the Security Council of the United Nations. And he said he had met with the leaders of Congress to request them to pass a Resolution making it clear that our Government is united in its determination to take all necessary measures in support of freedom and in defense of peace in Southeast Asia.

He ended with, "It is a solemn responsibility to have to order even limited military action by forces whose overall strength is as vast and as awesome as those United States of America, but it is my considered conviction, shared throughout your Government, that firmness in the right is indispensable today for peace. That firmness will always be measured. Its mission is peace."

When it was over, I had a certain feeling of pride and of release. At the same time, it is vastly disquieting to know that

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our communications between the Gulf of Tonkin and the White House are not as immediate and reliable as you imagine things to be in this Age of Miracles.

Hold off as long as he did, and in spite of many assurances it was now safe to speak, it later appeared that there was uncertainty as to exactly where our planes were when he went on the air. What he was playing for, as I see it, was to wait until they had dropped their bombs, were safely on the way home, and then to make the announcement before the Communists made an announcement that this was an act of aggression on the part of the United States, getting their story to the world first. It must be said that the exact location of the planes was clouded in confusion, and that is one of the many frightening things about this job. Perhaps for Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, there were a long series of such days. Obviously, up until now we have survived them all. But it's a perilous path to tread.