



The Ghosts of Tonkin



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THE GHOSTS OF TONKIN

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THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION MUST APPEAR ON ALL PAPER AND DIGITAL PROGRAMS, PRINTING, AND ADVERTISING:

1. The full title: The Ghosts of Tonkin
2. Writing credit: By Steve Lyons
3. In addition to the above, the program must include: “Produced by special arrangement with Evergreen Plays, Bellingham, WA”

Characters:

| | |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Wayne Morse | Male, 60 - 70 |
| Stage Manager | Male or Female. Age not important. |
| Doris | Female, 30s |
| Dean Rusk | Male, 55 |
| Max Taylor | Male, 63 |
| General Krulak | Male, 60 |
| Robert McNamara | Male, 40 - 45 |
| Lyndon Johnson | Male, 60 |
| Ben | Male, 30 - 40 |
| Barry Goldwater | Male, 55 |
| William Fulbright | Male, 45 |
| Voices of Senators | Male |
| Peter Lisagor | Male, 40 |

This play requires a minimum of one women and five men. Doris and Morse have the most stage time.

Doubling:

The following characters are not doubled:
Wayne Morse, Doris, McNamara

Suggested doubling as follows:

Ben, Peter Lisagor, Dean Rusk
General Krulak, President Johnson, Voice of senators
Barry Goldwater, Max Taylor, William Fulbright

The stage manager comes out on stage in the beginning.

Setting:

Three “offices.” One for McNamara, one for LBJ and one for Doris. Each has a desk or table with a 60’s-style phone. Also, a large “board room” table with chairs. However, the board room can be eliminated and the actors can just stand for the Senate hearing.

ON RISE: MORSE enters. He is confused and hesitant.

MORSE: Ah. Hello. My name is Wayne Morse. I am from Eugene Oregon. I was Oregon's Senator from 1945 to 1968. I died in 1974. Given that last bit of information, I am sure you can imagine that I am a little confused as to what I am doing here. Back stage I was just informed that it is 2025. Can that be right?

(STAGE MANAGER enters from wings)

This makes no sense.

(STAGE MANAGER hands note to Morse. STAGE MANAGER exits.)

Excuse me.

(MORSE reads note)

Ah. I am supposed to remind you to... Turn off your... Cellophane? What?

(MORSE is distracted by something off stage)

Pardon me folks.

(MORSE goes to side of stage. Speaks to someone. Returns.)

Ah. I am also supposed to tell you to not vibrate your cellophane.

I've only been gone fifty years, I come back and find you are all walking around with vibrating cellophane. I'm as confused as a cow on AstroTurf.

I rarely feel awkward in a public speaking situation such as this. But I am just a little out of sorts here.

Indeed, I gave many speeches in my day. I enjoyed trying to explain complex subjects in terms that people could understand. Comes from my old days as a college professor.

A young lady once told me that she learned more in the first ten minutes of one of my speeches than she learned in an entire college course. She also shared with me that she felt the subsequent two hours of my speech might benefit from a little editing.

(STAGE MANAGER wheels in a podium. Exits.)

(MORSE saunters over to the podium. Probably runs his hands over it, admiring it. MORSE stands behind podium.)

MORSE switches on a little podium light on the podium.)

This just became a very... very... long evening.

But gee, here I am, fifty years have gone by since I last walked upon this good earth. I don't want to talk. I want to learn all that has happened. It's been sixty years since one of the most shameful moments in our country's history. What has happened since that time?.

(UPSTAGE from Morse,
DORIS enters. Something
about her says “I am dead.”
She is dressed in fatigues.
Initially, it is assumed that
she is male. Her hair is
tucked up under a hat.)

Do people still remember the Vietnam War? Talk
about it? I am sure that--

Excuse me, did someone just appear behind me?
Someone who looks like they may not be alive?

(MORSE turns and eyes the
dead person a moment.)

Now don't be alarmed here folks. This used to
happen to me.

After the Vietnam War was in full swing, I'd be
working late in my office. Look up. And BAM, there
they'd be. Just staring at me. Probably happened
a few times every year. American soldiers.
Vietnamese soldiers. Civilians. Men and women.
Vietnamese children. Boys, girls. North or south,
it didn't matter. They would just suddenly appear
in my office. They'd never say a thing.

I can tell you that no matter how many times it
happened, it never failed to give me the creeps.

Sometimes they'd--

(DORIS lights match)

Yep - here we go -- they'd light a cigarette.

(DORIS lights cigarette)

Me, I never smoked. Didn't drink. Didn't swear.

I can tell you that I found this smoking in my office particularly irritating.

But it's this not speaking that always bothered me. What do they want?

(MORSE looks at soldier.)

Look, I admit that it is a bit of the pot calling the kettle black. I mean, I'm also... you know. But I feel I am being pleasant and I'm not being creepy. I'm not rattling chains or anything. And I intend to entertain you with a nice speech. But this fellow...

(MORSE considers Doris once more.)

Well. I guess we will just let him be.

(DORIS removes her cap, It is now obvious she is female.)

Oh, sorry, I thought you were--

DORIS: It must be stopped.

MORSE: It speaks!

(MORSE looks at Soldier a moment.)

I'm sorry. It is too late to stop it.

DORIS: It must be stopped.

MORSE: Look. I tried. It didn't work.

DORIS: Try again.

MORSE: I can't go through it again.

DORIS: It must be stopped.

MORSE: (to audience) I'm going to be honest with you. I never really tried very hard to have a conversation with one of these apparitions because I always suspected that the conversation might go something like this.

(to Doris) It's now 2025. That was sixty years ago. I can assure you, it is too late to change the past.

DORIS: It's July, 1964.

MORSE: (pause) Ah. It is?

DORIS: Yes. Washington DC. Excuse me, I need to get off to a meeting--

MORSE: But--

DORIS: --with the Special Assistant for Counter Insurgency and Special Activities.

MORSE: This makes no sense.

DORIS: Want to come with me?

MORSE: Who are you again?

SCENE 2

Lights up - Meeting at the State Department. Present is DEAN RUSK 55, Secretary of State; MAX TAYLOR, 63 newly appointed US Ambassador to South Vietnam; US Secretary of Defense ROBERT S. MCNAMARA, 48; Major General KRULAK, USMC, Special Assistant for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities.

(During the following, DORIS changes clothes, into a dress.)

MORSE: My gosh, that's Robert McNamara, and Dean--

DORIS: Shhh.

MORSE: So, you're on this committee?

DORIS: Shush.

DEAN RUSK: As far as the American people and the rest of the world knows, the United States is simply advising the South Vietnamese in their struggle with North Vietnam. So, I am worried that these Oplan 34A operations can be easily traced back to us. If one of these PT boats is captured by the North Vietnamese... We risk a very embarrassing situation.

MAX TAYLOR: I agree. We should lease these boats to the South Vietnamese, get them out of our name completely.

GENERAL KRULAK: The Navy is afraid that if the South Vietnamese assume ownership of our PT boats, that next they will want to participate in planning the raids on North Vietnam. We then lose control.

DEAN RUSK: Are these operations even effective? Mr. Secretary, you recently described these assaults as nothing more than pinpricks to the North Vietnamese.

(DORIS, changed into
business attire, enters.)

MCNAMARA: The success rate is increasing. For example, on June 12, Oplan 34A operations blew up a bridge in the Thanh Hao province. On June 26, a demolition team destroyed a second bridge on a major roadway. But I agree we need to be doing more.

DEAN RUSK: I heard they blew up a fish sauce factory.

MCNAMARA: (pause) Yes, apparently in addition to the bridges they may have mistakenly taken out a fish sauce factory.

DORIS: I think the concern of being caught is unfounded. No Americans are on these boats raiding North Vietnam.

DEAN RUSK: Is it true that the South Vietnamese soldiers who are assisting us are paid mercenaries?

MAX TAYLOR: We are getting more and more personnel from the South Vietnamese military. But yes, currently most are paid privateers.

GENERAL KRULAK: I find it disturbing that these South Vietnamese soldiers are motivated by financial gain instead of patriotism.

DORIS: Well, maybe they don't consider helping a foreign nation slaughter their kinsmen in the north to be an act of patriotism.

(This comment is met with stony silence.)

(DORIS glances around the room)

What?

(to Morse) I was never invited back to another meeting of the Counter Insurgency and Special Activities committee.

(Everything fades away. DORIS approaches Morse's area again.)

SCENE 3

MORSE: But who are you?

DORIS: Lieutenant Doris Little. I am a Naval intelligence officer, working at the Pentagon in Robert McNamara's office.

MORSE: Wow.

DORIS: Yeah.

MORSE: So you know...

DORIS: The truth.

(pause)

MORSE: I just can't go through all this again.

DORIS: Wouldn't you like to know what was happening behind the closed doors of the Pentagon and Oval Office?

MORSE: Of course.

DORIS: I can show you.

(pause)

MORSE: I'm confused. Is the year 2025 or 1964?

DORIS: A little of both.

MORSE: I have always been curious to know what really happened.

DORIS: Shall I show you?

MORSE: (pause) Okay. Where do we start?

DORIS: Well, while we were running these little PT boat raids on the North Vietnamese, another naval operation was taking place. This one with our own ship. Code named "Desoto," this was an electronic surveillance mission.

MORSE: Spying?

DORIS: No, just... electronic surveillance.

See, what we would do is run one of our destroyers within a few miles of the North Vietnamese shore. This would then cause them to turn on their radar tracking. We would then map the locations of their radar stations, with the assumption that their radar stations were probably in their military bases.

MORSE: That's clever.

DORIS: We thought so.

Unfortunately, these raids by PT boats, combined with this US destroyer, the Maddox, in North Vietnamese waters, pissed off a couple of North Vietnamese naval officers, who took matters into their own hands. On August 2, they decided to run the destroyer out of town.

SCENE 4

Lights up **PRESIDENT LYNDON JOHNSON** sits at his desk. Secretary of State **DEAN RUSK**, US Ambassador to South Vietnam **MAX TAYLOR**, and Secretary of Defense **ROBERT MCNAMARA** sit in front of the desk.

Lyndon Johnson slouches in his chair, head in hand, face scrunched up, thinking. LBJ is the poster boy for bad posture.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: What are the North Vietnamese thinking?

(fidgets, sighs)

Why they go and put us in this situation.

MCNAMARA: Mr. President, I think it's this Op Plan 34-A, these covert operations. There's no question but what that had bearing on it. On Friday night, as you probably know, we had four TP boats from South Vietnam attack two North Vietnamese islands. And we expended, oh, a thousand rounds of ammunition of one kind or another against them. We probably shot up a radar station and a few other miscellaneous buildings. And following twenty-four hours after that, with this destroyer in that same area, undoubtedly led the Vietnamese to connect the two.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I see.

DEAN RUSK: We are issuing a press release that states the attack on the *Maddox* was repelled and the patrol will continue.

MAX TAYLOR: That's our response?

MCNAMARA: Well, we feel that--

MAX TAYLOR: This is an opportunity to show the government of South Vietnam that we will not back down from confrontation with North Vietnam. It is not adequate to state that the attack was repelled and that the patrol will continue.

We should retaliate. Bomb the hell out of North Vietnam. Mr. President, if you don't retaliate, Goldwater will use it as another example of your weakness in the face of Communist aggression. Furthermore, we are faced with the very real danger that the South Vietnamese will soon seek a negotiated settlement with the North Vietnamese Communists.

DEAN RUSK: Uh. We of course appreciate your input, and will certainly--

MAX TAYLOR: Don't patronize me Dean.

MCNAMARA: Max, our intercepts indicate that the attack on the Maddox was an impulsive act by some rogue local commander. With this confusion with OpPlan 34-A and the fact that Hanoi apparently did not order these TP boats out there, we feel that any retaliation is just not called for at this time.

(MAX TAYLOR sighs loudly.)

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: (to Max Taylor) As Ambassador to South Vietnam, you tell them "They fired at us. We responded immediately. We put those North Vietnamese boats runnin'."

Dean, be sure to put something like that in the press release.

DEAN RUSK: Yes, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Goldwater's raising so much hell about how if you just vote for him come November, he's gonna blow Vietnam off the planet. Voters gotta know that Goldwater's not the only big dick on the November ballot. Some country shoots at me, I fire back, damn straight.

(Lights fade on Oval Office)

SCENE 5

MORSE: Did McNamara say "TP boats"?

DORIS: More than once.

MORSE: Brother. And four days later when I question him in the senate hearing about this connection between the PT boats and the destroyer, he flatly denies--

DORIS: Yes, yes. I know.

MORSE: Now we have to wait for the next attack.

DORIS: Now we wait.

MORSE: So... How did you die?

DORIS: I don't want to talk about it.

MORSE: I understand. War....

DORIS: Yeah. How about you?

MORSE: Oh. I died while in a senate race.

DORIS: Wow, sorry. So the other guy won?

MORSE: Yeah.

DORIS: Who was it?

MORSE: Bob Packwood.

DORIS: Really? Bob Packwood won because his opponent died?

MORSE: Well. Not exactly. He defeated me in 1968. Then, in 1974, I was taking back my seat. But I died.

DORIS: Really. So, you're the guy Bob Packwood ran against.

MORSE: Yeah.

DORIS: And he won.

(DORIS gives a slight laugh)

MORSE: Look, it really is not very funny.

DORIS: No. No. Of course not. It's just. I mean, someone had to lose to Bob Packwood, I just didn't know it was you.

(SHE is apparently delighted by this information)

MORSE: Young lady, I had been a senator for twenty-four years when I lost in 1968 to Packwood. I defeated numerous contenders in my time.

DORIS: Absolutely.

MORSE: I lost by 3,000 votes.

DORIS: Well, sorry.

(pause) He sure was good looking, wasn't he?

MORSE: So I hear.

(MORSE impatient with this discussion)

Do we have to wait two days for August fourth to roll around?

DORIS: No. No.

MORSE: Let's get on with it then.

DORIS: Certainly.

So, the Desoto patrols continue. Although the North Vietnamese attacked us on August second, we are determined to show the world that we will not be bullied by the North Vietnamese. The *Maddox* is now joined by a second destroyer, the *Turner Joy*. We never thought that the North Vietnamese would attack us again. But on August 4, in the late morning, the cables began pouring in from the Tonkin Gulf.

SCENE 6

ROBERT MCNAMARA walks briskly past Doris

MCNAMARA: Lieutenant, in my office please.

DORIS: (to Morse) Here we go.

(DORIS picks up a pile of documents and follows MCNAMARA into his "office")

MCNAMARA: Well?

DORIS: (thumbing through the cables) This attack was huge. The North Vietnamese PT boats attacked both the *Maddox* and the *Turner Joy*. Amazing. The engagement went on for hours.

MCNAMARA: Did our boys get hit?

DORIS: No. We're going to... to respond to this, right?

MCNAMARA: I have a meeting scheduled with the President this morning.

DORIS: Thank god.

MCNAMARA: Are we sure the attack was by the North Vietnamese? Could be the Chinese.

DORIS: Chinese? We aren't at war with the Chinese are we?

MCNAMARA: Hope not. They have the bomb.

(Fade on McNamara)

SCENE 7

MORSE: You're encouraging McNamara to respond?

DORIS: That is what I remember.

MORSE: Do you know what that means?

GOLDWATER: (on TV) I want to educate the American people to lose some of their fear of the word 'nuclear.'

MORSE: My God. Barry Goldwater.

GOLDWATER: When you say 'nuclear,' all the American people see is a mushroom cloud. Now a nuclear weapon in political terms may be a mushroom cloud. But for military purposes, it's just enough firepower to get the job done.

(BEN enters)

BEN: (Calling, searching) Doris!

DORIS: Oh crap, it's Ben. Quick.

(DORIS grabs Morse and hides behind him.)

BEN: (still searching) Doris!

MORSE: (to Doris) What are you doing?

DORIS: Ben "likes" me.

MORSE: And you don't "like" Ben?

BEN: (to Morse) Excuse me, have you seen... Ah Doris.

DORIS: Hi Ben.

BEN: I don't know what our boys are doing out there.

DORIS: What?

BEN: (shakes head) This cable just in from Captain Herrick on the *Maddox*.

DORIS: What's it--

BEN: He says the weather messed up the sonar readings.

DORIS: That's odd.

BEN: No, it's happened before.

DORIS: Sonar operates in the water. Weather has no effect on sonar readings.

(Ben looks at cable.)

BEN: I... I meant radar.

DORIS: (grabbing cable) Here.

(Doris scans cable.)

BEN: What's the "G" in the date/time stamp.

DORIS: (absently) Golf.

BEN: What?

DORIS: The North Vietnam time zone is called "golf time."
"G" stands for "golf."

BEN: Gulf?

DORIS: No, "golf." Like...

(she mimes swinging a golf club)

BEN: We call the time zone in the gulf "golf" time? But why not—

DORIS: Don't you need to get a copy of this to Secretary McNamara?

BEN: I already did.

DORIS: Well, more cables are probably coming into the NMCC. Better get back there.

BEN: No, I have a moment.

DORIS: I'm sorry Ben, you don't have the clearances to be reading this cable.

BEN: But I already read it.

MORSE: What does it say?

DORIS: This is from Captain Herrick of the *Maddox*.

"Review of action makes many reported contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful. Freak weather effects on radar

(glances up at Ben)

and overeager sonarman may have accounted for many reports. No actual visual sightings by *Maddox*. Suggest complete evaluation before any further action taken."

BEN: How many PT boats were out there?

DORIS: (riffles through cables) Let's see.

(looking at a cable)

Their radar picked up maybe six attacking boats. They aren't sure.

BEN: How many torpedoes did they track?

DORIS: Ben, I don't feel comfortable with this.

BEN: Each PT boat carries two torpedoes, right? So, if there were six boats, then they should have tracked a maximum of twelve torpedoes.

DORIS: Good point. Ah. Let's see. (shuffling through cables) They recorded twenty six torpedoes.

MORSE: That would require at least 13 PT boats. The math doesn't work out.

BEN: Look, that doesn't mean they're all due to weather or... or overeager whatever.

MORSE: They never saw the attacking PT boats?

DORIS: That's what he says here. "No visual sightings."

MORSE: How can they not see the attacking ships?

DORIS: Well, it was a moonless night.

BEN: And our ships weren't hit?

DORIS: No.

BEN: You can't just... just make up these sonar contacts, no matter how overeager you are.

DORIS: (sighs, disgusted) Well, you can actually.

You have to filter out the ghost images, such as rudder noise. But if you're a little green or a little... overeager, you might not differentiate between noises your ship makes naturally and fish in the water.

MORSE: Fish?

BEN: Torpedoes.

DORIS: And during an attack, the ship starts maneuvering, taking evasive actions which increases rudder noise, which makes you take more evasive actions and pretty soon... you've tracked 26 torpedoes.

McNamara has this, right?

BEN: Yes.

DORIS: When I see the sonar report I can tell you for sure what happened out there.

BEN: So why do we have destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin anyway? What are these guys doing?

MORSE: They're--

DORIS: (to Morse) Excuse me.

(to Ben) I'm sorry Ben. This information is on a "need to know" basis.

BEN: And I really need to know.

DORIS: Sorry.

BEN: Come on Doris, for Pete's sake.

(Pause.)

DORIS: It's the Desoto patrol. They're conducting electronic surveillance.

BEN: Spying!

DORIS: No. Just. You know. Electronic surveillance.

BEN: What kind of--

DORIS: Ben! Scram! Bring us more cables!

(Reluctantly, Ben leaves.)

DORIS: These doubts are just what Johnson and his crowd needs. They're gonna back down... Again.

MORSE: What?

DORIS: It's... No, that's not what I think. That's what I thought. Back then. I don't think that anymore. It's hard to keep this straight.

Well, I gotta put all this in my report.

(sighs) Democrats are such weenies...

MORSE: What?

DORIS: Sorry. I didn't say that. Well, I did. It's... what I thought at the time. I... I felt we should have retaliated after the first attack. At least that attack was real.

SCENE 8

Lights up, MCNAMARA and JOHNSON in Oval Office

MCNAMARA: We've drawn up a list of potential North Vietnamese bombing targets.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Good. I say let's pull one of these things that you've been doing, on one of their bridges or something.

MCNAMARA: Right.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Now, what do you think about, I don't see why we don't bring Goldwater in on this. Why don't we say I felt it appropriate just to communicate my decision to the Republican candidate for President. And I'll say he's assured me of his full support. I think it makes us sound like we're very much together and buddies and agreein' on bombing everybody.

MCNAMARA: I don't see any harm in telling Goldwater.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Get him on the record as supporting the President's action before he can find some fault with it.

MCNAMARA: Good idea.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: (shifts in his chair) This thing's gonna get hotter 'n a two-petered goat.

(Lights down on McNamara
and Johnson)

(pause)

DORIS: Things are moving quickly.

MCNAMARA: Lieutenant Little, in my office please.

(DORIS enters McNamara area.)

(Holding up paper) This is the smoking gun we've been looking for. Intercept T10-64. This intercept proves that an attack indeed took place last night.

(Doris reads intercept as McNamara continues.)

It's an after-action report from the North Vietnamese describing how they shot down two planes last night and lost two ships.

DORIS: Did they shoot down two planes?

MCNAMARA: No. It's just typical Communist bluster.

(Doris notices the date/time stamp of the intercept. It draws her in.)

What's the matter?

DORIS: (pause) Nothing.

MCNAMARA: So?

DORIS: (She takes a deep breath) Smoking gun.

MCNAMARA: Excellent.

DORIS: (to Morse) I just lied to the secretary of defense.

MORSE: What?

DORIS: That intercept that he just showed me. Anyone can look at the date/time stamp and realize it is not an after-action report.

MORSE: How?

DORIS: By that afternoon, my stomach was churning. I went back to McNamara and told him I had misled him. But it was too late.

(DORIS returns to
McNamara)

MCNAMARA: What!

DORIS: I'm... I'm sorry. The President hesitated after the first attack and I thought if there were these doubts about the timing of that intercept you showed me...

MCNAMARA: There are no doubts. The intercept is obviously a North Vietnamese after-action report of their second attack on the Maddox and Turner Joy.

DORIS: But, sir, it can't be. The date/time stamp shows the message was intercepted just as the attack was starting.

MCNAMARA: They describe losing boats and shooting down planes. What else could the intercept be referring to?

DORIS: But--

MCNAMARA: The date/time stamp is incorrect. It's happened before.

(pause)

Listen, we're preparing a resolution to present to Congress supporting the President's use of military intervention in Vietnam. We have a meeting at the White House this afternoon. I would like you to attend.

SCENE 9

DORIS returns to Morse

DORIS: See. I did try to undo the damage I had done. It was too late. Within a few hours we had gone from investigating whether or not the attack had really happened to convincing the rest of the world that the attack had taken place. But few people at the Pentagon actually believed it.

(pause)

That day haunted me for the rest of my life.

MORSE: But... why...

DORIS: Did I lie in the first place? Revenge.

MORSE: Revenge for what?

DORIS: My husband was an “advisor” in Vietnam. A Navy Seal. In early 1964 he was killed by North Vietnamese. I wanted revenge for my husband’s death.

MORSE: I see. I’m sorry.

DORIS: I was driven by hatred.

I... will never know if I could have prevented this war by questioning McNamara’s smoking gun at that first meeting.

Before the meeting with President Johnson, I needed the original transcription of the North Vietnamese intercept. For that, I needed the National Security Agency to give me access to the original.

(DORIS goes to her “office”
and lifts phone)

No. Again it is intercept number T10-64.

Yes, I do have it. Carol, as I mentioned, I need the original intercept in Vietnamese. What I have here seems to be some sort of summary of--

(Ben enters office with a rolled up 18"x24" paper. He waits patiently for her to get off the phone.)

Well, surely someone at the NSA knows, right?

Yes. Please do. Tell him I need it for a meeting with the President in about 2 hours.

(Disgusted, Doris hangs up the phone.)

Does the government purposely hire numskulls?

(re rolled up paper)

Is that it?

BEN: I think so.

DORIS: Well, let's see it.

BEN: I'm under strict instructions to take these directly to the Secretary of Defense.

DORIS: He won't know what to look for. Here... I'll take them.

BEN: Okay.

(Hands over rolled up papers)

DORIS: These are the sonar reports for both the *Turner Joy* and the *Maddox*?

BEN: No, just the *Maddox*.

DORIS: I need the sonar report for the *Turner Joy* also.

BEN: The *Turner Joy* had no sonar contacts.

DORIS: The *Turner Joy* was right behind the *Maddox*, but didn't register any torpedoes?

BEN: No Ma'am.

DORIS: Oh for Pete's sake. Okay. Thanks.

SCENE 10

Lights up McNamara, absorbed in some reading. DORIS enters with rolled up sonar reports.

DORIS: New sonar report just in from the attack on the *Maddox*.

MCNAMARA: (without looking up) Just set it there, thanks.

DORIS: (pause) I would be happy to look over the report for you.

MCNAMARA: No, that's okay.

DORIS: Yes, sir.

(Doris sets down reports.
Doris looks at McNamara.
He is ignoring her.)

During this latest attack, our ships weren't hit by the North Vietnamese?

MCNAMARA: The ships successfully evaded their torpedoes, yes.

DORIS: (pause) During the Cuban missile crisis...

MCNAMARA: (looking up, as if seeing her for the first time) Yes?

DORIS: You came up with that idea to blockade Cuba?

MCNAMARA: Yes, yes I did.

DORIS: The others wanted to attack the Russians, right?

MCNAMARA: The most popular idea in the government was to attack.

DORIS: My father said that you single-handedly averted nuclear war.

MCNAMARA: We'll never know.

DORIS: What do you think?

MCNAMARA: I think the blockade may have avoided nuclear confrontation, yes.

DORIS: (pause) Well... thank you.

(MORSE approaches
Doris/McNamara area.)

(MACNAMARA smiles
awkwardly, then returns to
his work)

DORIS: (Doris turns to leave, then pauses.)

A rule of thumb we had. If the sonar traces look like rays coming from the sun, then you have real torpedoes. If the sonar traces look like the legs of a centipede, with all the traces projecting out the same way no matter which way the boat turns, then they aren't torpedoes. You're just recording the sounds of your own propellor.

(Exit DORIS.)

(MCNAMARA watches Doris
leave, then unfurls the
rolled up reports.
MCNAMARA looks intently at

report, with MORSE peering over his shoulder.)

MORSE: Total centipede. Surely you can see that? Centipede. Centipede. Centipede.

MCNAMARA: (talking to himself) Sun.

MORSE: Come on.

MCNAMARA: (studies it more. Looks up at Morse)
Kind of a curvy, elongated sun.

MORSE: Oh, brother.

(lights down McNamara)

SCENE 11

Lights up Doris at her desk. Doris dials the phone.

DORIS: Hello, Carol?

Well, is Carol there?

This is the NSA, right?

Okay, I just talked to someone named Carol about getting the original translations on intercept number T10-64. She was going to ask, let's see, a Mr.... Brown, to get back to me.

Okay, when will he return?

No. No. Forget it.

(She slams down the phone.)

(DORIS thinks for a moment, then redials)

Hi, this is Doris Little from the office of the Secretary of Defense. I was just speaking to you about an intercept? T10-64?

No, it was you I was speaking to. I recognize your voice.

So, I am going to be meeting with the president in about 45 minutes. I need that intercept. It is imperative that I have the original intercept, in Vietnamese, before my meeting with the president.

(pause)

No, I have a level III security clearance.

(pause)

Ma'am, I work for the Secretary of Defense.

(pause)

May I speak to your boss?

Well, when will he return?

Never mind.

(She slams down the phone)

(to Morse)

As the war dragged on, many people, including members of congress, demanded to see intercept T10-64, the intercept that justified the Vietnam War.

The NSA keeps the intercepts nicely filed away in folders, each folder nicely labeled. Every folder holds their respective intercepts. Every folder except one. The folder labeled T10-64... is empty.

I have to get to this meeting.

I don't want to walk into a meeting with the President and the Joint Chiefs and tell them they're wrong, there was no attack yesterday. But the evidence does not support an attack.

(MCNAMARA enters)

MCNAMARA: Lieutenant.

DORIS: Coming.

(to Morse) My first meeting with the president.

(DORIS frantically gathers up papers, stuffs them into a satchel)

Wish me luck.

(exit DORIS and
MCNAMARA)

SCENE 12

MORSE approaches podium

MORSE: I began to study the history of Vietnam. Of course, we all knew of the most recent history of the failed French occupation of Vietnam.

But as I studied, I discovered that Vietnam's history is filled with failed attempts to subdue these people.

In the 13th Century, the great Chinese conqueror Kublai Kahn came to impose Chinese rule over Vietnam. Perhaps he believed they were doing a poor job of ruling themselves.

Kublai Kahn's fleet of 400 formidable Chinese war boats prepared to invade Vietnam. Four hundred boats! Against Vietnam's pathetic, small flotilla.

At high tide the Vietnamese boats lured the Chinese fleet into the mouth of the Bach Dang River.

The Chinese pursued the Vietnamese boats up the Bach Dang river, laughing at these foolish Vietnamese. However, as the tide fell, these magnificent Chinese war ships found themselves impaled on sharp stakes, planted by the Vietnamese just below the surface of the river. Helplessly trapped in the middle of the river, the great Kulbai Kahn was then attacked, his warriors slaughtered by Vietnamese peasants.

While this military technique of the peasants of Vietnam in the 13th century seems clever, we must not give them too much credit. They had simply borrowed the tactic used by the Vietnamese 500 years earlier to defeat similar Chinese invaders.

The Chinese had apparently forgotten their history. But the Vietnamese had not.

Like Kublai Kahn, throughout history many have come to impose their own rule over the Vietnamese. All are defeated by the same three problems.

Their ignorance of Vietnamese culture, their ignorance of Vietnamese lands, and their own arrogance.

SCENE 13**BEN** enters

(DORIS storms in, throws
her satchel on her desk)

BEN: Doris?**DORIS:** I need to be alone right now.**BEN:** They didn't ask you to present anything.**DORIS:** They discussed possible targets for retaliatory bombing. They discussed introducing a congressional resolution giving Johnson authority to use military force in Vietnam.**BEN:** Well, that's not so--**DORIS:** And, they discussed whether or not an attack really happened yesterday. McNamara gave five pieces of evidence that an attack had occurred. Two of those pieces of evidence come from that after-action intercept that any moron can see is not an after-action intercept at all.

(increasingly animated)

If they want to bomb the hell out of North Vietnam, just do it. But don't tell the Commander in Chief that there is all this conclusive evidence when what they really got is shit.

They asked me one question. They asked me if I would take notes.

He didn't need an intelligence analyst, he just needed a stenographer! Why did he take me to that meeting?

BEN: You substantiated his claims.

DORIS: I don't agree with his claims. They're wrong.
There was no attack.

BEN: You're the intelligence analyst. You were in the room as he made the statements, you didn't contradict what he was saying. Right?

DORIS: I'm not going to contradict the Secretary of Defense if I am not asked.

BEN: So, you affirmed what he was saying. Oldest trick in the book.

(DORIS approaches
McNamara's office.
MCNAMARA is at his desk,
reading)

DORIS: From today's meeting, it seemed that the president has not been told of Captain Herrick's doubts about the attack yesterday.

MCNAMARA: It's common to doubt yourself under stress. No shame in that. Captain Herrick is human just like the rest of us.

DORIS: So...

(MCNAMARA returns to
what he was reading.)

MCNAMARA: I didn't trouble the president with Captain Herrick's insecurities.

(pause)

DORIS: Goldwater has threatened to use nuclear weapons in Vietnam.

MCNAMARA: (still not looking up) Barry Goldwater is nuts.

DORIS: Before we introduce this resolution to use military intervention in Vietnam, maybe we should wait until after we find out who gets--

MCNAMARA: (looking up) elected? Johnson will get elected. Why? Because he is going to show the country that he is as tough on Communism as Goldwater. How? By passing this resolution.

(MCNAMARA returns to his reading.)

DORIS: Yes sir.

(DORIS turns to walk away)

MCNAMARA: Doris.

(DORIS stops)

Goldwater scares the hell out of me. He must not become President of this country. I intend to do everything in my power to prevent it.

(Fade on McNamara)

DORIS: (to Morse) We are about to introduce a resolution to use military intervention in Vietnam. In three months the country could easily elect a president who believes nuclear weapons are just "enough fire power to get the job done." We nuke Vietnam, China will retaliate with their nuclear arsenal. And you have World War III. Except in this war, everybody loses. Introducing a resolution to give the president military authority in Vietnam could be tantamount to issuing a death sentence for planet earth.

But on the evening of August fourth, no one was talking about that. Instead, we were scrambling

bombers and aircraft carriers into the Gulf of Tonkin.

SCENE 14

MCNAMARA enters the Oval Office. JOHNSON sits at his desk, or perhaps he sits on a couch in the Oval Office.

MCNAMARA: Mr. President. Sorry this is keeping you up so late.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Here, here sit.

(offering pastries)

Biscuit?

(McNamara sits)

MCNAMARA: (smiles, taking one) We call these pastries.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I don't eat "pastries."

MCNAMARA: I just got off the phone with Admiral Sharp. He thinks they should be bombing North Vietnamese harbors by 10 P.M. If you make your announcement right after launch, you could make the 11 o'clock news.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: (stands up, begins pacing) I want all those boys back tonight.

MCNAMARA: Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Every one.

MCNAMARA: That's what we anticipate.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: The more I stayed awake last night thinkin' about this thing, the more it looks to me like we're gettin' into another Korea. I don't think it's worth fighting for and I don't think we can get out. It's just the biggest damn mess.

I look at this sergeant of mine this morning; he's got six little ol' kids and what the hell am I ordering him out there for? What in the hell is Vietnam worth to me, or this country?

MCNAMARA: The dilemma is what that half of the world is going to think if this thing comes apart on us.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah... and if you start running from the Communists, they may just chase you right into your own kitchen.

MCNAMARA: We can't sit by and watch the Chinese turn South Vietnam into another Cuba.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Or Berlin. These poor German folks can't travel freely in their own city. That's what the Communists do. They oppress people.

(McNamara gets up.)

MCNAMARA: I'll let you know when they launch.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And Bob. I want a call from you first thing tomorrow telling me every one of those planes returned safely.

MCNAMARA: Yes sir.

(Fade on McNamara and LBJ)

(During the following, DORIS wanders over to a chair. Falls asleep)

PRESIDENT JOHNSON (ON TV) As President and Commander in Chief, it is my duty to report that renewed hostile actions against the United States ships on the high seas in the Gulf of Tonkin today required me to order the military forces of the

United States to take action in reply. That reply is being given tonight as I speak.

I have introduced 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.

(LBJ wanders over to a chair next to Doris, who is asleep in a chair. LBJ sits.)

(DORIS' head falls over onto LBJ. HE likes this.)

(DORIS suddenly wakes)

DORIS: (Startled. Jumps up.) Mr. President!

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I didn't mean to wake you.

DORIS: I'm sorry. I must have fallen asleep.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: You were snoring, very softly.

DORIS: I am so sorry.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I liked it.

DORIS: What time is it?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: It's almost midnight.

DORIS: Has the attack happened?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yes.

You're that gal from the meeting this afternoon.

DORIS: Yes.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Mac's secretary?

DORIS: No. His intelligence analyst. Doris. Lieutenant Doris Little.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Intelligence analyst? You didn't talk much in the meeting.

DORIS: No sir.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: So, you being the intelligence analyst, maybe you can explain something to me. Why did this little country attack the greatest military power in the world?

DORIS: I... I don't know.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Makes no sense to me.

DORIS: What.. Do you think?

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I think Vietnam is one big cow pie. And tonight, I stomped my boot right in the middle of it.

DORIS: (to Morse) That night I had a chance to tell him that the attack never happened. He gave me every opportunity. I didn't do it.

I'm sorry.

(Lights up McNamara in his office, on phone. Phone rings on Johnson's desk. JOHNSON dashes over to desk.)

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Mac?

MCNAMARA: Sir, I just got off the phone with Admiral Sharp. It was an overwhelming success. 64 sorties and we took out eight of their PT boats and several petroleum facilities.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Did all our boys come home?

MCNAMARA: No sir. We lost two planes. We believe one pilot ejected and may have been captured. The other apparently did not eject.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: What were their names?

MCNAMARA: I'll get you that information.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: And what about my war power resolution. Are you working on that?

MCNAMARA: We have a Senate Foreign Relations hearing August 6th.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: It will pass without a hitch.

MCNAMARA: Morse is on that committee.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Oh, Wayne will have his hissy fit. Everyone else on the committee has on cowboy hats - they won't listen to 'im.

MCNAMARA: Yes sir.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: I just scratch Wayne behind the ears and his hind leg will get to beatin' out any tune I whistle.

MORSE: Hey, now wait a minute.

MCNAMARA: Yes sir.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Anything else?

MCNAMARA: Just congratulations on a very successful mission.

PRESIDENT JOHNSON: Yeah. You too. Goodbye.

(Slowly hangs up phone)

(LBJ is lost in thought)

(Lights down McNamara and LBJ)

SCENE 15

Phone rings on Doris' desk. DORIS answers.

DORIS: Hello.

(to Morse) It's for you.

MORSE: Oh. Okay.

(grabbing phone)

Hello?

Bill!

(to Doris) It's William Fulbright.

Great to hear from you.

Sure, what time?

I'll be there.

(MORSE hangs up phone)

William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. That's the committee I serve on. We're having a hearing on the president's South East Asia Resolution.

I need to get off to the hearing.

(MORSE begins to leave for hearing room.)

DORIS: It's all up to you now. It must be stopped.

MORSE: I'll do my best.

DORIS: It must be stopped in that committee hearing. Once the resolution is on the Senate floor, it is too late.

MORSE: I... I know.

DORIS: Believe nothing that Robert McNamara says.

MORSE: Certainly my record demonstrates my ability to-

DORIS: You are the only one who can stop this resolution.
But you must stop it in that committee hearing.

MORSE: (pause) Excuse me, I'm running late.

(MORSE turns to go)

DORIS: Senator.

(MORSE pauses)

In that hearing room, it's Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and Senator Wayne Morse. No one else matters.

MORSE: Yes...

DORIS: Your entire life, Senator, has been in preparation for a single moment.

That moment is now.

You must not fail.

(MORSE enters hearing room)

SCENE16

Joint Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Committee on Armed Services. United States Senate. August 6, 1964.

At the actual hearing there were 24 males and one female. They are Senate members of the two committees.

Directors/designers are free to convey this scene as in whatever way seems most appropriate.

One approach is to have Doris, McNamara, Rusk, Fulbright and Morse as constant characters. All the remaining senators are played by the sixth actor.

FULBRIGHT: The meeting will now come to order.

Senate Joint Resolution 189, August 6, 1964.
Authorization for the use of military force in combating Communist aggression in Vietnam.

We all know why we have gathered this morning. We have the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk and the Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara with us.

Well, gentlemen, I don't wish to ask any questions. The promptness and decision which the Pentagon exhibited on this occasion is commendable.

We shall first hear from Secretary of State Dean Rusk.

DEAN RUSK: Mr. Chairman, we very much appreciate the speed with which Congress has turned its attention to this problem and hope very much that a unified and prompt action can be taken.

I shall not take your time this morning to review the constitutional aspects of resolutions of this character. I believe it to be the generally accepted constitutional view that the President has the constitutional authority to take at least limited armed action in defense of American national interests. We cannot now be sure what actions may be required.

This resolution, and this consultation which the executive and the legislative branches are now having in the course of today, will in no sense be

the last contact between the executive and the legislative branches on these problems in southeast Asia. There will continue to be regular consultations not only with committees but between the President and the congressional leaders.

FULBRIGHT: Thank you Mr. Secretary. Senator Stennis?

VOICE OF STENNIS: Mr. Chairman, most of us around the table have been in favor of this resolution. Do we know the strength of the North Vietnamese air power?

MCNAMARA: They have no combat aircraft at all.

VOICE OF STENNIS: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

FULBRIGHT: Senator Saltonstall?

VOICE OF SALTONSTALL: Mr. Chairman, I have no questions.

I believe the action of the President was essential to defend the prestige of our Armed Forces, and I intend to support this resolution wholeheartedly and with my best efforts.

FULBRIGHT: Senator Lausche?

VOICE OF SENATOR LAUSCHE: Can you describe the events of August 4? Were there shots fired by the North Vietnamese on the 4th?

MCNAMARA: Oh yes; the Maddox was attacked.

VOICE OF SENATOR LAUSCHE: Do you know how many of the torpedoes were set into motion and what small arms were used?

MCNAMARA: It is difficult to estimate. This was a very dark night.

VOICE OF SENATOR LAUSCHE: The shots were initiated by the North Vietnamese?

MCNAMARA: Yes.

VOICE OF SENATOR LAUSCHE: Now, you reiterate, Mr. McNamara, that we did not at all participate in this assault that was made by the South Vietnamese upon those two islands?

MCNAMARA: We did not.

(DORIS enters the hearing area, Goes to Morse.)

VOICE OF SENATOR LAUSCHE: The attacks upon the *Maddox* occurred in international waters?

MCNAMARA: That is right.

VOICE OF SENATOR LAUSCHE: Then our course would be to either maintain our honor and our security or drop tail and run for the ocean, I suppose?

MCNAMARA: That is correct.

FULBRIGHT: Senator Morse?

MORSE: Mr. Chairman, I am inalterably opposed to this course of action. When the South Vietnamese naval boats bombarded two islands a short distance off the coast of North Vietnam, we were implicated.

There isn't a scintilla of evidence that North Vietnam engaged in any military aggression against South Vietnam either with its ground troops or its navy.

The first act of open territorial aggression was last week, when South Vietnam naval boats attacked two North Vietnamese islands with American naval vessels conveniently standing by as a backstop.

Any Senator who votes for this resolution will live to regret it.

DEAN RUSK: Sir, I feel compelled to make a brief comment on what the distinguished Senator from Oregon has just said.

Since 1954 the North Vietnamese have been undertaking to undermine and take over the Government of South Vietnam.

I think we ought to try our best to keep clear who is the aggressor here, and what the purposes of the United States and the free world are. We have helped country after country in maintaining their security and independence, and we don't control any of them. We have none of them in any American empire.

MORSE: I don't propose to engage in a debate with the Secretary of State here. We shouldn't have been there except to keep the peace. We ought to have been at the conference table.

MCNAMARA: Mr. Chairman, may I respond to this?

There have been several misstatements made and I would like to correct them for the record.

First, our navy played no part in, was not associated with, was not aware of any South Vietnamese actions, if there were any. I want to make this perfectly clear. The *Maddox* was operating in international waters, was carrying out a routine patrol of the type we carry out all over the world. I say this flatly; this is a fact. Now I want to make one other point. This government has positive proof of the organized effort of North Vietnam to subvert the Government of South Vietnam.

MORSE: Mr. Secretary, you have not put in the record of this committee any proof at any time of any overt military operation of North Vietnam into South Vietnam.

MCNAMARA: I dispute that, Senator.

MORSE: Well, the record will speak for itself.

MCNAMARA: I don't know what the record shows because I am unfamiliar with the record of this committee.

MORSE: (Morse begins to respond, but...)

FULBRIGHT: Senator Long?

DORIS: You need to cross examine him. You're making really fine points but--

VOICE OF SENATOR LONG: (overlapping) I will vote for this resolution.

DORIS: Senator. Look at me. Ask him about the August 4 attack. Ask him what evidence he has.

(MORSE does not seem to see or hear Doris)

VOICE OF SENATOR LONG: (overlapping) My guess is that the enemy doesn't spend as much time arguing about the international niceties of what they are going to do.

DORIS: Ask him if Captain Herrick has doubts about the attack.

FULBRIGHT: Senator Aiken?

DORIS: And what about the centipede?? You didn't ask him about the centipede!

VOICE OF SENATOR AIKEN: (overlapping) Did our Embassy know that the South Vietnamese were going to attack these North Vietnamese islands?

MCNAMARA: I assume our Embassy had knowledge of it.

VOICE OF SENATOR AIKEN: I see. That is all.

DORIS: No. No. No.

FULBRIGHT: Senator Church.

VOICE OF SENATOR CHURCH: Mr. Chairman, I take it that our government, which supplied those boats to the Government of South Vietnam, did not know that the boats would be used for attacks upon North Vietnamese targets?

DEAN RUSK: In the larger sense that is so, but as far as any particular detail is concerned, we don't in Washington follow that in great detail.

VOICE OF SENATOR CHURCH: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

MORSE: Could I ask one question of fact on the patrol?

FULBRIGHT: Next is Senator Case.

(MORSE glares furiously at Fulbright.)

VOICE OF SENATOR CASE: I think it would be unfortunate if we did not support immediate action in response to aggression and on the spot because this is where the decisions are made and anything we do afterward will be affected favorably or adversely by our failure to take action or whatever action we take.

DORIS: I didn't follow that.

FULBRIGHT: We shall now bring the resolution to a vote.

DORIS: No! Senator Morse! What are you doing? Stop the resolution.

FULBRIGHT: All in favor?

ALL EXCEPT DORIS AND MORSE: Aye!

FULBRIGHT: Opposed?

MORSE/DORIS: No!

FULBRIGHT: The ayes have it. This hearing is adjourned.

(Fulbright slams down gavel with a deafening BANG. People get up from the table. Mingle. Clap each other on the back etc.)

(THEY ignore Doris and Morse)

DORIS: (to people leaving hearing room) Wait. No. That's it? That's the discussion?

(to Morse) Is that really what happened?

(to people leaving) Do you people understand what you've just done?

(to Morse) Do they.... And you! I thought you were a lawyer! You didn't cross examine the witness!

MORSE: I—

DORIS: You didn't ask for proof of anything!

MORSE: I—

DORIS: The Secretary of Defense just out maneuvered you.

MORSE: I... I'm sorry.

DORIS: What about all you have learned here. You didn't use any of it. You let McNamara blatantly lie in that hearing.

MORSE: Doris. I didn't know. I didn't know.

I'm sorry. This is what happened sixty years ago. I couldn't change it.

But.. I... I will stop it...

DORIS: I don't think so.

MORSE: ...on the Senate floor.

DORIS: You won't.

MORSE: I have to try.

DORIS: Like Johnson said, they all got their cowboy hats on.

MORSE: I've prepared a speech. It's a good speech.

SCENE 17

MORSE approaches podium and launches into speech

MORSE: Vietnam requires the application of reason, not bullets.

If we follow a course of action that bogs down thousands of American boys in Asia, the administration responsible for it will be rejected and repudiated by the American people. Future generations will look with dismay upon a Congress about to make such a historic mistake. All of South Vietnam is not worth the life of a single American boy.

DORIS: Very good points.

MORSE: Thank you.

DORIS: How many were in the senate chambers when you made your speech?

MORSE: I... I can't remember.

DORIS: I remember. When you made that speech, the senate chambers... were empty.

MORSE: (tries to respond, but can not)

DORIS: They were all tired of you Senator Morse.

MORSE: I... I made that speech for the Congressional record.

DORIS: Unfortunately, the record was not voting on the resolution.

MORSE: Does this mean you are going to die, in Vietnam, just like before?

DORIS: I will not discuss my death.

MORSE: I understand. I'm so sorry Lieutenant.

PETER LISAGOR: Senator, you're on in two minutes.

MORSE: On in two minutes? What?

DORIS: What are you on?

MORSE: Don't know. Must be another interview. Let's just keep talking, maybe he'll go away.

DORIS: Well, okay. What do we talk about?

SCENE 18

Lights up Peter Lisagor. Or maybe Peter Lisagor is a disembodied voice.

PETER LISAGOR: Twenty seconds.

MORSE: E gad, it's that awful guy from Meet the Press.

PETER LISAGOR: Rolling.

Our guest tonight is Oregon's Senator Wayne Morse.

MORSE: (overlapping) No. Stop.

PETER LISAGOR: Last week, Senator Morse of Oregon and Senator Ernest Gruening of Alaska were the only two congressmen to vote against the resolution to give our President the authority to assist --

MORSE: (overlapping) I am in the middle of--

PETER LISAGOR: South Vietnam in its fight against communist insurgents.

MORSE: (overlapping) Go away. Can't you see I'm--

PETER LISAGOR: Senator Morse has called our participation in the South Vietnam War unconstitutional and illegal. Senator what do you mean by that?

MORSE: (no reply)

PETER LISAGOR: Senator?

MORSE: Oh all right. Look.

Our government has no right to send American boys to their death in absence of a declaration of war. Article one, section eight of the constitution vests the prerogative of declaring war in the Congress of the United States. And no war has been declared in Southeast Asia.

PETER LISAGOR: Senator, the constitution gives to the President the sole responsibility for the conduct of foreign policy.

MORSE: Couldn't be more wrong. You couldn't make a more unsound legal statement than the one you have just made.

PETER LISAGOR: (overlapping) To whom--

MORSE: Its an old fallacy that foreign policy belongs to the President of the United States.

PETER LISAGOR: (overlapping) To whom--

MORSE: That's nonsense.

PETER LISAGOR: To whom does it belong then senator?

MORSE: It belongs to the American people.

PETER LISAGOR: Where does the president fit in?

MORSE: What I am saying is under our constitution all the president is is the administrator of the will of the people's foreign policy.

PETER LISAGOR: (overlapping) You know--

MORSE: And I am pleading that the American people be given the facts.

PETER LISAGOR: (overlapping) You know Senator that the American people can not formulate and execute foreign policy.

MORSE: Why do you say that?

Why you are a man of little faith in democracy if you make that --

PETER LISAGOR: (overlapping) No that's not--

MORSE: ... kind of statement. I have complete faith in the ability of the America people to follow the facts if you'll just give them--

PETER LISAGOR: (overlapping) It isn't a lack of--

MORSE: And my charge is you are not giving the American people the facts.

Now go away.

(Peter Lisagor fades away)

(pause)

Hello?

Good.

SCENE 19

DORIS: The media! That's it! The press will investigate!

MORSE: The press is a bunch of lap dogs.

DORIS: Let's see.

(DORIS rummages around the pile on her desk)

Here we go. Time Magazine, just came out.
August 14, 1964.

MORSE: Doris. I doubt that--

DORIS: The attack in the Gulf of Tonkin is the cover story!

MORSE: Well, that's good.

DORIS: Let's see.

(SHE leafs through to the story.)

MORSE: What's it--

DORIS: (shushes him as she reads)

MORSE: Do they question the--

DORIS: (shushes him again)

(pause)

(despondent, DORIS hands magazine to Morse)

MORSE: (reads from magazine) "Through the darkness, from the West and South, the intruders boldly sped. There were at least six of them, Russian-designed Swatow gunboats armed with 37-mm and 28-mm guns, and P-4's. At 9.52 they opened fire on the destroyers with automatic weapons, and this time from as close as 2,000 yards. The night glowed eerily with the nightmarish glare of air dropped flares and boat's searchlights. Two of the enemy boats went down."

(sets down magazine)

Well. It's nicely written.

DORIS: Yeah.

MORSE: I know you are disappointed in Time Magazine's coverage of the Gulf of Tonkin attack.

DORIS: Yeah.

MORSE: I'll tell you a story. In 1953 Eisenhower urged passage of something called the tidelands bill. I felt this bill was an environmental disaster written by oil companies and rubber stamped by a conservative administration.

I filibustered the tidelands bill for 22 hours and 26 minutes. During that time I could not sit down. I could not leave the room. I could not stop talking. I remember greeting Senators as they returned to the chamber the next morning. They were surprised to see me still up there talking away.

When I relinquished the floor, I immediately held a press conference, to be certain that the media understood the folly of this bill.

And after all this, what was the focus of the newspaper reports the next day? Not on the subtleties of this evil bill. Not on how congress is run by oil companies. No. The press coverage was almost exclusively about my amazing bladder control during the 22 hour filibuster.

(pause)

I had this dog, Blackie, when I was a kid. Every time I pointed at something, Blackie would never look at what I was pointing at. Blackie would always look at my hand. No matter how I tried.

I would go --

(MORSE points finger at something, shaking his hand)

And Blackie would go --

(MORSE follows the shaking finger with his head)

Blackie is just like the press in this country.

(MORSE again shakes finger and follows the shaking finger with his head)

DORIS: Press.

MORSE: Press.

Necessary evil though.

DORIS: So, that's it? We now get the Vietnam War?

MORSE: I'm sorry.

DORIS: So, in four years, you are going to be defeated by Bob Packwood because you are unAmerican.

MORSE: And you are going to die in Vietnam.

(pause)

DORIS: I. I didn't die in Vietnam.

MORSE: Oh. But I thought--

DORIS: In fact, I never served in Vietnam.

MORSE: Oh. Then how...

DORIS: I. I died in Virginia.

MORSE: Oh.

DORIS: (sighs) I was at a pool party. Someone challenged me to jump into the pool with all my clothes on. I was extremely drunk. I tried to jump in but slipped and hit my head on the side of the pool and drowned.

MORSE: Oh.

DORIS: Yeah.

MORSE: (slight chuckle)

DORIS: It's really not funny.

MORSE: (holding back laughter) Oh I know, it's just...

DORIS: Well, okay. It's kinda funny.

(moment)

MORSE: Well. I guess that's it.

DORIS: Ten years of war in Vietnam.

MORSE: So... I have a question for you. In the Tonkin Gulf, on the night of August fourth, the *Maddox* was just shooting at the noise from her own propeller?

DORIS: That's what I thought initially. But as the war continued, many boats in the Gulf of Tonkin experienced these same false sonar and radar readings. In fact, it became such a common occurrence in the navy that these false readings came to be known as the "Tonkin Ghosts."

(pause)

Well, I'm going back.

(DORIS slowly begins to leave)

You coming?

MORSE: Sure. I just need to finish my speech, and I'll be right there.

(MORSE approaches podium)

(DORIS waits)

I am ashamed of what you have witnessed here tonight. I am embarrassed that while I was a member of congress, the United States attacked Vietnam based on completely bogus information. Following our initial attack, my fellow members of congress then gave the president the authority to use military intervention in Vietnam, a country that posed absolutely no threat to the United States. Congress gave the president this authority because we were lied to about the intelligence gathered by the Pentagon. And I am ashamed to report that our US media simply regurgitated

whatever lies our government fed them. Two million lives were eventually lost in an unconstitutional war that should have never happened.

But these two million lives have not been in vain.

I am sure that you have never repeated our disgraceful mistakes.

Never again will a complicit media simply repeat the lies fed to them by the government without questioning those lies. Never again will we attack another country based upon false information. And never again will we invade a country that poses no immediate threat to the United States.

For if we did, two million people would have died in vain in Vietnam.

DORIS: Senator?

MORSE: Thank you. Goodnight.

(MORSE turns off the podium light that was switched on at the beginning of the play.)

(MORSE joins Doris and THEY walk away, as lights fade on them.)

END OF PLAY