

This Day in History... August 5, 1964

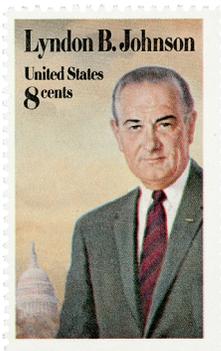
Operation Pierce Arrow

On August 5, 1964, the US launched Operation Pierce Arrow in response to the Gulf of Tonkin Incident. The operation marked the start of US air operations over North Vietnam.

In early 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson became increasingly concerned that South Vietnam was losing the fight against the Viet Cong guerrillas. He decided that US naval aid to the South Vietnamese might help compel Ho Chi Minh to stop providing support to communists in the South.

The US Navy gave the South Vietnamese fast patrol boats and trained their crews to use them. American naval forces were also ordered to go on intelligence-gathering missions along the coasts of the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, and North Vietnam, within their territorial waters. While on one of these missions on August 2, the USS *Maddox* traveled along the coast of North Vietnam in the Gulf of Tonkin. There it was the target of three North Vietnamese torpedo boats.

None of the torpedoes hit the ship, and it suffered no substantial damage. However, shellfire from the *Maddox* and F-8 Crusader jets from the nearby *Ticonderoga* bombed all three torpedo boats, leaving one dead in the water. Reportedly, a second Gulf of Tonkin incident occurred two days later, but it is believed that the supposed second torpedo attacks were actually false radar images. As a result of both incidents, President Johnson ordered retaliatory attacks against North Vietnam. The event led to the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, which granted the president the authority to assist any Southeast Asian country endangered by “communist aggression.”



President Johnson ordered the operation under the authority of the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution.

Operation Pierce Arrow was one of the first actions taken under this resolution. On August 5, 1964, 64 planes were launched from the aircraft carriers *Ticonderoga* and *Constellation* against the torpedo boat bases of Hon Gai, Loc Chao, Quang Khe, Ben Thuy, and the oil storage depot at Vinh.



Issued on Veteran's Day in 1979.



From the 1998-2000 Celebrate the Century series



The first US Navy prisoner of war in Vietnam was taken during this operation.

Two US aircraft were lost to anti-aircraft fire and one pilot was killed. Additionally, Ensign Everett Alvarez Jr., an A-4 Skyhawk pilot, became the first US Navy prisoner of war in Vietnam. It's been estimated that the pilots destroyed about 90 percent of the petroleum storage facility at Vinh and destroyed or damaged 25 P-4 torpedo boats.

Pierce Arrow marked the start of US air operations over North Vietnam, with the major goal being to destroy their facilities, war material, and military units.

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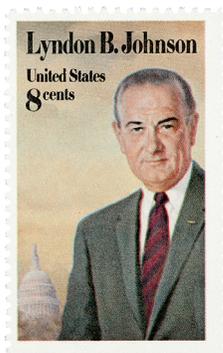
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