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AFTER ACTION REPORT



**US MILITARY OPERATIONS
SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND
12-15 MAY 1975**

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AFTER ACTION REPORT

SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION
12 - 15 MAY 1975

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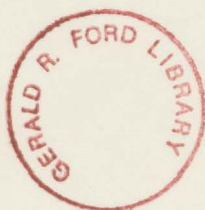
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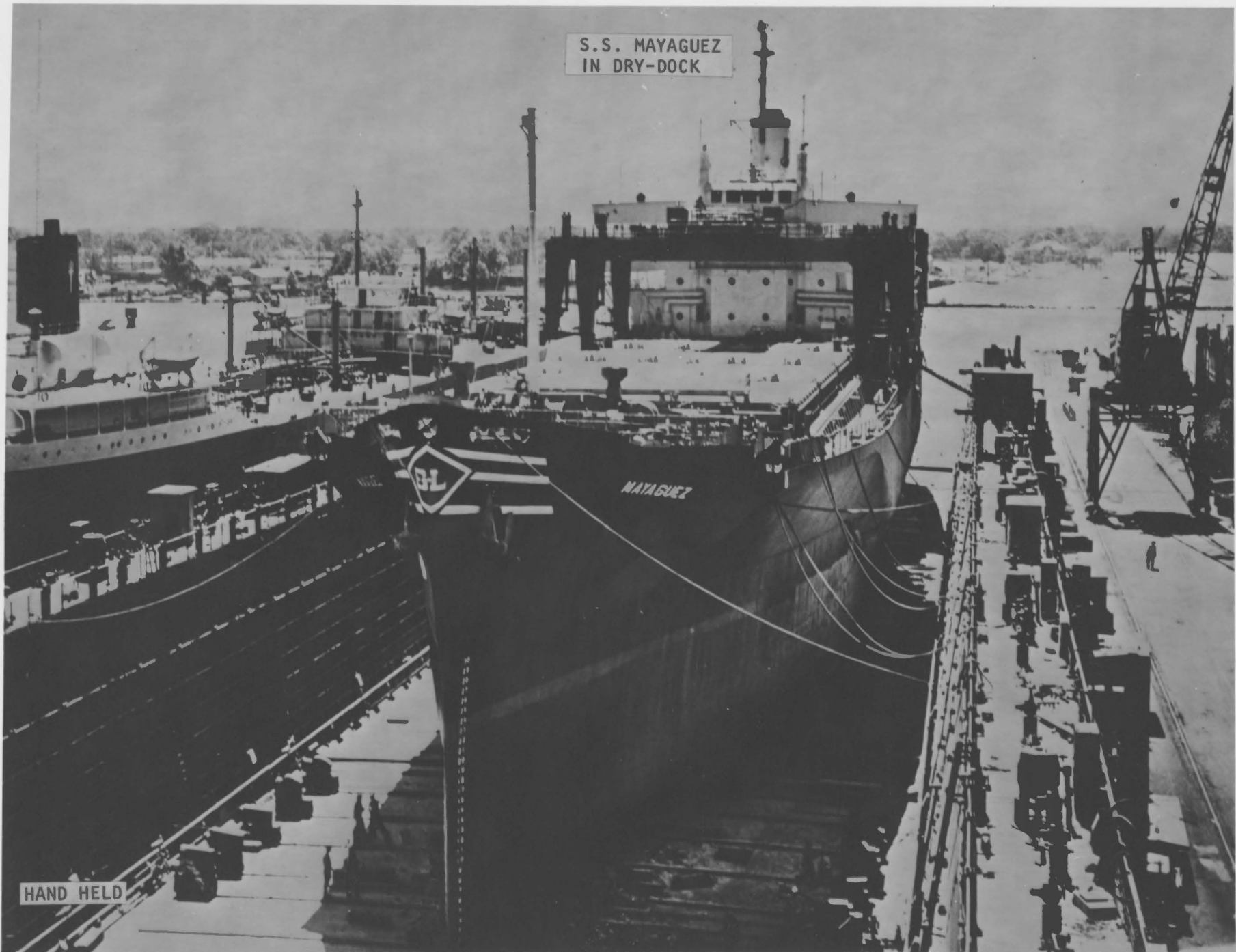
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S.S. MAYAGUEZ
IN DRY-DOCK



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SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The following is a narrative summary of events beginning with report of the capture of the SS MAYAGUEZ by a Cambodian gunboat, and concluding with the extraction of the Marines from Kaoh Tang Island. All times used are Eastern Daylight Time (to convert to Gulf of Thailand time add eleven hours).

The incident became known in Washington at 0512 hours on 12 May 75 when the NMCC received a report from the American Embassy Jakarta that the SS MAYAGUEZ had possibly been boarded. At 0730 hours NMCC requested that a reconnaissance aircraft be launched from Utapao Airfield, Thailand, and at about 1000 hours, a P-3 took off to begin coverage of the area. By mid-afternoon other reconnaissance aircraft had been added and continuous surveillance was maintained until the end of the operation. First battle damage was incurred when a P-3 was hit by one round of small arms fire from a gunboat at 2116 hours. During the afternoon, the destroyer USS HOLT, the support ship USS VEGA, the USS CORAL SEA carrier task group, and the destroyer USS WILSON had been directed to proceed to the vicinity of Kompong Som from various locations in the Western Pacific. All of these ships were to play a significant role in the operations on 14-15 May. By midnight the MAYAGUEZ had moved from the vicinity of Poulo Wai Island to near Kaoh Tang Island.

On 13 May during the early morning hours, JCS directed CINCPAC to maintain fighter/gunship cover over the MAYAGUEZ to effect release of the ship or to prevent her movement into port. At 0619 hours an A-7 reported placing ordnance in the water to signal the ship not to get underway. During the remainder of the morning, several small boats were observed moving to the MAYAGUEZ and between the ship and Kaoh Tang Island. It was concluded that the crew of the MAYAGUEZ was moved to the island during this time.

At 1210 hours, CINCPAC was directed by JCS to move all available USAF helicopters and a detachment of Security Police to Utapao, and to bring two reinforced Marine platoons from Cubi Point, Philippines to Utapao. During movement of the Security Police, a CH-53 crashed due to unknown causes, killing all 23 persons on board. At 1512 hours on 13 May, JCS directed CINCPAC to move a Marine Battalion from Okinawa to Utapao. All the above deployments were completed by 0300 hours on 14 May.



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During the remainder of 13 May and into early evening of the 14th, efforts continued to prevent the MAYAGUEZ from getting underway until US forces could be positioned. Also, it was during this period, at 2020 hours, that an A-7 sank the first patrol boat of the operation while attempting to divert the craft. Authority to sink this boat had been given by the President eight minutes earlier. Shortly thereafter, a boat was seen leaving the island proceeding towards Kompong Som with a group of people in the bow. The pilot of the aircraft who made the sighting reported that these people were possibly caucasians. Unsuccessful attempts to turn back this boat including using riot control agents and firing across its bow; however, the boat continued and subsequently entered the harbor. It was not taken under direct attack because of the probability of Americans being aboard. One hour later, at midnight on the 13th, authority was given to attack and sink all small craft in the vicinity of Kaoh Tang.

Just before one o'clock on the morning of 14 May, CINCPAC and USSAG/7AF were tasked by the Acting Chairman, following an NSC meeting, to make preparations to seize the MAYAGUEZ, occupy Kaoh Tang Island, conduct B-52 strikes against the port of Kompong Som and Ream Airfield, sink all Cambodian small craft in target areas, and plan to also use tactical aircraft from the USS CORAL SEA. Preparations were to be completed in time for execution early on 15 May. The USSAG/7AF concept plan to conduct these operations was received in Washington at 1330 hours on 14 May and approved, with minor modification, by CINCPAC. The operational concept is attached at Tab C and subsequent events followed this scenario closely, with tactical air from the USS CORAL SEA being substituted for B-52s in the attacks on the mainland.

The operation to effect the recovery of the SS MAYAGUEZ and crew from Cambodian control began with the military execute order issued after an NSC meeting at 1652 hours on 14 May, following extensive planning and prepositioning of forces. The initial order directed CINCPAC to seize and secure the MAYAGUEZ using Marines placed aboard the destroyer USS HOLT, and then to sail or tow the ship to sea as soon as possible. This order also directed a Marine helicopter assault on Kaoh Tang Island. Locations of the ship and island are as shown on Map, Tab C. Tactical air from Thailand and the carrier USS CORAL SEA was authorized to support the operations as required, as was the use of naval gunfire and riot control agents.



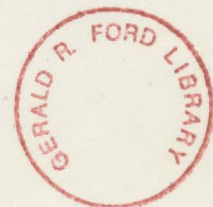
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At 1714 hours on 14 May, the first helicopter took off from Utapao Airfield, Thailand, where all available USAF helicopters and the Marine Ground Security Force had been positioned. Tactical air began to launch from Thailand to provide continuous coverage for the operation and the airborne command post, flying over the Gulf of Thailand, assumed overall control at the onset. The first three helicopters carrying 48 Marine Ground Security Force combat troops, six Military Sealift Command personnel, six US Navy explosive ordnance disposal technicians, and a linguist arrived over the USS HOLT at 1858 hours, Personnel transfer to the HOLT was completed by 1922 hours. The HOLT came alongside the MAYAGUEZ at 2045 hours, and 20 minutes later reported in full control of the ship. There were no personnel found on the MAYAGUEZ at the time of the boarding, but food found on the dining table and a warm kettle on the stove were evidence of a recent, hasty departure.

At 1710 hours, based on word passed from an NSC meeting in progress, JCS directed CINCPAC to commence cyclic strike operations from the USS CORAL SEA on the Kompong Som complex, with first time on target specified at 2045 hours to coincide with the estimated time of capture of the MAYAGUEZ. This estimate proved to be exceedingly accurate. The first cycle was to be armed reconnaissance with Cambodian aircraft and military watercraft as principal targets. Subsequent flights were to make maximum use of precision guided munitions to attack targets of military significance. The first cycle did not expend ordnance probably due to some uncertainty because of a temporary divert after becoming airborne and their inability to positively identify principal targets as Cambodian. The second cycle struck the Ream Airfield. The runway was cratered, several aircraft were destroyed or damaged, and the hangars were badly damaged. The third and final cycle struck the naval base at Ream damaging the barracks area and the Kompong Som port and POL refinery. Two warehouses were damaged in the port and a direct hit was scored on a large building in the marshalling yard. This initial bomb damage assessment is preliminary, based on pilot reports and some photography, and may be refined as more information becomes available. Photographs of the target areas are included at Enclosure 4 to Tab D. Operations against the mainland terminated with final time on target of 0010 hours on 15 May.

The assault on Kaoh Tang Island (Photograph with Tab B) began at 1720 hours on 14 May with the take-off from Utapao of the first three of eight total USAF helicopters transporting Marine assault forces. At 1909 hours, one of the first helicopters in the area of the island reported hostile ground fire.



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The flight mechanic was wounded and became the first casualty of the operation. A second helicopter was reported hit and burning in the water six minutes later. The third helicopter from this flight was reported crashed on the beach at 1945 hours. Thirty minutes later insertion of the first assault wave had been completed. Of the eight helicopters in the first wave, three crashed on the beach or in the water and two were disabled, one landing on a Thai island for fuel before proceeding to Utapao and the other returning directly to Utapao. The Marine Ground Force Commander had secured his initial position at the northwestern landing zone by 2147 hours, and was receiving occasional automatic weapon fire and encountering claymore mine detonations. On the eastern landing zone, across the island from the main force, 22 personnel were isolated near the helicopter which had crashed on the beach. For photograph of the landing zones, see Enclosure 1 to Tab B.

At 2223 hours a boat was reported approaching the island flying a white flag. The destroyer USS WILSON picked up the occupants of the boat at 2305 hours. Shortly thereafter, it was reported that the entire crew of the MAYAGUEZ was accounted for aboard the WILSON and that all were in good condition. The five-man Thai crew of the boat which brought the MAYAGUEZ crew to the WILSON from Kaoh Rong San Lem was provided food and fuel. By 0025 hours on 15 May, the MAYAGUEZ crew had been returned to their ship, and the ship was towed away from the island by the USS HOLT.

The initial assault wave had landed approximately 180 Marines on Kaoh Tang. Additional ground security forces had been requested by the commander on the island to provide reinforcement for a successful withdrawal or to continue offensive operations. The second Marine assault wave began to arrive in the area at about 2345 hours on 14 May. The helicopters received ground fire and one of the first two was damaged. At eight minutes past midnight, the Marines were reported in good position with the enemy forced back. At 0049 hours on 15 May the order was given to immediately cease all offensive operations and to disengage and withdraw all forces from the area as soon as possible consistent with safety/self defense. At 0121 hours, a helicopter from the second assault wave was hit at the island, and, along with two other helicopters, returned to Utapao without unloading Marines.

Initial efforts to withdraw forces from the island concentrated on extracting the 22 personnel in the vicinity of the downed helicopter on the beach, as this small force could have been rather easily overrun if left overnight. The helicopter making the attempt



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was hit by ground fire at 0334 hours and recovered on the USS CORAL SEA. The main body of the Marine ground force, with a strength of approximately 213 personnel, had been unable to reach the downed helicopter or the 22-man Marine force, isolated on the opposite side of the island since approximately 1945 hours.

The extraction of the ground force was complicated by the reduction in numbers of helicopters operational (seven total of all types), the amount of enemy ground fire received by each inbound helicopter and the approach of darkness. Small boats from the USS HOLT and USS WILSON began efforts to assist in the withdrawal and approached the beaches at 0615 hours, but aborted due to ground fire. Working with naval gunfire and TACAIR support and with the ground force commander's recommendation that the extraction continue as necessary into darkness, helicopters recovering to the CORAL SEA were finally able to clear all USMC personnel from the island at 0917 hours, 15 May. Two hours earlier the small group near the downed helicopter had been the first extracted.

Latest reports indicate that there were 11 USMC, two USAF, and two USN killed in action, 41 USMC, seven USAF, and two USN wounded in action, and three USMC missing in action. The missing personnel are members of a Marine machine gun crew last seen during the final helicopter extraction from the northwestern landing zone, Kaoh Tang Island. Debriefing and investigation to determine final status of these MIAs are still being conducted.

At the approximate time of the extraction of the last Marines from Kaoh Tang Island, JCS directed that the residual force of 789 Marines at Utapao be retrograded from Thailand by daylight, 16 May (Bangkok time). The first C-141 aircraft with 150 Marines lifted off from the Utapao Airfield at 1156 hours with the last aircraft departing at 1710 hours, 15 May.

With the extraction of the last Marines from Kaoh Tang Island and the retrograde of the Marines from Thailand, the operation was successfully concluded. Reconnaissance sorties were continued until 17 May to provide bomb damage assessment and to search for the missing in action.



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DIA INTELLIGENCE APPRAISAL

1. Several islands off shore from the Cambodian mainland have been disputed by the Vietnamese and Cambodians over ownership for some time, particularly due to the possibility of oil deposits on the continental shelf. It appears that the Khmer Communists (KC) have decided to garrison these islands before the Vietnamese Communists focus their attention on them. Puolo Wai and Kaoh Tang Islands are two of these KC garrisoned locations.

2. Kaoh Tang Island (Encl 1), the suspected retention site of the SS MAYAGUEZ crew prior to initiation of Marine landing operations, is approximately 3 1/2 miles long and two miles wide at its greatest width. Two small islets lie about 1/2 mile off the east and south coast of the main island. The island is rock fringed with its highest point at its northern extremity. Two shallow coves press into the eastern and western neck of the island's northern plateau. The eastern cove has a long shallow coral sand beach excellent for helicopter landings. A near surface coral reef excludes vessels of any draft greater than 3-4 feet from reaching the beach.

3. No dwellings other than one or two small huts near the beach of the northeastern cove were identified prior to initiation of operations. Miscellaneous small fishing boats and navy patrol type craft were known to ply the waters between the islands and the mainland.

4. The following information was the best information available on the KC military situation in the area at the onset of the operation:

- a. Khmer Communist 3rd Division directing operations in the coastal area; 1800-2000 troops.
- b. KC units sent to small islands.
- c. 150-200 KC possibly on Kaoh Tang; 82 mm mortars, 75 mm recoilless rifles, 30 caliber, 7.62 mm and 12.7 mm machine guns, B40/41 Rocket Propelled Grenade Launchers.
- d. 1500-2000 KC vicinity Ream/Kompong Som.
- e. Possible KC naval craft in coastal areas.

- 16-18 Swift Boats
 - 1-3 Riverine patrol craft
 - 2 Landing craft utility
 - 4 Landing craft medium
- 1-177 Foot patrol craft



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f. Weapons mix on naval boats.

3 inch guns
20/40 mm anti-aircraft
50 cal./7.62 mm/12.7 mm machine guns.

g. KC air defense capability.

Unknown number 23 mm/37 mm AAA weapons with 37 mm sites known at Ream Airfield.

h. Small number T-28, AU-24, AC-47 and helo gunships with unknown operational status and location.

i. Tactical Communications probably fair using residual US equipment provided to the former Marine Navy Khmer (MNK), and Forces Armees National Khmer (FANK).

5. Post Operations Intelligence.

a. The enemy force on the island is estimated at less than 200 troops, and armed with weapons indicated in paragraph 4c, above, with the addition of unknown types of antipersonnel mines. The KC had prepared defensive positions at key locations, especially with automatic weapons on the northern most high ground that commands the northeast and northwest coves and beaches.

b. Sensitive sources indicate that the KC suffered personnel casualties of 47 killed and 55 wounded in all strike areas. Included in this total were 10 dead boat pilots and an unknown number missing.

c. Mainland bomb damage assessment (BDA) is presently being evaluated and portions of available photography are contained in Encl 4 to TAB D. BDA of sunken ships is also being evaluated with present probable losses in Encl 7 to TAB D.

6. Encl 2, SS MAYAGUEZ debrief.



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17 APR 75

CAMBODIA
KOH TANG ISLAND
1018N 10308E



LZ WEST

LZ EAST

APPROXIMATE SCALE

0 1 mile
0 1 km

SR-71

SECRET NOFORN

27 APRIL 75

CAMBODIA
KOH TANG ISLAND
1018N 10308E



LZ WEST

156x235 FT

285 FT

LZ EAST

SWIFT BOATS

0 1000FT
0 300M

SR-71

WARNING NOTICE SENSITIVE SOURCES AND
METHODS INVOLVED DISSEMINATION RESTRICTED

NO FOREIGN DISSEM
XGDS-2

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12

DEBRIEF OF MAYAGUEZ CREW

The crew of the SS MAYAGUEZ was debriefed twice; once by US Navy personnel of the USS WILSON and once by the US Naval Attache, Singapore. Information presented in both debriefs is essentially the same and is outlined as follows:

- 12 May - SS MAYAGUEZ challenged seven nm southwest of Poulo Wai Island by two PCF Swift boats; 50 cal machinegun fire across bow and down the sides. Boarded by seven armed men, none of whom spoke English.
- Ship's Master told to take the ship to Kompong Som; Master indicated he could not comply due to broken radar, remained anchored, night of 12 May near Poulo Wai.
- On 13 May, ship moved to vicinity Kaoh Tang Island, anchored and disembarked to Thai fishing boat and Khmer boat; US TACAIR arrived on the scene. Thai fishermen gave food and water to crew. English speaking Cambodian asked about ship's cargo and mission. At dark, Khmer took Master and several crewmen back to ship to check out locked rooms. On arrival, flares dropped by US aircraft caused Khmer to return group to boats.
- 14 May, Thai fishing boat with crew, preceeded by two Khmer patrol craft, headed toward Kompong Som; patrol boats believed sunk by airstrikes. TACAIR placed gunfire across fishing boat bow and hit it with RCA but fishing boat with crew reached Kompong Som. Boat then proceeded to Koh Rong San Lem Island.
- Master convinced Cambodians that he could get US forces to stop bombing/strafing if ship and crew released.
- On 15 May at 0530 hours local (Golf) crew was put in Thai fishing boat to return to MAYAGUEZ and escorted to a point about one mile from Koh Rong Sam Lem Island and released. Crew put up white cloth on bamboo poles and continued movement until picked up by the USS WILSON at 0958 Local (Golf) and then returned to SS MAYAGUEZ.
- MAYAGUEZ under tow at 1540 hours Local (Golf) and under own power at 1648 hours local 15 May.
- Thai fishermen received food and water from the USS WILSON, diesel fuel from the USS HOLT and escorted out of the area to return to Thailand; fishermen reportedly held by the Cambodians for five months.

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- Ship's Captain states that Cambodian fear of airstrikes and prompt US force response were the primary causes for release of the ship and its crew.

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CAMBODIA
USS HAROLD E. HOLT PREPARING TO
TAKE S.S. MAYAGUEZ IN TOW
APROX 1/4NM EAST OF NORTH END OF
KOH TANG ISLAND

15 MAY 75



U.S.S. HAROLD E. HOLT
DESTROYER ESCORT



GULF OF THAILAND

SS MAYAGUEZ

TAC RECCE

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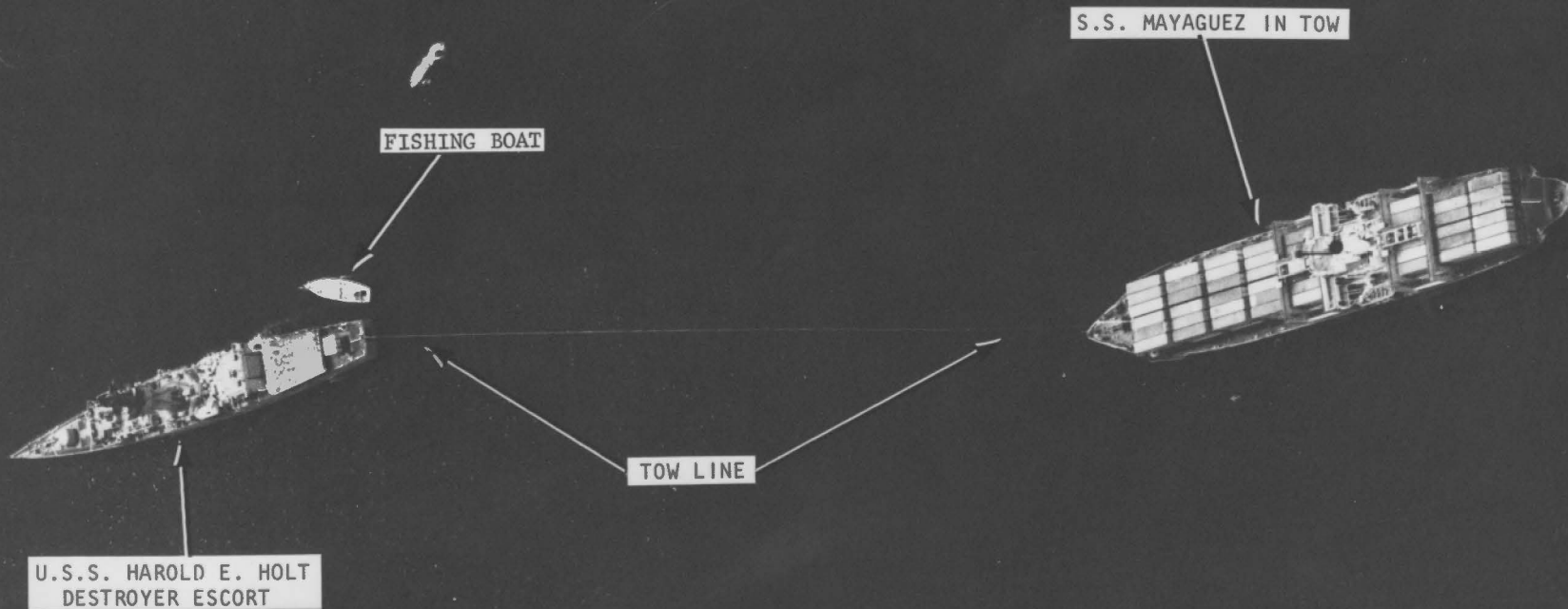
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ODIA

CONFIDENTIAL

USS HAROLD E. HOLT HAS
SS MAYAGUEZ IN TOW
2.5NM EAST OF KOH TANG ISLAND



GULF OF THAILAND

TAC RECCE

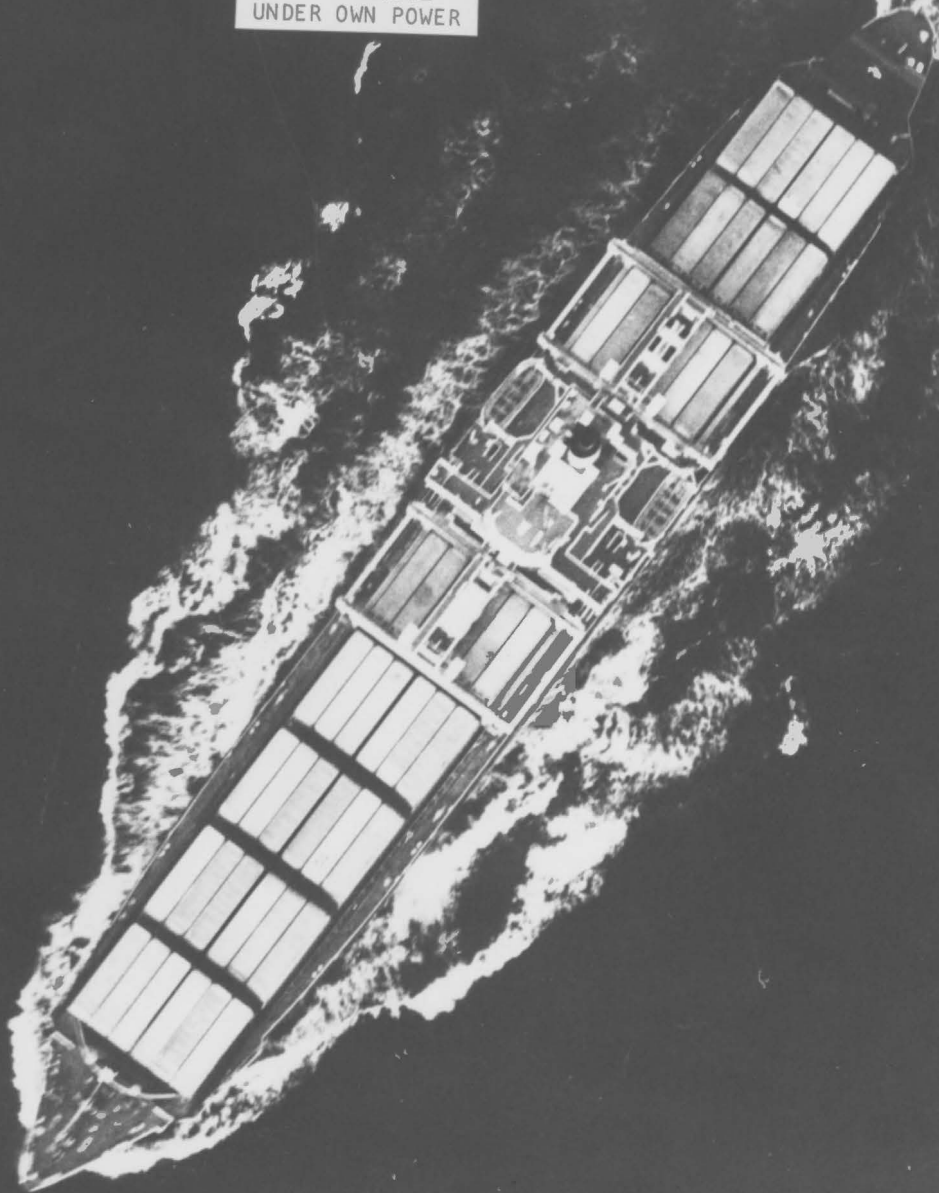
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15 MAY 75

CAMBODIA
SS MAYAGUEZ
UNDER OWN POWER

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~



TAC RECCE

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~



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SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION

OPERATIONAL CONCEPT

Ref: Map attached.

1. MISSION: Seize the SS MAYAGUEZ and conduct military operations to influence the outcome of US initiatives to secure the release of the ship's crew.

2. CONCEPT:

a. Assault to begin at sunrise 15 May.

b. Using three USAF helicopters, insert 48 marines, 12 USN/MSC personnel, an explosive ordnance team and a Cambodian linguist on the USS HOLT.

c. Using eight USAF CH/HH-53 helicopters execute a combat assault on Kaoh Tang Island, with 175 marines in the initial wave and subsequent buildup to a total of 625 Marines on the island.

d. USS HOLT, upon closure of Marine Security Force, conduct operation to seize the USS MAYAGUEZ and take action to remove the ship from the operational area.

e. Marine assault force on Kaoh Tang Island secure the island and rescue members of the SS MAYAGUEZ that may be found there.

f. Combat support.

(1) Destroyers USS WILSON and USS HOLT provide naval gunfire and search and rescue support.

(2) USAF TACAIR: A-7, F-4 and F-111 aircraft used during daylight and F-111/AC-130 aircraft used at night. Provide close air support for marine assault forces. Prevent movement of Cambodian small craft in the Kaoh Tang/Poulo Wai Island complex.

(3) USN TACAIR: A-6 and A-7 aircraft engage Cambodian shipping in designated area. Maintain continuous armed reconnaissance during daylight. Prepare to strike mainland targets, if directed.

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(4) B-52 force from Guam conduct conventional airstrikes against Ream Airfield, and ports of Kompong Som and Ream beginning approximately three hours after the assault on Kaoh Tang Island. As an alternate, USN TACAIR from the CORAL SEA instead of the B-52 force will strike designated mainland targets.

(5) Search and Rescue: USAF HC-130 fixed wing and HH-53 helicopters respond as required.

(6) On scene coordination: Airborne command and control center in an EC-130 aircraft provide continuous coverage.

(7) Helicopters for assault force: CH/HH-53 helicopters shuttle marine force to Kaoh Tang Island from Utapao RTAFB, Thailand. (3.5-4 hour turn around time - 1 hour 45 minutes flight one way).

(8) Air refueling: SAC KC-135 tankers support USAF TACAIR requirements; HC-130s support HH-53 helicopters.

(9) Weather reconnaissance, forward air controllers, flare support, flak suppression, escort, rescue cover, electronic warfare, electronic intelligence, air refueling, search and rescue and other support actions conducted as required.

(10) Landing zone clearing using the BLU-82 (15,000 pound special purpose bomb) authorized, as required.

g. Command and Control.

(1) Overall operational control of PACOM forces directed by CINCPAC as authorized by the JCS.

(2) CINCSAC exercises operational control of committed B-52 force for strikes that may be directed by JCS.

(3) COMUSSAG/7AF exercises on scene coordinating authority for supporting forces as directed by CINCPAC.



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CD/P-42

CD/P-42

PORT FACILITY
ATTACKED BY TACAIR

REFINERY
ATTACKED BY TACAIR

AIRFIELD
ATTACKED BY TACAIR

MAYAGUEZ

NAVAL BASE
ATTACKED BY TACAIR

REAM

USMC REGAINED
CONTROL

USMC GSF INSERTED

KAOH TANG ISLAND

POULO WAI ISLAND

MAYAGUEZ
INTERCEPTED/BOARDED

GULF OF THAILAND

WARNING
Republic of Vietnam (RVN) Buffer zone five kilometers (2.7 NM) of Vietnam along the border with Cambodia and ten kilometers (5.5 NM) of Vietnam along the Ben Hai river which marks the line of demarcation between the Republic of Vietnam.

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QK

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07

HON DA BAN 712
HON PANIANG 157 200 357

ASIAN COASTAL BUF

CAMBODIA
VIETNAM

R Bn
DUONG DONG

PHU QUOC

KAS PRINS

PHUMI PHSAR REAM

KAOH RONG

KAOH MAND

KOMPONG SOM

SIHANOUKVILLE

KAMPONG

PHUMI DAMNOK CHANG AEU

KAOH TONSAY

KAOH THMEI

KAOH SES

Phu Quoc

HON THOM 335 315

387 226

HON NAM DU 1014 34

position approximate
position approximate

numerous fishing

ASI COASTAL BUFFER ZONE

ASI

+100

400

210 298 262 387

509

298

50

104

30

20

120

50

40

30

20

10

9°

509

1073

440

1470

361

1754

1470

524

16

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104°

104°

104°

104°

104°

104°

104°

104°

10

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SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION

PERSONNEL CASUALTIES

The following is a summary of subject casualties reported by the Service Headquarters as of 1430 EDT 20 May 1975:

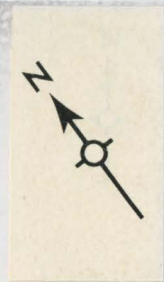
	<u>KIA</u>	<u>MIA</u>	<u>WIA</u>
USN	2	0	2
USMC	11	3	41
USAF	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>7</u>
TOTALS	15	3	50



15 MAY 75

CAMBODIA
DESTROYED AND DAMAGED
CH-53 HELICOPTERS
LOCATED ON NORTHEAST BEACH
AT KOH TANG ISLAND

IDEN



HEAVILY DAMAGED CH-53

20 FT TAIL SECTION MISSING

DESTROYED CH-53

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SCALE APPROX 100
30M