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23 MAY 1975MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subj: SS MAYAGUEZ Recovery Operation

Encl: (1) Chronology

Background. On 15 May 1975, Marines and Navy corpsmen of the 3d Marine Division took part in an operation to recover the MAYAGUEZ and her crew seized by Cambodia on 12 May 1975 in the Gulf of Thailand.

Discussion. The Marine force had two missions: board and secure the MAYAGUEZ; and seize, occupy and defend Kaoh Tang Island to rescue any of the crew on the island. Significant events, viewed by mission, are as follows:

Boarding of the MAYAGUEZ*57 USMC, 2 USN*

- Boarding party consisted of 59 Marines ("D" Co, 1/4), 6 MSC crewmen, 6 USAF EOD personnel, and 1 USA linguist.
- Party flew onto destroyer escort USS HOLT shortly after first light, 15 May, at about the same time as the lead elements of the assault force were landing on Tang Island.
- With boarding party embarked, the HOLT moved from her operating area and came alongside the Mayaguez, which had been prepped by air with CS agent.
- Marines boarded the MAYAGUEZ without incident, conducted search, and found ship to be unoccupied. Search was completed and MAYAGUEZ fully in U. S. Hands as of 0822 local time, 57 minutes after the HOLT had come alongside.
- No U. S. casualties were sustained in the boarding of the MAYAGUEZ.

Kaoh Tang Island Assault

- Plan called for up to 5 helicopter waves to insert a total of 625 Marines of 2d Bn, 9th Mar onto island from Utapao.
- First wave of 8 USAF CH/HH-53's departed Utapao with 179 Marines and corpsmen. At about 0610 local time, the assault landing began.

Declassified by CMC 21 Feb 1979  
Marine Corps History and Archives  
in accordance with the provisions  
of CNO ltr Ser 039D323/1MS2095  
21 Feb 1979  
Signature: *6/2/79*

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--By 0630, two helicopters had taken hits and gone down on the northeastern side of the island. (One of these burned upon crashing in the water, with survivors swimming to seaward and later being picked up by the USS WILSON. Ten of the eleven Marine KIA's and both of the USN KIA's resulted from this crash).

--A third helicopter unloaded its Marines on the western side of the island, took hits, and crashed shortly after takeoff. A fourth sustained hits and diverted without landing, reaching the coast of Thailand.

--The remaining four helicopters of the first wave were able to land and unload on the island, the last one getting in at about 0900.

--The first wave had succeeded in putting 139 Marines and corpsmen onto the island, fragmented at three locations.

--The second wave of USAF helicopters from UTAPAO landed an additional 100 men, completing the insertion at about noon. At that time, all but 25 of the force were together and consolidating positions on the western side of the island. The 25 remained isolated on the eastern side, some 400 meters away, until their eventual extraction by USAF helicopter some 25 minutes before last light.

--The main body on the western side was withdrawn by helicopter (including four sorties by SH-3's from the CORAL SEA) under the cover of heavy tactical air and naval gunfire support. The withdrawal was completed after dark, at 2017, 15 May, with the helicopters recovering to the CORAL SEA and the HOLT.

Casualties

--USMC: 11 KIA, 41 WIA, 3 MIA.

--USN: 2 KIA, 2 WIA

--USAF: 2 KIA, 7 WIA

--Only 1 of the Marine and Navy KIA's occurred on the island, a Marine killed by a Claymore.

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--Of the Marine and Navy wounded, 8 Marines required hospitalization with only 1 in serious condition.

--The three Marine MIA's, a machinegun team, are known to have gotten onto the island, but they were not among the men extracted.

USAF Helicopters

--During a period of 18 hours, 28 minutes on 15 May, flew a total of 50 sorties for 109.2 flight hours.

--Of 15 helicopters to start the operation:

3 were lost to enemy fire.

10 sustained battle damage.

2 received no damage.

  
L. N. ANGELO  
COLONEL USMC~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~SS MAYAGUEZ RECOVERY OPERATIONChronology

Note: All times are Cambodia local - GOLF Time Zone.

12 May

1418 SS MAYAGUEZ boarded and seized vicinity Poulo Wai Islands, 60 miles from Cambodia mainland.

1612 NMCC received word of ship seizure.

1830 JCS directed reconnaissance up from Thailand.

2200 P-3 aircraft took off from Utapao. Air surveillance continuous thereafter.

2215 Destroyer escort HOLT and auxiliary ship VEGA ordered to move from vicinity Subic Bay.

13 May

0141 USS CORAL SEA en route Australia turned around vicinity Lombok Strait near Java.

0529 Destroyer escort WILSON directed to move.

1100 MAYAGUEZ anchored 3000 meters east of Kaoh Tang Island.

2310 CINCPAC directed to move all available USAF helicopters and a detachment of USAF Air Police to Utapao. Eight CH-53 and eight HH-53 deployed. One CH-53 crashed en route. None of the 23 USAF aboard survived.

D Co (-), 1/4, about 100 men, alerted to move by air from Subic Bay to Utapao.

14 May

0233 BLT 2/9, with 56 officers and 987 enlisted men, alerted to move by air from Okinawa to Utapao.

0433 D Co (-), 1/4, arrived Utapao.

1000 Small craft with caucasians sighted aboard reached Kompong Som from Kaoh Tang Island. (Confirmed later that "caucasians" were the crew of the MAYAGUEZ.)

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~14 May (Cont.)

1300 USS HANCOCK Attack Group departed Subic Bay with CG 9th MAB, 2/4(-)(Rein), and HMH-462(-)(Rein) embarked.

1400 BLT 2/9 completed move to Utapao by USAF C-141. USAF move of helicopters to Utapao completed.

1545 Until 1830. Marine unit commanders made visual reconnaissance of Kaoh Tang Island.

15 May

0357 COMUSSAG/7AF execute order issued.

0414 Until 0423. First wave of USAF helicopters with Marines embarked departed Utapao. First wave made up of 13 CH-/HH-53's: 3 to USS HOLT with boarding party (D, 1/4), 8 to Kaoh Tang Island, and 2 SAR aircraft.

0516 First light.

0558 Until 0622. Boarding party arrived on board the HOLT, located about 12 NM northwest of the MAYAGUEZ position.

0609 First wave helicopters began landing on Kaoh Tang Island. Heavy ground fire caused first helicopter into northeast cove to divert after sustaining hits.

0615 Helicopter next into northeast cove took hits from ground fire on approach, crashed and burned in three feet of water. Survivors swam to seaward to escape enemy fire from beach. (Ten USMC and three USAF picked from water about 3½ hours later by the WILSON. Ten other Marines and two corpsmen in the aircraft were not recovered.)

0645 A third helicopter attempting to land in the northeast cove HLZ force-landed near the landing zone, after sustaining hits from enemy fire. The 21 embarked Marines and 4 USAF crewmen took cover in a nearby treeline. This was last attempt to insert Marines into northeast cove.

0700 Armed recce flight of 18 aircraft launched from USS CORAL SEA for Kompong Som/Ream objective area.

0714 MAYAGUEZ prepped with air drop of CS agent.

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~15 May (Cont.)

0715 Three helicopters landed 61 Marines in the northwest cove HLZ. Battalion commander of 2/9, LtCol AUSTIN, with 29 Marines landed 1,000 meters to the south.

0720 MAYAGUEZ crew released in Thai fishing boat vicinity Kaoh Rong Island.

0728 D/1/4 Marines from the HOLT board the MAYAGUEZ wearing protective masks. No enemy aboard the MAYAGUEZ.

0744 DTG of JCS message ordering halt of CORAL SEA air strikes against Kompong Som/Ream.

0818 DTG of JCS message rescinding 0744 message and ordering continuation of CORAL SEA air strikes against Kompong Som/Ream.

0821 USAF aircraft sighted small craft with about 30 caucasians aboard waving white flags.

0822 Search of MAYAGUEZ completed with negative results. Marines hoisted U. S. Colors.

0845 Seven attack aircraft launched by CORAL SEA against Ream airfield.

0900 Final helicopter of first wave landed 27 Marines at Battalion Commander's position.

1000 Eight attack aircraft launched by CORAL SEA against Ream naval station and Kompong Som port facilities.

1007 MAYAGUEZ crew taken on board the WILSON.

1050 First helicopter of second wave landed Marines after three earlier attempts against mortar fire in the HLZ.

1115 CJCS verbally instructed CINCPAC to cease offensive operations and withdraw U. S. forces as soon as feasible.

1130 CORAL SEA launched attack aircraft in support of Marines on Kaoh Tang Island.

1155 DTG of JCS message ordering halt of offensive operations.

1200 Battalion Commander, moving north, linked up with main body of Marines vicinity of northwest cove beach.

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~15 May (Cont.)

1215 Second wave insertion with 100 Marines onto Kaoh Tang Island completed, with total of five USAF helicopters making up the second wave. Marine assault force on island now estimated as 240.

1434 USAF helicopter attempted to extract isolated group at northeast cove HLZ, sustained hits from enemy ground fire, and aborted to the CORAL SEA.

1505 First airborne FAC launched in OV-10 from Utapao.

1530 Approximate time, BLU-82 ("Daisy Cutter") dropped by USAF C-130 on middle of the island.

1545 MAYAGUEZ underway on own power.

1715 Small boats from the WILSON attempting to reach the northeast cove were turned away by enemy fire.

1817 USAF helicopter succeeded in extracting group from northeast cove.

1843 Last light.

2017 Helicopter extraction of northwest cove area completed.

2256 Airlift of Marines from Utapao to Okinawa began.

2321 Last aircraft (one ABCCC, one AC-130) departed station over objective area.

16 May

0410 Last Marine lifted off from Utapao.

1015 Last of BLT 2/9 cargo tail departed Utapao.

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