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Pentagon Gives Details On Mayaguez Rescue

Washington

The Pentagon told Congress yesterday it did not know where the civilian crew was when it launched the air and Marine assault to recover the freighter Mayaguez last month, but assumed crew members might be in three places.

It also said U.S. planes made 15 bombing sorties against Ream Airfield and Kompong Som, Cambodian Navy facilities on the mainland.

The bombing continued after the 39-member crew was released by the Cambodians to ensure the safe withdrawal of the Marines that had been sent into Koh Tang, an island off the Cambodian coast, to recover the ship and crew, according to the Pentagon statement.

These details were provided to the House Armed Services Committee in response to a resolution of inquiry introduced by Representative Michael Harrington (Dem-Mass) and 37 other House members.

Asked what information U.S. intelligence had on the crew before the assault was launched, the Pentagon replied that air reconnaissance indicated some crew members were on the island and some had been taken to the mainland.

"The operation was conducted under the assumption that members of the crew may have been in all three locations," the formal Pentagon reply said.

The third location presumably was the Mayaguez itself which had been taken to Koh Tang after capture by the Cambodians.

The Pentagon said three of the eight helicopters carrying the first assault wave of Marines on to the island crashed on the beach and under Cambodian fire and two others were disabled.

Without giving details on how the 41 servicemen killed

in the operation lost their lives, the Pentagon reply said most casualties were suffered in the first hour of the five-hour assault.

The reply gave three reasons for the 15 air strikes on the Cambodian mainland:

- To prevent the Cambodians from sending planes, boats or ground troops from

the mainland to Koh Tang while the U.S. assault forces were there.

- "To put pressure on the Cambodians to release the crew."

- To ensure the safe withdrawal of the U.S. Marine assault force from the island.

Associated Press