

NYTimes
**Pentagon Says 2 Dead Marines
Were Left in Saigon by Mistake**

By JOHN W. FINNEY MAY 8 1975
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WASHINGTON, May 7—The bodies of two of the last marines killed in the Vietnam war were left behind in the confusion of the final American evacuation from Saigon, the Defense Department said today.

The department had announced last Thursday—and informed the parents of the two young marines—that the bodies had been flown to the carrier Midway for return to the United States.

A Pentagon spokesman said today, however, that after checking the Midway and other ships in the evacuation fleet it was concluded last night that the bodies had been left behind,

probably in a hospital near Tan Son Nhut Airport.

The parents of Cpl. Charles McMahon Jr. of Iowa, who had been making plans for the burial of the two marines on the basis of earlier Pentagon assurances, were informed late last night that the bodies had not been recovered in the evacuation.

The two marines, part of the security guard at the defense attaché office in Saigon, were killed in a Communist rocket and artillery bombardment of the Tan Son Nhut airport on

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April 29, about 12 hours before the helicopter evacuation effort began. Their bodies were taken to the Seventh Day Adventist Hospital, which is near the airport.

Charles McMahon Sr., father of the marine corporal, told reporters in Woburn that a Marine Corps spokesman had informed him that his son's body "couldn't be evacuated" because it was "out of reach of the helicopters." A different version was provided by a Pentagon spokesman.

As explained by Joseph Laitin, Assistant Secretary of Defense for public affairs, embassy officials and the marine contingent had called the hospital on the day of the evacuation and were told by hospital officials that the bodies had been removed by "American authorities," who were not identified.

At first, according to Mr. Laitin, it was assumed that the bodies had been flown out by aircraft to Thailand before the helicopter evacuation began. But later, he said, the Pentagon received a message from the American Embassy in Saigon stating it was understood that the bodies had been flown by helicopter to the carrier Midway.

A few days ago, Mr. Laitin said, the Midway, which had been ordered to make arrangements to have the bodies flown to the United States, advised the Pentagon, after a complete check of the ship, that the bodies were not aboard the carrier.

A search was then ordered of other ships in the evacuation fleet, all of which reported that they did not have the bodies,

he added.

Mr. Laitin said the Defense Department concluded late yesterday that there was "every probability" that the bodies were still at the hospital in Saigon.

Mr. Laitin said the State Department was "doing everything possible" to determine where the bodies were and to arrange for their return to the United States.

The mix-up, as Pentagon officials privately acknowledged, was of particular embarrassment to the Marine Corps, which places emphasis upon the military tradition not to leave any dead or wounded behind.

The two marines were the last to be listed officially killed in the Vietnam war. Two other marines — first Lieut. Michael John Shea and Capt. William Craig Nystol—were listed as missing and presumed dead when their helicopter crashed at sea the next day during the evacuation effort.

The Defense Department reported, meanwhile, that on the basis of interviews with persons evacuated, the American Embassy in Manila had concluded that some 30 Americans and 25 persons of other nationalities had remained in Saigon, apparently of their own volition.

Marine's Father Bitter

WOBURN, Mass., May 7 (UPI)—"If they can evacuate 130,000 South Vietnamese refugees, why can't they get two dead marines out?" asked Charles McMahon Sr. as he bitterly read the last letter from his son once again.

Iowa Family Optimistic

MARSHALLTOWN, Iowa, May 7 (UPI)—S. Sgt. Loren Judge of the Air Force said today that his family was optimistic that his younger brother's body would be returned to this central Iowa community for burial.