

Marines Battle Cambodians --  
Ship and Crew Are Rescued

## Some U.S. Casualties Reported--Bombers Attack the Mainland

### Washington

Cambodia surrendered 40 American freighter crewmen in the face of military force early yesterday after U.S. Marines recaptured the ship seized by the Khmer Rouge government three days ago.

President Ford announced on national television the return of the full crew after a tense day of troop landings and the bombing of the Cambodian mainland.

Two helicopters were reportedly lost in the attacks and White House press secretary Ron Nessen said "reports indicated some American casualties."

The Pentagon said preliminary reports indicated the U.S. casualties were light, with no known deaths.

Mr. Ford said that Marines who landed on a small island off Cambodia were still under fire as they sought to disengage after return of the crew.

The operation to regain the Mayaguez was begun, according to American officials, about an hour before word of a Cambodian government broadcast offering to release the vessel was received here. It began at 7:20 p.m. yesterday, Washington time, and lasted about six hours.

The White House announced that the Marines were landing from U.S. ships that had rushed the Gulf of Thailand.

As hundreds of Marines stormed into the island, U.S. planes bombed air installations on the mainland, near the port of Sihanoukville.

When Marines seized the freighter SS Mayaguez, hopes rose that the crisis was over. But the ship was empty, although warm food was in the galley.

As the U.S. assault continued, a Cambodian ship flying a white flag approached the U.S. Destroyer Wilson and handed over 30 of the

ship's crew.

It was not immediately clear how the remaining ten were returned.

After the rescue was made, Mr. Ford said:

"At my direction, United States forces tonight boarded

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the American merchant ship S. S. Mayaguez and landed at the island of Koh Tang for the purpose of rescuing the crew and ship which had been illegally seized by Cambodian forces."

The defense chief advised caution for fear of over reacting. Kissinger's view won out and the operation was put into effect as soon as the

Marines could be moved into position and the Carrier The Coral Sea placed in the Gulf of Thailand to provide support.

This came about 7 p.m. EDT and the Marines, at first 135 of them, landed on the island. After meeting strong resistance, reinforcements were called in along with air strikes against the Cambodians.

A Pentagon spokesman later said the Marine forces totaled "a couple of hundred."

Although newsmen picked up hints of the operation during the day yesterday, the first real word came from the White House at 9:18 p.m. EDT when presidential spokesman Ron Nessen read a statement that at Mr. Ford's direction the Mayaguez had been seized and the Koh Tang Island invaded.

During all of this, Mr. Ford sat in the ornate R State dining room of the White House, hosting the Dutch prime minister.

It wasn't until word came from the military commanders in the area that all of the crew members had been recovered safely that Mr. Ford walked into the White House briefing room to face newsmen and the broadcast audience.

Until then information came in fragments from the White House and Pentagon, where press officer Joseph Laitin disclosed that the Marines had found the Mayaguez empty when they boarded but warm food was sitting in plates in the galley.

The use of force became the only realistic alternative in the administration thinking when Cambodian ships attempted to move the prisoners to the mainland.

That brought the first U.S. response — U.S. fighter-bombers sank three of the Cambodian gun boats.

Publicly, the situation remained static until Nessen



called newsman into the White House briefing room at 9:19 p.m. and issued this statement:

The civilian freighter had been seized about 90 miles off Cambodia but within about eight miles of the small island of Koh Tang, which Cambodia claims.

The U.S. government immediately demanded return of the ship and sought diplomatic help through the People's Republic of China.

But no such help was forthcoming.

Sources said that both Mr. Ford and Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger were convinced from the start of the crisis on Monday that force would have to be used.

During a series of three  
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National Security Council meetings Tuesday and yesterday, the plans were shaped and a number of options considered.

One source said before the operation began that Kissinger was determined that if troops were to be used it would be a strong, sharp blow.

So, when word was received of a Cambodian radio broadcast last night offering to release the Mayaguez, it was ignored.

The orders then were issued for the Marines to open their first combat in Southeast Asia since U.S. forces withdrew from Vietnam in 1973.

As the crisis continued, a split developed between Kissinger and Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger. Kissinger wanted a quick and punishing strike even if the crew was put in danger.

"The President has directed the following military measures, starting this evening, Washington time:

"• U.S. Marines to board the S.S. Mayaguez.

"• U.S. Marines to land on Koh Tang Island in order to rescue any crew members as may be on the island.

"• Aircraft from the carrier Coral Sea to undertake associated military operations to regain the vessel and members of the crew."

Nessen then added that the operation was in progress and Marines had stormed the ship.

Nessen's briefing came about an hour after a broadcast was monitored in Washington from Phnom Penh radio saying that "our Royal Government of National Union in Cambodia will order the Mayaguez to withdraw from Cambodian territorial waters and will warn it against further espionage or provocative activities."

Nessen took note of this and responded. "We have heard," Nessen said in reading a message sent to Cambodia, "a radio broadcast that you are prepared to release the S.S. Mayaguez. We welcome this development, if true.

"As you know, we have seized the ship. As soon as you issue a statement that you are prepared to release the crew members you hold unconditionally and immediately, we will promptly cease military operations."

However, U.S. officials would not discuss how widespread the attacks might be.

About 1100 Marines had been flown to nearby Thailand for use in the operation, which also was to have included several Phantom fighter-bombers, other war planes and at least one U.S. destroyer.

Mr. Ford's decision to attack came about an hour after he briefed congressional leaders on the situation. At that time he pledged he would live up to legislative strictures that he inform Congress in writing before he launched the operation.

As late as 8:30 p.m. ED House Speaker Carl Albert and Democratic House Leader Thomas O'Neill said no such letter had been submitted.

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