

Toll in Rescue Put at 5 Dead, 70-80 Injured

By George C. Wilson
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The Defense Department yesterday raised sharply its casualty figures for the Mayaguez rescue, disclosing that five American servicemen had been killed and 70 to 80 others wounded.

In addition, said Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger on "Issues and Answers" (ABC-WMAL), 16 servicemen are still missing after action that saved the Mayaguez merchant ship and its crew of 40 in the Gulf of Siam off Cambodia last week.

On Friday, the Pentagon had placed preliminary casualty figures at one Marine killed; 22 wounded, three of them seriously; 13 Marines and airmen missing.

The revised estimate includes men with minor injuries, Schlesinger said.

"As a result of the reassessment of casualties," Schlesinger said yesterday, "the current indication is something like three Marines and two airmen were killed . . . This is a complex operation, but that is the general indication."

Asked on the TV program why it had taken the Defense Department so long to determine the new figures, Schlesinger replied:

"Well, we indicated at the time that we were withdrawing from the island that initially there had been a number of choppers that had been downed; that we were running a muster on board the ships in order to assess what had been the damage. We attempted to get out the results as they became clear."

The casualties were suffered in an air-sea rescue that included a Marine landing on the Cambodian island of Tang at 6:20 a.m. Thursday Cambodian time in the mistaken be-



JAMES R. SCHLESINGER
... denies error

lief the Mayaguez crew was being held captive there. The crew instead had been put aboard a fishing boat the morning before and taken to the Cambodian mainland port of Kompong Son, also called Sihanoukville.

Schlesinger said Mayaguez skipper Charles T. Miller "was in error" in telling reporters in Singapore on Saturday that he had seen the bodies of seven Marines "on ice" aboard the American destroyer Wilson Thursday morning.

Schlesinger said Miller "probably referred to wounded Marines rather than Marines who had been killed . . ."

The Defense Secretary denied that an intelligence error was responsible for sending Marines to attack Tang after the Mayaguez crew had left the island.

"We did not know whether or not the crew in its entirety or even in part had been removed from the island" and "we therefore felt it essential to seize the island" before the crew could be moved off it, Schlesinger said.

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Although an American pilot had spotted Caucasians aboard a fishing boat headed for Kompong Son on Wednesday morning, Schlesinger said, "we did not at that time know whether there were any Americans on board that ship."

Said Schlesinger of the whole Mayaguez air-sea rescue: "This has been—including an element of good fortune—a very successful operation, and I would not change it . . . The main thing is the United States must take action to defend the right of innocent passage, to defend the right of freedom of the seas . . . The actions that were taken were judicial . . . I have no regrets about it."

The Defense Secretary took a hard line on defending South Korea, indicating that the gradual application of American military in the case of Vietnam would not be repeated if North Korea started a war.

"I think one of the lessons of the Vietnamese war," said Schlesinger, "is that ancillary military operations not directed against any fixed military objective, such as destroying the heart of enemy power—his military forces—is likely to be ineffective if the opponent has will and determination to persist."

"I would hesitate," he said in discussing Korea, "if I were some other power, to test

whether this is the lesson that we have drawn."

Schlesinger sounded a similar warning in an interview with U.S. News and World Report magazine released yesterday.

North Korean leaders "would have to conclude that the United States would take more vigorous action than we were inclined to take during much of the Vietnamese war," he said.

To keep the support of the American public, he added, "action must be more vigorous at the outset, particularly where there are American forces involved."

Schlesinger in his televised remarks yesterday said the United States has "no precise commitment to Israel" but is interested "in its well-being."

In the magazine interview, he said that "the military balance is far more favorable from Israel's standpoint than it was in October, 1973." He added that even without using the Azores as a refueling stop for U.S. planes taking arms to Israel, supplies could be delivered there "about 36 hours after an order is given by the President."

Schlesinger also warned oil producers against imposing another embargo. "We are likely to be less tolerant than we were of the initial one in 1973," he told U.S. News and World Report. "There are economic, political or conceivably military measures in response" to an embargo.