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**Questions on Ship Rescue  
Persist Despite Briefings**

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WASHINGTON, May 19 — Questions about casualty reports and other matters related to the Mayagüez incident persisted today despite new explanations from the White House and the Pentagon.

The Pentagon again revised its count of casualties in the Marine assault last week to rescue the merchant ship Mayagüez and its crew from Cambodian forces. At the same time, the White House press secretary, Ron Nessen, reported that President Ford had been "puzzled" and "frustrated" by his inability to obtain quick and accurate information about casualties.

Mr. Nessen insisted there was not "any intention to hide bad news."

Joseph Laitin, the Pentagon spokesman, said at a briefing that the estimate of wounded was now 49, not 70 to 80 as reported by the Secretary of

Defense James R. Schlesinger. The Pentagon's estimate of the number of killed and missing remained at five and 16, respectively.

Mr. Laitin said the lower count of wounded was a result of eliminating superficial injuries from the list. He said a final count was yet to come. He added that few of the 49 were seriously injured.

None of the bodies of the five known dead has been recovered. One, that of Lance Corp. Ashton Loney, from Albany, was left behind on Tang Island when the marines pulled out.

The four other men who are known to be dead are believed to have perished by drowning when their helicopter crashed into the sea. It is not known with certainty whether any of the 16 men officially identified

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as missing are dead, or how they may have died.

Mr. Laitin said it had taken so long to produce an accurate report on casualties because the marines had been evacuated to various ships and taken to different destinations. In view of the time thus required to take an accurate muster, there was "not any undue delay," he said.

Newsmen who had covered the Vietnam war recalled that the military had always been quick and precise with casualty lists and "body counts" in that conflict even under trying combat situations.

#### Other Issues Raised

Mr. Nessen, who himself had reported from Vietnam, did not explain why last week's action produced more confusion.

A number of other issues still remained without clarification. For example, no prompt warning was sent out to merchant ships to avoid the Cambodian islands even though a South Korean vessel had been fired on in those waters.

The Foreign Broadcast Information Service, a department of the Central Intelligence Agency, reported on May 5 that a South Korean freighter had been fired on by "what appeared to be an armed Communist gunboat on the high seas." The next day the report noted that the South Korean Government had warned its merchant ships to stay out of the area.

The United States also had information several days before the Mayagüez incident that Cambodian gunboats had detained a Panamanian merchant ship. Despite these known incidents, the Defense Mapping Agency's Hydrographic Service did not issue a special warning to mariners, which is standard procedure in time of apparent danger.

After several inquiries, a Defense Department spokesman, Col. Tom Byrnen, said:

"We are trying to get some information about why the word didn't get down to the Defense Mapping people. So far we don't know why."

Another question was why

the marines attacked Tang Island when the best information available indicated that the crew of the Mayagüez had been taken to the mainland.

Administration spokesmen have said intelligence indicated that the crew, or some members, had been taken to the island. They did not say what this intelligence was.

Government officials reported that one of the Cambodian vessels off the island was not attacked by American fighters because a pilot had spotted what appeared to be American faces on the deck during one pass.

But the captain of the Mayagüez, Charles T. Miller, said United States planes were making low-level passes over the boat for four hours, firing across its bows, and dropping tear gas and nausea-creating gas.

In any case, in view of the pilot's sighting, the possibility must have been raised before the Marine attack that all of the crew had been removed from the island and that the assault was not necessary.

#### Bombing of Mainland

Another issue that has been raised is why were the air attacks on the mainland necessary after the crew of the Mayagüez had been surrendered by the Cambodians?

The assault on Ream airfield and the oil storage near Sihanoukville was necessary, the Administration said, to keep Cambodian forces from reinforcing the defenders of Tang Island.

But, judging by the Government's own reports, the Cambodians had no ships and planes that could not have been interdicted by the warships and aircraft that the United States had on the scene.

The Pentagon appeared to have been surprised by the strength of Cambodian resistance on Tang Island. Mr. Laitin reported today that the defenders used heavy machine guns, mortars and other heavy arms in fighting the Marine assault.

#### An April 17 Photograph

The Pentagon reported earlier that its intelligence had indicated that there were only a

few people on the island. This raises the question why advanced surveillance devices and methods had not been available to the armed forces to produce better information.

The Pentagon spokesmen last week used a photograph of Tang Island that was dated April 17. A questioner at a briefing last week was unable to learn why the island had been photographed on that date.

Finally, there is the question why reports on the whole operation had been so confusing and late.

Mr. Laitin said today that there had been inadequate communication between the National Military Command Center and the Office of Public Relations, which was briefing the press.

None of the questions necessarily implied anything secretive in the Government's handling of the affair. But until the questions are resolved, a good many observers are going to feel uneasy about the incident.

Column by Jack Anderson, WXP 26 May 75, says "U.S. satellite photos at the height of the crisis showed only rock and foliage on the island of Tang, where the Marines landed. Therefore, they had not expected the heavy resistance they encountered."