

# Death Toll Raised In Ship Rescue

MAY 21 1975

Washington

The official toll of U.S. servicemen known to have died in the effort to recapture the American merchant ship Mayaguez has risen to 15, the Pentagon announced yesterday.

Three other servicemen are officially listed as missing in action, although Defense Department spokesman Joseph Laitin acknowledged that "there is little likelihood" that these men are still alive.

Therefore, almost six days after U.S. Marines, Air Force helicopter crews and Navy ships went into a 15-hour battle to try to recover the Mayaguez and free its crew, the final total cost in U.S. lives appears to be 18.

The official figure of 15 dead — 11 Marines, two Airmen and two sailors — released by the Pentagon yesterday is considerably higher than the preliminary figure of five dead disclosed last Sunday by Defense Secretary James Schlesinger. Two days earlier, the Pentagon had given still more preliminary estimates of only one killed.

However, in these earlier accountings, the number of men missing and presumed lost was much higher. The 16 men missing that Schlesinger mentioned on Sunday has now been scaled down to three, all of them Marines.

In an attempt to explain the sharp switch from missing to known dead, Laitin said there apparently had been some "double-counting" in the earlier listing of the missing.

The Pentagon denies that an accurate casualty toll was delayed on purpose so as not to take the glow of success off initial reports of the recapture of the vessel and release of its 39-man crew.

Laitin said another 50 servicemen — 41 marines, seven airmen and two sailors — were wounded, but that only two were hurt seriously and that both of these are expected to recover. The wounded toll is considerably below the figure of 70 to 80 used by Schlesinger Sunday.

The Defense Department has claimed that the marines used in the battle wound up being scattered over several different recovery ships and at other bases in Thailand which delayed an accurate nose count.

Laitin said there could still be some "minor adjustment" to the figures but the totals now released are "as close to final as possible."

The three missing marines, according to eyewitness reports, were all known to have been fighting on the island and were last seen on the island, according to Laitin.

"But all eyewitness re-

ports so far indicate that no American fighting men were left alive on the beach."

Washington Post