

# U.S. Now Reports 15 Dead In Recapture of Mayaguez

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Special to The New York Times

MAY 21 1975

WASHINGTON, May 20—The Defense Department, in a casualty report that a spokesman called "as complete as we can make it," said today that 15 Americans had been killed in last week's operation to rescue the Mayaguez and its crew from the Cambodians.

The count also listed three marines as missing in action and a total of 50 as wounded. Yesterday, the Pentagon reported five dead, 16 missing and 49 wounded.

The spokesman said that it was possible that further information could lead to the addition of the missing marines to the list of those killed in action and that a few more names could raise the total of wounded. But he indicated that today's report was likely to stand for the immediate future.

Of those listed as killed in action, 11 were from the Marine Corps, two from the Navy and two from the Air Force. The wounded included 41 marines, even from the Air Force and two from the Navy.

The military assault was undertaken last Wednesday to recover the Mayaguez and its crew of 39.

## Another Question Raised

The defection of a Cambodian warship to Thailand last week, added still another to a number of unanswered questions about the Mayaguez incident.

A Pentagon spokesman, Joseph Laitin, confirmed today that a 170-foot submarine chaser with 40 Cambodians aboard had been turned over to Thai authorities in the port of Sattahip.

But in answering questions at a news briefing, Mr. Laitin said he did not know if the ship had taken part in the Cambodian seizure of the Mayaguez in May 12.

Members of the Cambodian vessel's crew apparently told the Thais, at least initially, that their vessel had taken part in the seizure of the Mayaguez and that the crew had then thrown a Cambodian Communist soldier overboard and sailed for Thailand.

Mr. Laitin said that the Pentagon did not have "any facts" on whether the submarine chaser, originally commissioned by the United States Navy, had played any role in the Mayaguez incident.

## No Mention of Craft

All previous accounts from the crew of the Mayaguez and from Administration officials on the incident indicated that only small Cambodian gunboats and fishing craft had participated in the seizure. There was never any mention of a vessel the size of the submarine chaser in reports of the seizure and the subsequent American surveillance and recapture of the Mayaguez.

These questions were raised concerning the submarine chaser:

If the bigger vessel, which has been in Cambodian hands since the nineteen-fifties, was involved in the Mayaguez incident, why was the involvement not reported? And why did its crew defect afterward?

If it was not involved, why did its crew members say so when they reached Thailand? Why did the Pentagon have no firm information today about the Cambodian submarine chas-

er, which reached Sattahip last week?

The Pentagon was able to trace the background of the submarine chaser, explaining that it had passed from the United States to the French Navy and then to the Cambodian Navy in the early nineteen-fifties.

Pentagon spokesmen were unable to give an explanation of how a United States-made patrol boat known to have been used in the attack on the Mayaguez had been obtained by the Cambodians.

A photograph published in today's issue of the New York Times and other newspapers, taken by a Mayaguez crew member at the time of the capture, showed a patrol boat of the Swift class alongside the Mayaguez.

## Swifts Given to Saigon

Jane's Fighting Ships for 1973-1974 does not list any ships of this class in the Cambodian Navy. Jane's indicates that a number of the Swift craft were given to the South Vietnamese but gives no indication that any were turned over to Cambodia before the communist victory in that country.

A Pentagon spokesman, asked when and how the Cambodians had obtained this patrol boat, could not give an answer. He said he would try to check it out, but several hours

later he still was not able to provide any information.

Meanwhile, interviews today with members of the Mayaguez crew members raised anew a question whether the Cambodians might have released the ship and crew without a military attack by the United States.

Wilbert Bock, radio operator on the Mayaguez, said today that Charles T. Miller, captain of the ship, had rejected an offer that he return with some of his crew to his vessel the night before the marine assault.

Mr. Bock, interviewed in San Francisco while on his way home to New Jersey, said that the Cambodians had offered to let Captain Miller send a radio message to American forces to call off the air attacks. Mr. Bock seemed to believe that the offer had been part of a plan to free the crew.

Another crew member, Emil Puntillo of Kienosha, Wis., told an interviewer in Hong Kong of a Cambodian offer to send the captain and seven crew members back to the ship last Tuesday night. Captain Miller had told of the offer and said he had turned it down because he did not want to split the crew and because the boat to return them to the Mayaguez might have been sunk by United States planes.

But the Cambodian offer would seem to suggest that, at a minimum, the Cambodians were willing to negotiate. And as Captain Miller suggested, they might have let the Mayaguez and its crew go when they were satisfied it was not a spy ship.

Captain Miller has expressed an opinion that the crew would not have been rescued without the marine assault. But his account and those of his crewmen would seem at least to raise a question of whether a delay in the attack and further attempts to negotiate with the Cambodian captors might have led to the release of the crew and ship without bloodshed.