

Hill Report Faults Mayaguez Action

APW 10/6/76

Associated Press

WXPost

OCT 6 1976

U.S. Marines were ordered to rescue the Mayaguez crew from a Cambodian island despite reports indicating that the crew was no longer there and with bad information about enemy resistance, a congressional report says.

White House press secretary Ron Nessen said in San Francisco, "We disagree with that conclusion."

"The President carried out the actions in the Mayaguez case and believed they were right," he said. "The interval of time has not affected anything."

The report by the General Accounting Office said U.S. jet pilots had accurately reported seeing all or most of the Mayaguez crew on a fishing boat off the island. But it said U.S. commanders relied instead on an inaccurate report that the crew was on the island.

It also said key planners of the Marine assault on the island, Koh Tang, expected resistance from only about 20 Cambodian soldiers and did not know of accurate U.S. intelligence

that there were about 150 heavily armed soldiers there.

The U.S. Marine assault May 15, 1975, on Koh Tang to rescue the ship and crew seized by Cambodian gunboats three days earlier left 18 Marines dead or missing. Twenty-three Air Force men involved in the mission also were killed in a helicopter crash two days earlier.

The report was prepared by the GAO for the Democratic-controlled House International Political and Military Affairs Subcommittee, which re-

leased it yesterday with several security deletions. The committee did not say why it released the report at this time.

It was harshly attacked by a top aide to Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger as "attempts to second-guess" the fast decisions officials had to make at the time.

The Kissinger assistant, Lawrence S. Eagleburger, condemned the report in a letter reprinted in it as "totally inadequate and misleading."

The report concludes, as had been evident, that the Marine assault and U.S. bombing on Cambodia's mainland did not win release of the Mayaguez crew because it started after the Cambodians had begun releasing the crew.

But it said that "probably could not have been known at the time," and said earlier U.S. military strikes and sinking of gunboats probably did influence Cambodia to release the crew.

The report says U.S. jet fighter crews had reported the day before the assault that they had seen 30 to 40

2d Debate Tonight

Amid tightening public-opinion polls, President Ford and Jimmy Carter turn to foreign policy and defense at 9:30 p.m. (EDT) in the second round of their nationally televised debates.

Story on Page A8

MAYAGUEZ, From A1

persons who looked like Caucasians on the deck of a fishing boat away from the island.

It said the pilots reported that although they could not be certain they had seen some or all the Mayaguez' 40 Caucasian crewmen on the fishing boat, the people were bigger than Orientals and were wearing brightly colored Western gear.

It said the local U.S. command relied instead on a report earlier the same day that "all personnel appear to have been transferred to the island."

The GAO said it was unable to determine why the local command relied on that report, but said, "One might just as easily conclude that the weight of the evidence suggested that most or all of the crew was no longer on Koh Tang."

The GAO said it also was unable to determine why a U.S. intelligence report in Washington of about 150 heavily armed Cambodian soldiers on the island was not passed on to planners of the Marine assault.

It quoted Marine assault personnel as saying that "had the more accurate information been available, the assault would have been conducted more covertly."

See MAYAGUEZ, A13, Col. 3