

SECRET

# AFTER ACTION REPORT



US MILITARY OPERATIONS  
SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND  
12-15 MAY 1975

SECRET

BF

IN DRY DOCK



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AFTER ACTION REPORT

SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION  
12 - 15 MAY 1975

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## SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION

### NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The following is a narrative summary of events beginning with report of the capture of the SS MAYAGUEZ by a Cambodian gunboat, and concluding with the extraction of the Marines from Kaoh Tang Island. All times used are Eastern Daylight Time (to convert to Gulf of Thailand time add eleven hours).

The incident became known in Washington at 0512 hours on 12 May 75 when the NMCC received a report from the American Embassy Jakarta that the SS MAYAGUEZ had possibly been boarded. At 0730 hours NMCC requested that a reconnaissance aircraft be launched from Utapao Airfield, Thailand, and at about 1000 hours, a P-3 took off to begin coverage of the area. By mid-afternoon other reconnaissance aircraft had been added and continuous surveillance was maintained until the end of the operation. First battle damage was incurred when a P-3 was hit by one round of small arms fire from a gunboat at 2116 hours. During the afternoon, the destroyer USS HOLT, the support ship USS VEGA, the USS CORAL SEA carrier task group, and the destroyer USS WILSON had been directed to proceed to the vicinity of Kompong Som from various locations in the Western Pacific. All of these ships were to play a significant role in the operations on 14-15 May. By midnight the MAYAGUEZ had moved from the vicinity of Poulo Wai Island to near Kaoh Tang Island.

On 13 May during the early morning hours, JCS directed CINCPAC to maintain fighter/gunship cover over the MAYAGUEZ to effect release of the ship or to prevent her movement into port. At 0619 hours an A-7 reported placing ordnance in the water to signal the ship not to get underway. During the remainder of the morning, several small boats were observed moving to the MAYAGUEZ and between the ship and Kaoh Tang Island. It was concluded that the crew of the MAYAGUEZ was moved to the island during this time.

At 1210 hours, CINCPAC was directed by JCS to move all available USAF helicopters and a detachment of Security Police to Utapao, and to bring two reinforced Marine platoons from Cubi Point, Philippines to Utapao. During movement of the Security Police, a CH-53 crashed due to unknown causes, killing all 23 persons on board. At 1512 hours on 13 May, JCS directed CINCPAC to move a Marine Battalion from Okinawa to Utapao. All the above deployments were completed by 0300 hours on 14 May.

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During the remainder of 13 May and into early evening of the 14th, efforts continued to prevent the MAYAGUEZ from getting underway until US forces could be positioned. Also, it was during this period, at 2020 hours, that an A-7 sank the first patrol boat of the operation while attempting to divert the craft. Authority to sink this boat had been given by the President eight minutes earlier. Shortly thereafter, a boat was seen leaving the island proceeding towards Kompong Som with a group of people in the bow. The pilot of the aircraft who made the sighting reported that these people were possibly caucasians. Unsuccessful attempts to turn back this boat including using riot control agents and firing across its bow; however, the boat continued and subsequently entered the harbor. It was not taken under direct attack because of the probability of Americans being aboard. One hour later, at midnight on the 13th, authority was given to attack and sink all small craft in the vicinity of Kaoh Tang.

Just before one o'clock on the morning of 14 May, CINCPAC and USSAG/7AF were tasked by the Acting Chairman, following an NSC meeting, to make preparations to seize the MAYAGUEZ, occupy Kaoh Tang Island, conduct B-52 strikes against the port of Kompong Som and Ream Airfield, sink all Cambodian small craft in target areas, and plan to also use tactical aircraft from the USS CORAL SEA. Preparations were to be completed in time for execution early on 15 May. The USSAG/7AF concept plan to conduct these operations was received in Washington at 1330 hours on 14 May and approved, with minor modification, by CINCPAC. The operational concept is attached at Tab C and subsequent events followed this scenario closely, with tactical air from the USS CORAL SEA being substituted for B-52s in the attacks on the mainland.

The operation to effect the recovery of the SS MAYAGUEZ and crew from Cambodian control began with the military execute order issued after an NSC meeting at 1652 hours on 14 May, following extensive planning and repositioning of forces. The initial order directed CINCPAC to seize and secure the MAYAGUEZ using Marines placed aboard the destroyer USS HOLT, and then to sail or tow the ship to sea as soon as possible. This order also directed a Marine helicopter assault on Kaoh Tang Island. Locations of the ship and island are as shown on Map, Tab C. Tactical air from Thailand and the carrier USS CORAL SEA was authorized to support the operations as required, as was the use of naval gunfire and riot control agents.

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At 1714 hours on 14 May, the first helicopter took off from Utapao Airfield, Thailand, where all available USAF helicopters and the Marine Ground Security Force had been positioned. Tactical air began to launch from Thailand to provide continuous coverage for the operation and the airborne command post, flying over the Gulf of Thailand, assumed overall control at the onset. The first three helicopters carrying 48 Marine Ground Security Force combat troops, six Military Sealift Command personnel, six US Navy explosive ordnance disposal technicians, and a linguist arrived over the USS HOLT at 1858 hours; Personnel transfer to the HOLT was completed by 1922 hours. The HOLT came alongside the MAYAGUEZ at 2045 hours, and 20 minutes later reported in full control of the ship. There were no personnel found on the MAYAGUEZ at the time of the boarding, but food found on the dining table and a warm kettle on the stove were evidence of a recent, hasty departure.

At 1710 hours, based on word passed from an NSC meeting in progress, JCS directed CINCPAC to commence cyclic strike operations from the USS CORAL SEA on the Kompong Som complex, with first time on target specified at 2045 hours to coincide with the estimated time of capture of the MAYAGUEZ. This estimate proved to be exceedingly accurate. The first cycle was to be armed reconnaissance with Cambodian aircraft and military watercraft as principal targets. Subsequent flights were to make maximum use of precision guided munitions to attack targets of military significance. The first cycle did not expend ordnance probably due to some uncertainty because of a temporary divert after becoming airborne and their inability to positively identify principal targets as Cambodian. The second cycle struck the Ream Airfield. The runway was cratered, several aircraft were destroyed or damaged, and the hangars were badly damaged. The third and final cycle struck the naval base at Ream damaging the barracks area and the Kompong Som port and POL refinery. Two warehouses were damaged in the port and a direct hit was scored on a large building in the marshalling yard. This initial bomb damage assessment is preliminary, based on pilot reports and some photography, and may be refined as more information becomes available. Photographs of the target areas are included at Enclosure 4 to Tab D. Operations against the mainland terminated with final time on target of 0010 hours on 15 May.

The assault on Kaoh Tang Island (Photograph with Tab B) began at 1720 hours on 14 May with the take-off from Utapao of the first three of eight total USAF helicopters transporting Marine assault forces. At 1909 hours, one of the first helicopters in the area of the island reported hostile ground fire.

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The flight mechanic was wounded and became the first casualty of the operation. A second helicopter was reported hit and burning in the water six minutes later. The third helicopter from this flight was reported crashed on the beach at 1945 hours. Thirty minutes later insertion of the first assault wave had been completed. Of the eight helicopters in the first wave, three crashed on the beach or in the water and two were disabled, one landing on a Thai island for fuel before proceeding to Utapao and the other returning directly to Utapao. The Marine Ground Force Commander had secured his initial position at the northwestern landing zone by 2147 hours, and was receiving occasional automatic weapon fire and encountering claymore mine detonations. On the eastern landing zone, across the island from the main force, 22 personnel were isolated near the helicopter which had crashed on the beach. For photograph of the landing zones, see Enclosure 1 to Tab B.

At 2223 hours a boat was reported approaching the island flying a white flag. The destroyer USS WILSON picked up the occupants of the boat at 2305 hours. Shortly thereafter, it was reported that the entire crew of the MAYAGUEZ was accounted for aboard the WILSON and that all were in good condition. The five-man Thai crew of the boat which brought the MAYAGUEZ crew to the WILSON from Kaoh Rong San Lem was provided food and fuel. By 0025 hours on 15 May, the MAYAGUEZ crew had been returned to their ship, and the ship was towed away from the island by the USS HOLT.

The initial assault wave had landed approximately 180 Marines on Kaoh Tang. Additional ground security forces had been requested by the commander on the island to provide reinforcement for a successful withdrawal or to continue offensive operations. The second Marine assault wave began to arrive in the area at about 2345 hours on 14 May. The helicopters received ground fire and one of the first two was damaged. At eight minutes past midnight, the Marines were reported in good position with the enemy forced back. At 0049 hours on 15 May the order was given to immediately cease all offensive operations and to disengage and withdraw all forces from the area as soon as possible consistent with safety/self defense. At 0121 hours, a helicopter from the second assault wave was hit at the island, and, along with two other helicopters, returned to Utapao without unloading Marines.

Initial efforts to withdraw forces from the island concentrated on extracting the 22 personnel in the vicinity of the downed helicopter on the beach, as this small force could have been rather easily overrun if left overnight. The helicopter making the attempt

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was hit by ground fire at 0334 hours and recovered on the USS CORAL SEA. The main body of the Marine ground force, with a strength of approximately 213 personnel, had been unable to reach the downed helicopter or the 22-man Marine force, isolated on the opposite side of the island since approximately 1945 hours.

The extraction of the ground force was complicated by the reduction in numbers of helicopters operational (seven total of all types), the amount of enemy ground fire received by each inbound helicopter and the approach of darkness. Small boats from the USS HOLT and USS WILSON began efforts to assist in the withdrawal and approached the beaches at 0615 hours, but aborted due to ground fire. Working with naval gunfire and TACAIR support and with the ground force commander's recommendation that the extraction continue as necessary into darkness, helicopters recovering to the CORAL SEA were finally able to clear all USMC personnel from the island at 0917 hours, 15 May. Two hours earlier the small group near the downed helicopter had been the first extracted.

Latest reports indicate that there were 11 USMC, two USAF, and two USN killed in action, 41 USMC, seven USAF, and two USN wounded in action, and three USMC missing in action. The missing personnel are members of a Marine machine gun crew last seen during the final helicopter extraction from the northwestern landing zone, Kaoh Tang Island. Debriefing and investigation to determine final status of these MIAs are still being conducted.

At the approximate time of the extraction of the last Marines from Kaoh Tang Island, JCS directed that the residual force of 789 Marines at Utapao be retrograded from Thailand by daylight, 16 May (Bangkok time). The first C-141 aircraft with 150 Marines lifted off from the Utapao Airfield at 1156 hours with the last aircraft departing at 1710 hours, 15 May.

With the extraction of the last Marines from Kaoh Tang Island and the retrograde of the Marines from Thailand, the operation was successfully concluded. Reconnaissance sorties were continued until 17 May to provide bomb damage assessment and to search for the missing in action.

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DIA INTELLIGENCE APPRAISAL

1. Several islands off shore from the Cambodian mainland have been disputed by the Vietnamese and Cambodians over ownership for some time, particularly due to the possibility of oil deposits on the continental shelf. It appears that the Khmer Communists (KC) have decided to garrison these islands before the Vietnamese Communists focus their attention on them. Puolo Wai and Kaoh Tang Islands are two of these KC garrisoned locations.
2. Kaoh Tang Island (Encl 1), the suspected retention site of the SS MAYAGUEZ crew prior to initiation of Marine landing operations, is approximately 3 1/2 miles long and two miles wide at its greatest width. Two small islets lie about 1/2 mile off the east and south coast of the main island. The island is rock fringed with its highest point at its northern extremity. Two shallow coves press into the eastern and western neck of the island's northern plateau. The eastern cove has a long shallow coral sand beach excellent for helicopter landings. A near surface coral reef excludes vessels of any draft greater than 3-4 feet from reaching the beach.
3. No dwellings other than one or two small huts near the beach of the northeastern cove were identified prior to initiation of operations. Miscellaneous small fishing boats and navy patrol type craft were known to ply the waters between the islands and the mainland.
4. The following information was the best information available on the KC military situation in the area at the onset of the operation:
  - a. Khmer Communist 3rd Division directing operations in the coastal area; 1800-2000 troops.
  - b. KC units sent to small islands.
  - c. 150-200 KC possibly on Kaoh Tang; 82 mm mortars, 75 mm recoilless rifles, 30 caliber, 7.62 mm and 12.7 mm machine guns, B40/41 Rocket Propelled Grenade Launchers.
  - d. 1500-2000 KC vicinity Ream/Kompong Som.
  - e. Possible KC naval craft in coastal areas.
    - 16-18 Swift Boats
    - 1-3 Riverine patrol craft
    - 2 Landing craft utility
    - 4 Landing craft medium
    - 1-177 Foot patrol craft

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f. Weapons mix on naval boats.

3 inch guns  
20/40 mm anti-aircraft  
50 cal./7.62 mm/12.7 mm machine guns.

g. KC air defense capability.

Unknown number 23 mm/37 mm AAA weapons with 37 mm sites known at Ream Airfield.

h. Small number T-28, AU-24, AC-47 and helo gunships with unknown operational status and location.

i. Tactical Communications probably fair using residual US equipment provided to the former Marine Navy Khmer (MNK), and Forces Armee National Khmer (FANK).

5. Post Operations Intelligence.

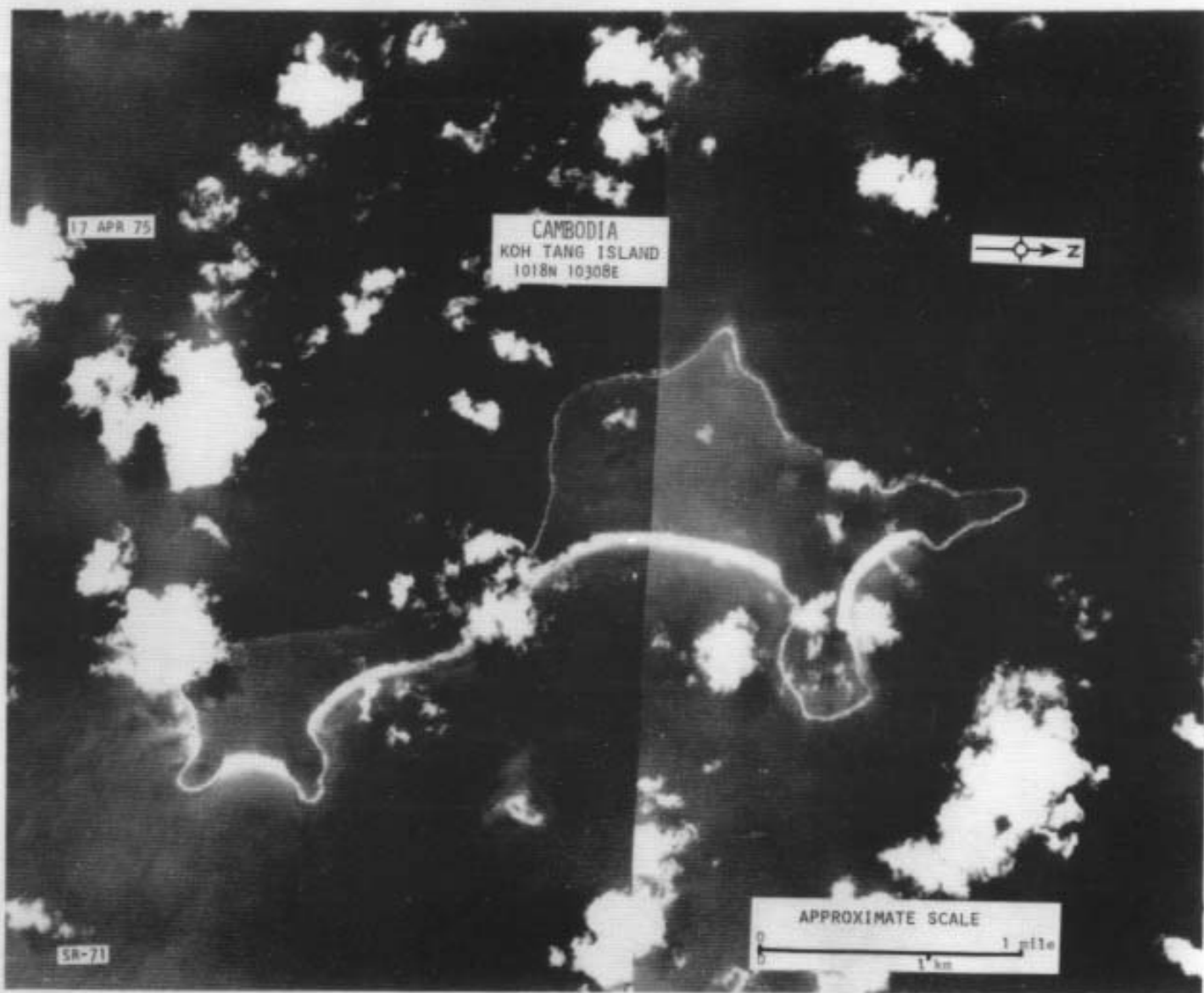
a. The enemy force on the island is estimated at less than 200 troops, and armed with weapons indicated in paragraph 4c, above, with the addition of unknown types of antipersonnel mines. The KC had prepared defensive positions at key locations, especially with automatic weapons on the northern most high ground that commands the northeast and northwest coves and beaches.

b. Sensitive sources indicate that the KC suffered personnel casualties of 47 killed and 55 wounded in all strike areas. Included in this total were 10 dead boat pilots and an unknown number missing.

c. Mainland bomb damage assessment (BDA) is presently being evaluated and portions of available photography are contained in Encl 4 to TAB D. BDA of sunken ships is also being evaluated with present probable losses in Encl 7 to TAB D.

6. Encl 2, SS MAYAGUEZ debrief.





17 APR 75

CAMBODIA  
KOH TANG ISLAND  
1018N 10308E



SR-71

APPROXIMATE SCALE

0 1 mile  
0 1 km

27 APRIL 75

CAMBODIA  
KOH TANG ISLAND  
101871 10508E

156x335 FT

295 FT

SWIFT BOATS

SR-71



SECRET  
NO FOREIGN DISSEM  
EOD 3.2  
EXEMPT FROM AUTOMATIC  
DOWNGRADING AND  
DECLASSIFICATION RESTRICTIONS



UNCLASSIFIED

DEBRIEF OF MAYAGUEZ CREW

The crew of the SS MAYAGUEZ was debriefed twice; once by US Navy personnel of the USS WILSON and once by the US Naval Attache, Singapore. Information presented in both debriefs is essentially the same and is outlined as follows:

- 12 May - SS MAYAGUEZ challenged seven nm southwest of Poulo Wai Island by two PCF Swift boats; 50 cal machinegun fire across bow and down the sides. Boarded by seven armed men, none of whom spoke English.
- Ship's Master told to take the ship to Kompong Som; Master indicated he could not comply due to broken radar, remained anchored, night of 12 May near Poulo Wai.
- On 13 May, ship moved to vicinity Kaoh Tang Island, anchored and disembarked to Thai fishing boat and Khmer boat; US TACAIR arrived on the scene. Thai fishermen gave food and water to crew. English speaking Cambodian asked about ship's cargo and mission. At dark, Khmer took Master and several crewmen back to ship to check out locked rooms. On arrival, flares dropped by US aircraft caused Khmer to return group to boats.
- 14 May, Thai fishing boat with crew, preceded by two Khmer patrol craft, headed toward Kompong Som; patrol boats believed sunk by airstrikes. TACAIR placed gunfire across fishing boat bow and hit it with RCA but fishing boat with crew reached Kompong Som. Boat then proceeded to Koh Rong San Lem Island.
- Master convinced Cambodians that he could get US forces to stop bombing/strafing if ship and crew released.
- On 15 May at 0530 hours local (Golf) crew was put in Thai fishing boat to return to MAYAGUEZ and escorted to a point about one mile from Koh Rong Sam Lem Island and released. Crew put up white cloth on bamboo poles and continued movement until picked up by the USS WILSON at 0958 Local (Golf) and then returned to SS MAYAGUEZ.
- MAYAGUEZ under tow at 1540 hours Local (Golf) and under own power at 1648 hours local 15 May.
- Thai fishermen received food and water from the USS WILSON, diesel fuel from the USS HOLT and escorted out of the area to return to Thailand; fishermen reportedly held by the Cambodians for five months.

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

- Ship's Captain states that Cambodian fear of airstrikes and prompt US force response were the primary causes for release of the ship and its crew.

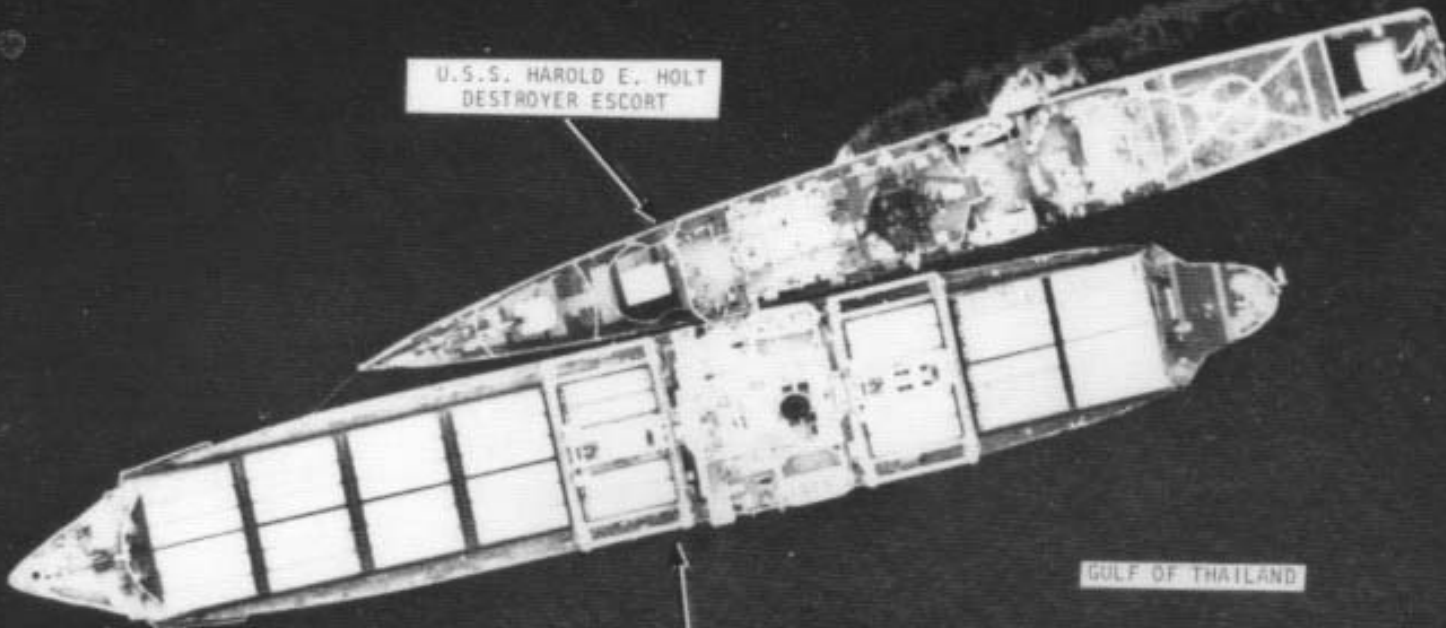
UNCLASSIFIED

15 MAY 75

CAMBODIA  
USS HAROLD E. HOLT PREPARING TO  
TAKE S.S. MAYAGUEZ IN TOW  
APROX 1/4NM EAST OF NORTH END OF  
KOH TANG ISLAND



U.S.S. HAROLD E. HOLT  
DESTROYER ESCORT



GULF OF THAILAND

SS MAYAGUEZ

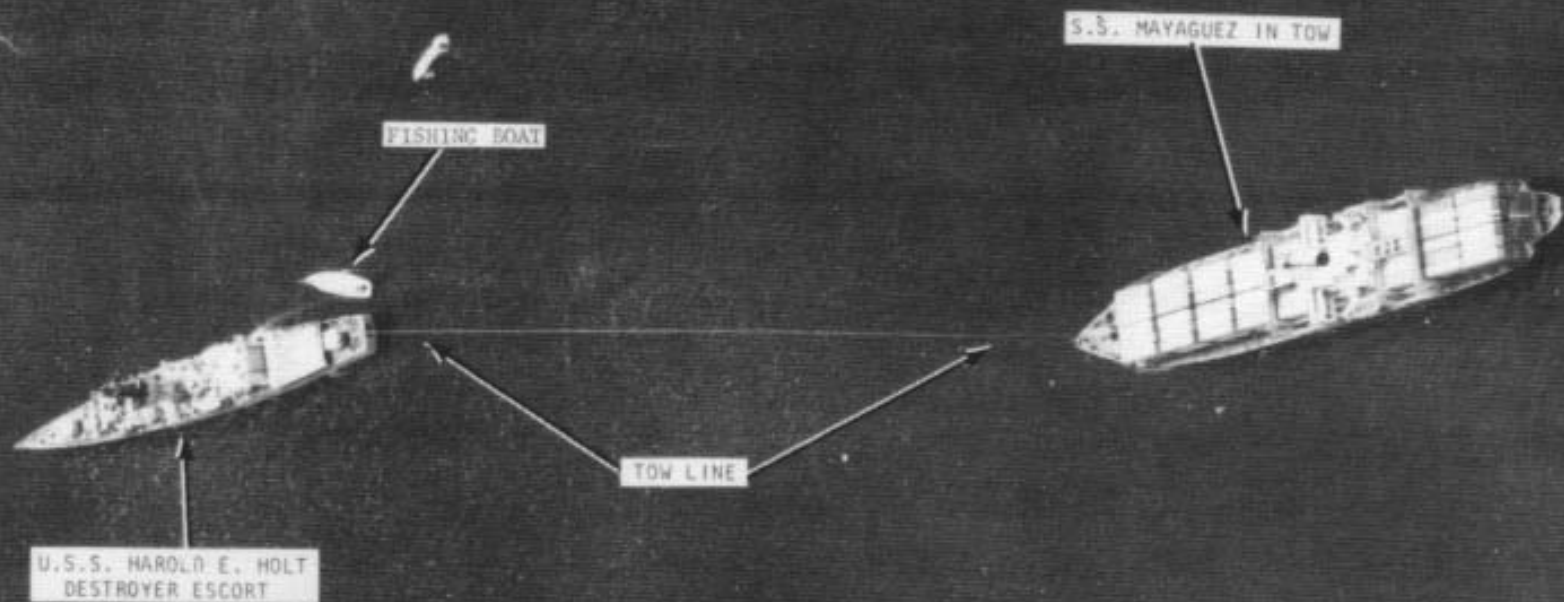
TAC RECCE  
CONFIDENTIAL

SCALE APPROX 100  
30M

15 MAY 75

CAMBODIA  
USS HAROLD E. HOLT HAS  
SS MAYAGUEZ IN TOW  
2.5NM EAST OF KOH TANG ISLAND

CONFIDENTIAL



GULF OF THAILAND

TAC RECCE

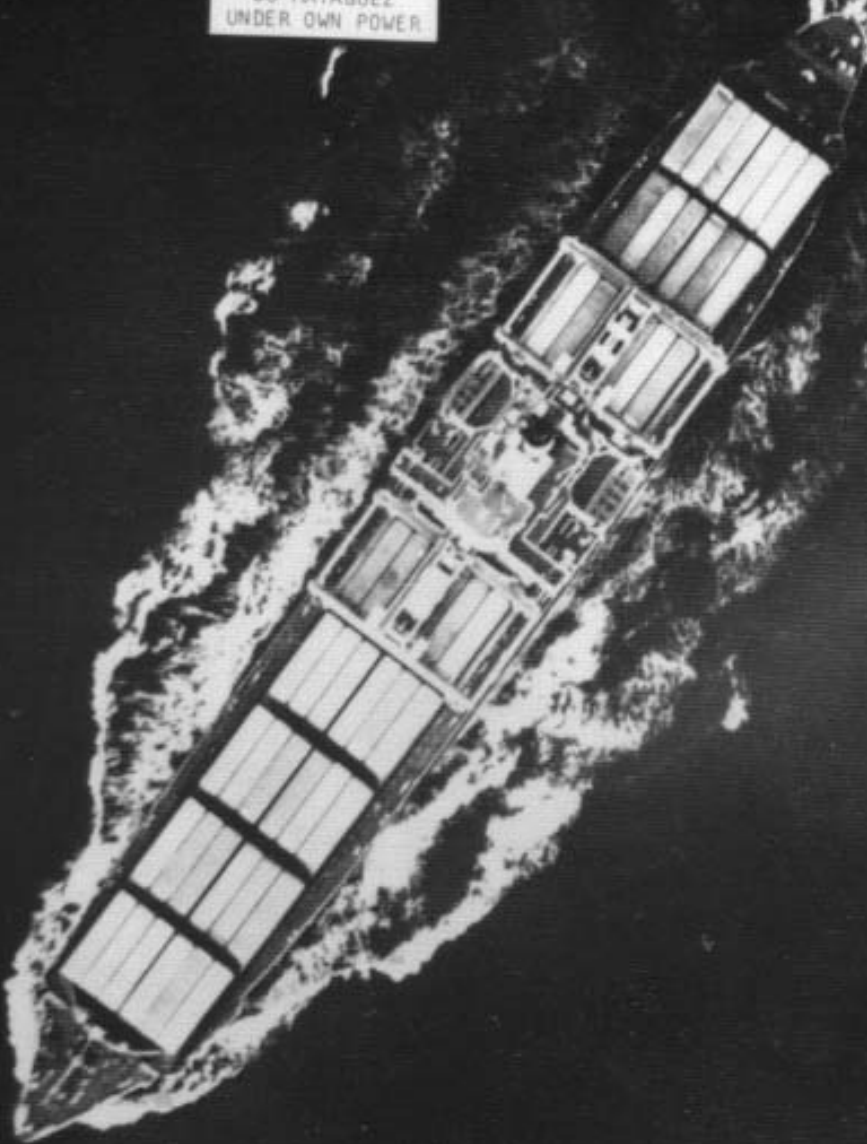
CONFIDENTIAL



15 MAY 75

CAMBODIA  
SS MAYAGUEZ  
UNDER OWN POWER

CONFIDENTIAL



TAC RECCE

CONFIDENTIAL





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SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION

OPERATIONAL CONCEPT

Ref: Map attached.

1. MISSION: Seize the SS MAYAGUEZ and conduct military operations to influence the outcome of US initiatives to secure the release of the ship's crew.

2. CONCEPT:

a. Assault to begin at sunrise 15 May.

b. Using three USAF helicopters, insert 48 marines, 12 USN/MSA personnel, an explosive ordnance team and a Cambodian linguist on the USS HOLT.

c. Using eight USAF CH/HH-53 helicopters execute a combat assault on Kaoh Tang Island, with 175 marines in the initial wave and subsequent buildup to a total of 625 Marines on the island.

d. USS HOLT, upon closure of Marine Security Force, conduct operation to seize the USS MAYAGUEZ and take action to remove the ship from the operational area.

e. Marine assault force on Kaoh Tang Island secure the island and rescue members of the SS MAYAGUEZ that may be found there.

f. Combat support.

(1) Destroyers USS WILSON and USS HOLT provide naval gunfire and search and rescue support.

(2) USAF TACAIR: A-7, F-4 and F-111 aircraft used during daylight and F-111/AC-130 aircraft used at night. Provide close air support for marine assault forces. Prevent movement of Cambodian small craft in the Kaoh Tang/Poulo Wai Island complex.

(3) USN TACAIR: A-6 and A-7 aircraft engage Cambodian shipping in designated area. Maintain continuous armed reconnaissance during daylight. Prepare to strike mainland targets, if directed.

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(4) B-52 force from Guam conduct conventional airstrikes against Ream Airfield, and ports of Kompong Som and Ream beginning approximately three hours after the assault on Kaoh Tang Island. As an alternate, USN TACAIR from the CORAL SEA instead of the B-52 force will strike designated mainland targets.

(5) Search and Rescue: USAF HC-130 fixed wing and HH-53 helicopters respond as required.

(6) On scene coordination: Airborne command and control center in an EC-130 aircraft provide continuous coverage.

(7) Helicopters for assault force: CH/HH-53 helicopters shuttle marine force to Kaoh Tang Island from Utapao RTAFB, Thailand. (3.5-4 hour turn around time - 1 hour 45 minutes flight one way).

(8) Air refueling: SAC KC-135 tankers support USAF TACAIR requirements; HC-130s support HH-53 helicopters.

(9) Weather reconnaissance, forward air controllers, flare support, flak suppression, escort, rescue cover, electronic warfare, electronic intelligence, air refueling, search and rescue and other support actions conducted as required.

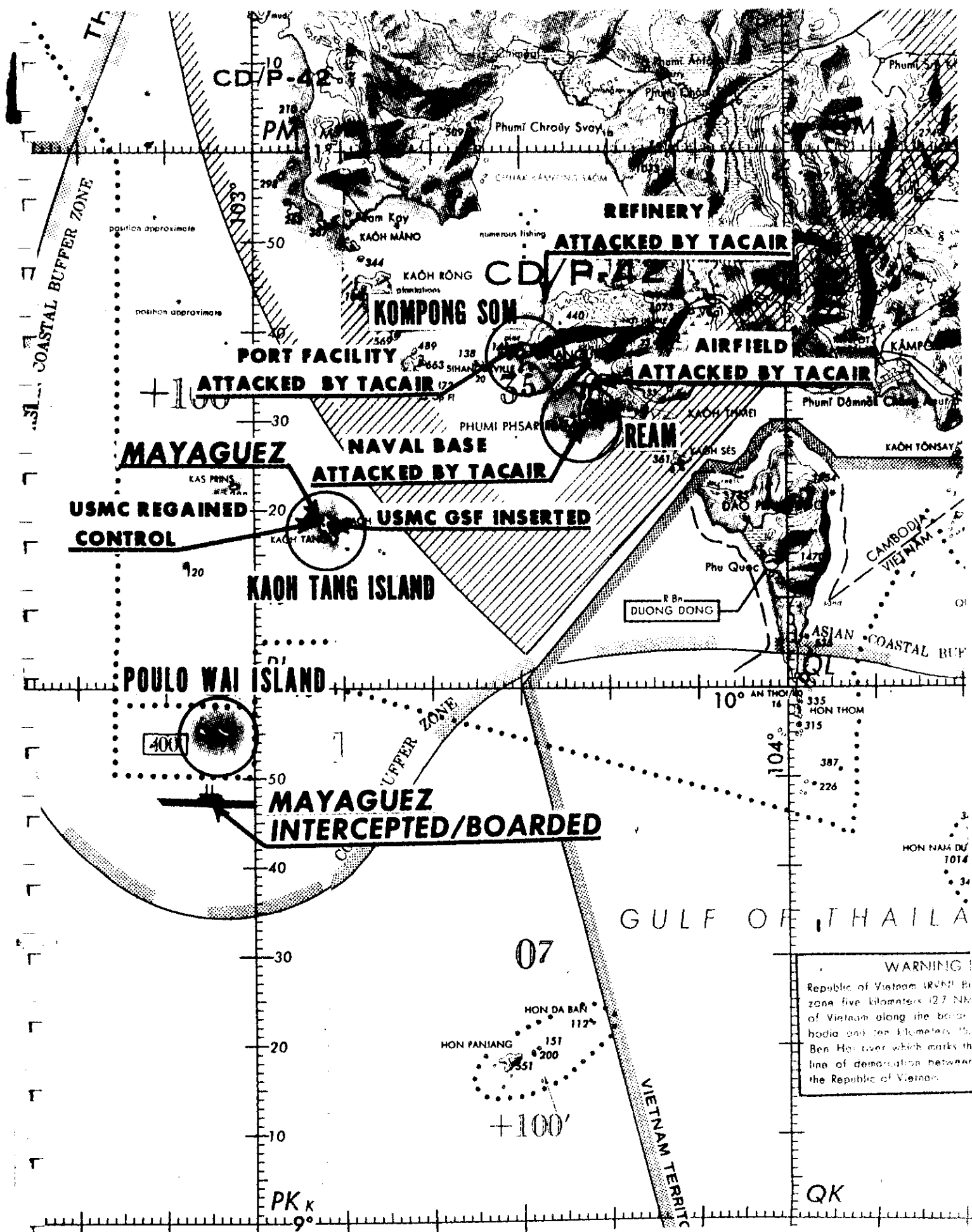
(10) Landing zone clearing using the BLU-82 (15,000 pound special purpose bomb) authorized, as required.

g. Command and Control.

(1) Overall operational control of PACOM forces directed by CINCPAC as authorized by the JCS.

(2) CINCSAC exercises operational control of committed B-52 force for strikes that may be directed by JCS.

(3) COMUSSAG/7AF exercises on scene coordinating authority for supporting forces as directed by CINCPAC.



**WARNING!**  
 Republic of Vietnam (RVN) EEZ zone five kilometers (2.7 NM) of Vietnam along the border of Vietnam and ten kilometers (5.4 NM) Ben Hai river which marks the line of demarcation between the Republic of Vietnam.





SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION

PERSONNEL CASUALTIES

The following is a summary of subject casualties reported by the Service Headquarters as of 1430 EDT 20 May 1975:

	<u>KIA</u>	<u>MIA</u>	<u>WIA</u>
USN	2	0	2
USMC	11	3	41
USAF	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>7</u>
TOTALS	15	3	50

CAMBODIA  
DESTROYED AND DAMAGED  
CH-53 HELICOPTERS  
LOCATED ON NORTHEAST BEACH  
AT KOH TANG ISLAND

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HEAVILY DAMAGED CH-53

20 FT TAIL SECTION MISSING

DESTROYED CH-53

TAC RECCE

CONFIDENTIAL

SCALE APPROX 100  
30M





SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION

HELICOPTER SORTIES  
LOST/DAMAGED

<u>SERVICE</u>	<u>HELOS EMPLOYED</u>	<u>SORTIES</u>	<u>LOSS</u>	<u>DAMAGE</u>	<u>CAUSE</u>
USAF*	7 CH-53	20 CH-53	3 CH-53	4 CH-53	Ground fire Kaoh Tang Island
	8 HH-53	32 HH-53		6 HH-53	
USN	2 SH-3G	4			
USMC	None				

\* Does not include 8 CH-53 and 11 HH-53 deployment/redeployment sorties to and from Utapao nor CH-53 lost due to unknown causes during deployment.



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SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION

TACAIR OPERATIONS FROM THAILAND

<u>SERVICE</u>	<u>TYPE ACFT</u>	<u>SORTIES</u>	<u>TARGETS</u>	<u>LOSS/DAMAGE</u>
USAF	F-4	164	Close air spt vic Kaoh Tang.	1 damaged - hole in inlet ramp.
	A-7	44	Close air spt vic Kaoh Tang and RCA on MAYAGUEZ.	1 damaged - hole in wing.
	F-111	45	Close air spt vic Kaoh Tang.	
	AC-130	19	Close air spt vic Kaoh Tang.	
	C-130	6	1 BLU 82 dropped.	
	TOTAL	278		

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SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION  
TACAIR OPERATIONS FROM CARRIER CORAL SEA AND  
BOMB DAMAGE ASSESSMENT, MAINLAND STRIKES

<u>SERVICE</u>	<u>TYPE ACFT</u>	<u>SORTIES</u>	<u>TARGETS</u>
USN	A-7	5*	REAM/KOMPONG SOM AIRFIELD
	A-6	2*	REAM/KOMPONG SOM AIRFIELD
	A-7	2*	REAM PORT/POL STORAGE
	A-7	4*	KOMPONG SOM PORT/POL FACILITY
	A-6	2*	REAM PORT/POL STORAGE
	F-4	18	CAP/ESCORT
	A-6	4	CLOSE AIR SUPPORT KAOH TANG ISLAND
	A-7	10	CLOSE AIR SUPPORT KAOH TANG ISLAND
		—	
TOTAL		47	

\* Results of airstrikes Cambodian mainland.

KOMPONG SOM PORT COMPLEX:

- Two warehouses damaged and fires noted
- POL refinery hit
- Railroad marshalling yard building hit, no fire or secondary explosions noted

REAM NAVAL BASE:

- Barracks destroyed; POL fires noted

REAM AIRFIELD:

- Numerous A/C destroyed, 5 A/C damaged  
Hangars damaged, runway cratered, large POL fire, active 37 mm  
AAA site damaged.

CONFIDENTIAL

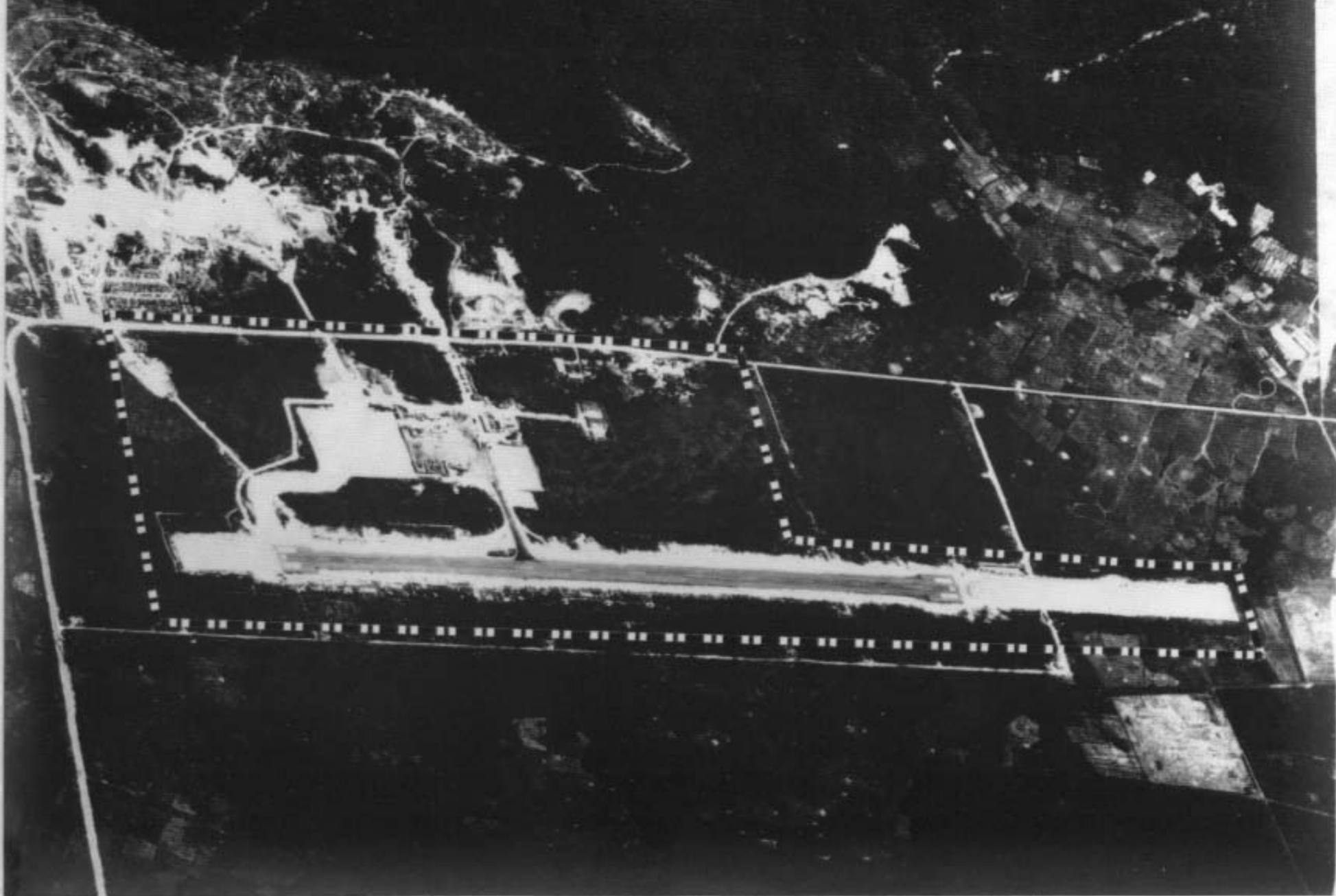
974

CAMBODIA

Ream Kampong Saom Airfield

0739-08666

103438N 1033828E



15 MAY 75

CAMBODIA  
OVERALL BDA AT REAR  
KAMPONG SAOM AIRFIELD

CONFIDENTIAL



TAC RECCE  
CONFIDENTIAL

OBLIQUITY PRECLUDES SCALING

16 MAY 75

CAMBODIA  
OVERALL SOA AT REAR  
KAMPONG SAOM AIRFIELD

CONFIDENTIAL



DAMAGED BUILDING

DESTROYED BUILDING

2-L-19 UNDAMAGED

C-131 UNDAMAGED

3-T-28 UNDAMAGED

SCALE APPROX 100  
0 61

C-131 DAMAGED

C-46 DESTROYED

C-47 DAMAGED

TAC RECCE  
CONFIDENTIAL

C-47 DESTROYED

C-47 DESTROYED

BOMB IMPACT AREA



16 April 1971

Kampong Saom Port Facilities  
0739-00098  
1038468 10130142



TOP SECRET  
CONFIDENTIAL

APPROXIMATE SCALE  
0 1000 FT  
0 300 M

15 MAY 75

CAMBODIA  
KAMPONG SAOM PORT FACILITIES

CONFIDENTIAL



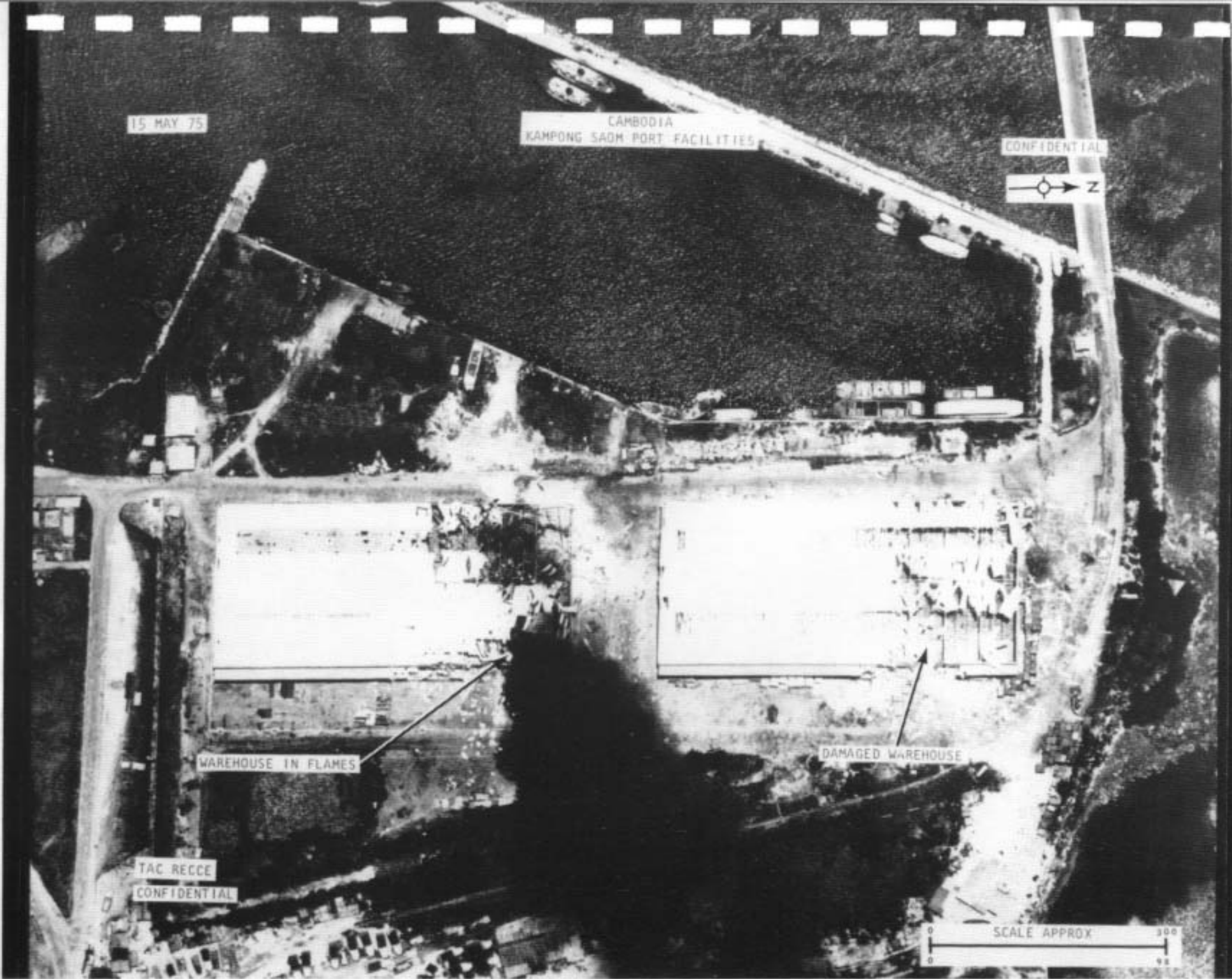
WAREHOUSE IN FLAMES

DAMAGED WAREHOUSE

TAC RECCE

CONFIDENTIAL

SCALE APPROX 300  
0 98



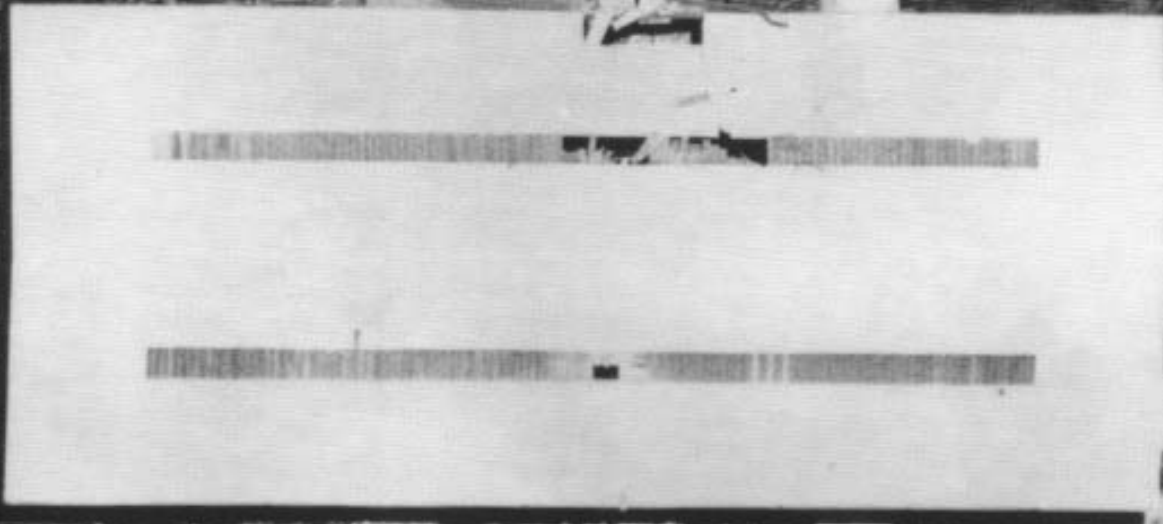
15 MAY 75

CAMBODIA  
BOMB DAMAGE AT  
KAMPONG SAOM RR STATION & CLASS YARD

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DAMAGED WAREHOUSE



TAC RECCE  
CONFIDENTIAL

SCALE APPROX 100  
0 63



SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION

COMBAT SUPPORT AIRCRAFT OPERATIONS

<u>SERVICE</u>	<u>TYPE</u>	<u>SORTIES</u>	<u>MISSION</u>
USAF	OV-10	4	Forward Air Controller
	EC-130	6	Airborne Command and Control Center
	HC-130	8	Search and Rescue Control and HH-53 Refuelers
	CH/HH-53	3	Search and Rescue
	KC-135	<u>49</u>	TACAIR Refuelers
	Sub Total	70	
USN	KA-6D	6	Refueler
	KA-7D	2	Refueler
	E1-B	<u>4</u>	Airborne Early Warning
	Sub Total	12	
	Grand Total	82	



# SECRET

## SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION

### RECONNAISSANCE SORTIES

	<u>MAY</u>	<u>12th</u>	<u>13th</u>	<u>14th</u>	<u>15th</u>	<u>16th</u>	<u>Total</u>	
<u>USAF</u>								
RF-4C		0	4	6	4	2	16	
*U-2R		1	3	3	3	1	11	
RC-135		0	0	1	0	1	2	
<u>USN</u>								
EP-3E		1	0	0	0	0	1	
RF-8G		0	0	0	2	0	2	
**P-3		-----						<u>18</u>
							50	

\* Increased tasking from one/8-hr mission per day to 24-hr/day coverage for radio relay. Continued normal COMINT tasking.

\*\* Continuous surveillance of Gulf of Thailand throughout MAYAGUEZ incident.

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SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION

RESULTS OF ATTACKS AGAINST  
CAMBODIAN NAVAL VESSELS

Following is a recapitulation of the results of reported strikes on Cambodian naval vessels.

Sinkings to Prevent Movement of  
SS MAYAGUEZ to Kompong Som

<u>Date/Time of Incident</u> (all times are EDT)	<u>Struck by</u>	<u>Type Vessel</u>	<u>Results</u>
132020 May 75	A-7	Patrol Boat	Sunk NE Kaoh Tang Island
140040 May 75	F-4	2 small boats	Sunk between MAYAGUEZ & Kaoh Tang Is.
141406 May 75	AC-130	Patrol craft	Sunk 2 miles ENE Kaoh Tang Island

Sinkings to Protect USMC  
Forces on Kaoh Tang Island

<u>Date/Time of Incident</u>	<u>Struck by</u>	<u>Type Vessel</u>	<u>Results</u>
150100 May 75	F-4	Large barge	Sunk North Kaoh Tang Is.
150140 May 75	A-7	Patrol craft	Sunk 6 miles south Kompong Som
150146 May 75	F-111	2 small boats	Sunk south Kaoh Tang Is.
150540 May 75	USS WILSON	Patrol boat	Sunk north Kaoh Tang Is.
	TOTAL	8 patrol craft and one barge sunk.	

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SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION

RETROGRADE OF US MARINES FROM THAILAND

It was directed that all USMC personnel be extracted from Thailand by daylight 16 May (Bangkok time). As a result, the Military Airlift Command, using C-141 aircraft, began outloading from Utapao RTAFB immediately after termination of combat operations. There were 789 Marines for transport to Kadena Airfield, Okinawa. The first aircraft departed Utapao at 1156 hours (EDT) 15 May and the last trooplift aircraft departed Utapao at 1710 hours (EDT) 15 May (approximately one and one half hours prior to Bangkok daylight) arriving Kadena at approximately 2225 hours (EDT) 15 May.



# SECRET

SS MAYAGUEZ/KAOH TANG ISLAND OPERATION  
JCS LOG OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS  
(120512 EDT THRU 150920 EDT  
MAY 1975)

<u>TIME</u>	<u>EVENT</u>
120512 EDT	US Embassy, Jakarta reports possible boarding of SS MAYAGUEZ. (Critic 0356)
120703 EDT	Deputy Director for Operations (DDO), National Military Command Center (NMCC) requested Pacific Command (PACOM) to launch reconnaissance (recce) aircraft from Utapao - Estimate time of launch 121000 EDT.
120957 EDT	PACOM reports that P-3 recce aircraft airborne (40 minutes to surveillance area).
121111 EDT	COMSEVENTHFLT tasks USS HOLT and USS VEGA to proceed to search area.
121441 EDT	CINCPACFLT directs USS CORAL SEA and escorts (TG 77.5) to proceed to vicinity of Kompong Som and directs Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) (USS OKINAWA, DULUTH, BARBOUR COUNTY, MT. VERNON) to prepare to proceed to scene.
121546 EDT	JCS (msg) directs continuous P-3 surveillance and tracking of Cambodian naval units (observe 12 mile limit).
121829 EDT	TG 77.5 ETA Gulf of Thailand at 150300 EDT. USS WILSON underway with ETA of 142000 EDT.
122116 EDT	P-3 aircraft reports positive identification made of MAYAGUEZ - 09° 56N - 102° 58 E; two gunboats in vicinity - on 1000 yard pass P-3 was fired upon and took one hit in vertical stabilizer.
130225 EDT	SS MAYAGUEZ is dead in the water at 10° 20 N - 103° 09 E; surveillance aircraft received small arms fire (tracer) from SS MAYAGUEZ.
130617 EDT	Message confirming telecon between J-3/JCS/and J-3/CINCPAC: Directed to maintain constant TACAIR/gunship coverage of the MAYAGUEZ - authority granted to fire in vicinity of but not at small boats to prevent movement - authority granted to proceed within the 12 mile limit.
130619 EDT	A-7 placing ordnance in the water vicinity MAYAGUEZ as a signal not to get underway.

SECRET

# SECRET

<u>TIME</u>	<u>EVENT</u>
130642 EDT	Small boats approaching MAYAGUEZ from vicinity Kaoh Tang. F-111 directed to make a low pass to discourage or slow their movement.
130644 EDT	Small boats tied up to MAYAGUEZ. No reaction from people aboard the ship.
130705 EDT	Small boats departed MAYAGUEZ for Kaoh Tang; personnel appearing to be Caucasians sitting with heads on knees.
130716 EDT	Thai Prime Minister states that Thai position on retaliation is that it should be between the US and Cambodia and should not involve Thailand.
130753 EDT	Two small boats at Kaoh Tang Island are off loading people onto the island.
130845 EDT	MAYAGUEZ is still dead in the water. All personnel appear to still be on the island. Surveillance aircraft is drawing small arms fire from the island.
131021 - 131040	Two 50 foot patrol boats went to the MAYAGUEZ and then departed the ship; status of passengers unknown.
131041 EDT	USS HOLT directed to move to secure or disable the MAYAGUEZ upon arrival at the scene.
131200 EDT	JCS directed CINCPAC and USSAG/7AF that Kaoh Tang should be isolated by intercepting all boats. Action should be reported to JCS within 10 minutes of occurrence. Decision to sink boats resides in Washington. Directive result of NSC meeting.
131210 EDT	JCS execute message dispatched: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- All available helicopters in Thailand to Utapao.</li><li>- Two marine platoons from Cubi Pt. to Utapao.</li><li>- Marine battalion at Okinawa placed in advance deployability posture.</li></ul>

# SECRET

# SECRET

<u>TIME</u>	<u>EVENT</u>
131422 EDT	Reconnaissance aircraft observed personnel off loaded from MAYAGUEZ; TACAIR received ground fire from Kaoh Tang Island.
131512 EDT	JCS directs USMC battalion to move from Okinawa to Utapao via MAC airlift.
131705 EDT	Marine Battalion Landing Team (2d Battalion, 9th Marines) began movement to Utapao; estimated completion time of 140300 EDT.
132012 EDT	JCS relayed to CINCPAC and USSAG/7AF President's decision through SECDEF to sink a Cambodian patrol boat attempting to leave vicinity of the island.
132020 EDT	A-7 aircraft attempted to divert a Cambodian patrol boat; boat sunk with 10 survivors sighted in a raft.
132152 EDT	Fishing boat with possible Caucasians aboard spotted moving toward the mainland northeast of Kaoh Tang Island.
132255 EDT	TACAIR fired across bow of fishing boat and dropped riot control agents on the boat to divert or stop its movement; vessel continued its course.
132353 EDT	F-111 aircraft received anti-aircraft fire from an island west of Kompong Som.
140005 EDT	Authority given from President through SECDEF to sink four boats at Island and another patrol boat which previously fled island and now moored at another island.
140006 EDT	JCS verbal authority given to sink small boats and advises caution in actions against craft next to the MAYAGUEZ or at Kaoh Tang Island.
140040 EDT	Two F-4 aircraft expended 2,000 rounds of 20 mm on small boats in cove; one secondary explosion. Two boats sunk.
140048 EDT	ACJCS debriefed CINCPAC and major subordinate commanders on the NSC meeting and provided planning guidance for military operations to recover the ship and crew as follows: At first light 15 May, US Forces will be prepared to secure Kaoh Tang Island and simultaneously board the MAYAGUEZ. Also plan for strikes against Kompong Som complex using B-52s from Guam and TACAIR from the USS CORAL SEA.

# SECRET

## TIME

## EVENT

140055 EDT JCS message confirms verbal authority to sink small boats (item 140006 EDT).

140520 EDT CINCPACFLT directed USS HANCOCK to sail immediately with troops and helicopters for MAYAGUEZ operational area.

140952 EDT AC-130 aircraft directed by on-scene commander to prevent any boat from approaching the MAYAGUEZ.

141406 EDT AC-130 gunship sunk a patrol craft two miles east northeast of Kaoh Tang Island.

141421 EDT USS HOLT standing by 25 nautical miles northwest of Kaoh Tang Island.

141442 EDT P-3 aircraft directed to locate Swedish vessel HIRADO.

141645 EDT NSC Meeting to JCS: Directed forces to begin operations to board MAYAGUEZ and make a helicopter assault on Kaoh Tang Island, but excluded air attacks on the Mainland of Cambodia.

141652 EDT JCS gave verbal order to CINCPAC to initiate the operation - excluded mainland strikes.

141703 EDT First flight of assault helicopters to depart Utapao at 1714 EDT - third flight of the first wave to depart at 1723. First three HH-53 (Jolly Green 11, 12, 13) to go to USS HOLT and the remaining five (Knife 21, 22, 23, 31, 32) to Kaoh Tang Island.

141710 EDT NSC meeting to JCS: Directed cyclic strike operations from the USS CORAL SEA against targets in the Kompong Som Complex with first time-on target specified at 2045. Details of operational authorities and principal targets were included.

141710 EDT JCS directed CINCPAC to commence cyclic strike operations against the Kompong Som Complex with the first time on target of 142045 EDT. First flight to be armed reconnaissance. Make use of guided munitions against targets of military significance.

# SECRET

# SECRET

<u>TIME</u>	<u>EVENT</u>
141742 EDT	JCS msg confirms verbal execute order of 1652 EDT.
141845 EDT	Five flights of A-7 TACAIR launched for operational area.
141858 EDT	Three HH-53s arrived over the USS HOLT.
141909 EDT	Knife 22 (CH-53) received small arms fire at the landing zone (LZ); flight mechanic wounded.
141915 EDT	Knife 21 (CH-53) crashed into the water 1 nm north northwest of Kaoh Tang Island.
141922 EDT	Jolly Green 11 and 12 completed offload of marines on the USS HOLT and proceeded to provide SAR support for Knife 21 (crashed in water between Kaoh Tang Island and the USS WILSON).
141930 EDT	Knife 22 reported to be losing fuel - Knife 23 providing escort.
141940 EDT	Knife 23 and 31 reported receiving small arms fire from the tree line vicinity of the LZ on the northeastern beach, Kaoh Tang Island. Knife 31 subsequently crashed and burned on the beach waterline and Knife 23 crashed on the beach a short distance away from 31.
141946 EDT	Approximately 100 marines inserted on the island; difficulty in forming up; some hours before reinforcement possible.
142028 EDT	White House Situation Room forwards direction that CORAL SEA aircraft are not to release ordnance on Kompong Som Harbor.
142029 EDT	JCS informed CINCPAC not to use Navy TACAIR for strikes on Kompong Som Harbor.
142044 EDT	JCS directed CINCPAC to cease all cyclic strike operations from the CORAL SEA.
142045 EDT	USS HOLT drew alongside the MAYAGUEZ.
142047 EDT	White House Situation Room forwarded direction that the first wave from the CORAL SEA could continue mainland strike mission; report BDA prior to additional strikes.
142048 EDT	JCS informed CINCPAC of instructions from the White House (142047 EDT).

# SECRET

<u>TIME</u>	<u>EVENT</u>
142052 EDT	White House provided instructions that CORAL SEA strikes should continue as planned; CINCPAC informed by JCS (NMCC).
142105 EDT	Boarding party from the USS HOLT reported in full control of the MAYAGUEZ; no incidents.
142106 EDT	Marine assault force reported to be consolidated on the island; force commander instructed to preserve his force until reinforced.
142110 EDT	MAYAGUEZ boarding party reports that no one was found aboard the ship.
142204 - 2215 EDT	Possible that two more cycles of seven helicopters would extend into the night; estimated departure of the second wave was 142300 EDT; ground force under heavy enemy fire and requesting naval gunfire from the USS HOLT.
142223 EDT	Boat flying a white flag reported to be approaching the island.
142236 EDT	Two tugs 60 miles from the MAYAGUEZ, enroute to pickup the ship and release marines for use on the island.
142250 EDT	Naval gunfire communications established with the ground force ashore.
142254 EDT	The boat with the white flag reported to contain caucasians. USS WILSON directed to secure the boat and its personnel.
142301 EDT	Time of CORAL SEA strike at Ream Airfield reported as 142257 EDT.
142314 EDT	Entire crew (40) of the MAYAGUEZ and five Thai fishermen secured and identified by the USS WILSON.
142316 EDT	Marine ground force directed to pull back so that CORAL SEA TACAIR can provide suppressive fires to cover withdrawal operations.

# SECRET

# SECRET

<u>TIME</u>	<u>EVENT</u>
142341 EDT	Ground force on western objective area reported one KIA and eight WIA (three serious).
142344 EDT	SECDEF informed the CJCS that the third wave from CORAL SEA should strike as planned.
142344 EDT	CORAL SEA strike underway against the Kompong Som POL depot ordered to continue with all subsequent sorties devoted to close air support for the Marine force.
150008 EDT	Marines reported to be in a good position and consolidating with opposition forced back.
150010 EDT	SECDEF instructed the CJCS that efforts should be made to extract the Marines without further casualties.
150020 EDT	JCS advised CINCPAC that there was no commitment to keep the Marines on the island or capture it and request was made for extraction plan. Asked for recommendations for maintaining pressure on mainland targets.
150038 EDT	SECDEF informed the CJCS to cancel the CORAL SEA's fourth wave attack against mainland targets.
150040 EDT	B-52 alert cancelled. TACAIR to be used to cover marine withdrawal.
150041 EDT	CORAL SEA instructed to move closer to the island and to act as recovery base for the helicopter extraction.
150049 EDT	JCS directed CINCPAC to devote efforts to extracting Marines - no further consideration to additional mainland strikes.

# SECRET

# SECRET

<u>TIME</u>	<u>EVENT</u>
150050 EDT	SECDEF directed cessation of all offensive operations and to completely disengage all forces.
150055 EDT	JCS message implemented item 150050 EDT.
150121 EDT	Under cover of TACAIR, Knife 51 and 52 (CH-53) inserted reinforcements.
150140 EDT	A-7 aircraft attacked and sunk a patrol craft from which hostile fire was received.
150236 EDT	PAC informed NMCC that Knife 23 still had radio communication; one man aboard who could blow it up - one man critically wounded, one with a head wound, two with leg wounds, and one dazed.
150244 EDT	USS WILSON destroyed hostile gun position in partially sunken gunboat vicinity of eastern LZ.
150254 EDT	Marine commander reported that he was ready for extraction using six helicopters; two into the LZ at one time.
150310 EDT	Reported to be 160 Marines on the northwestern LZ and 22 at the helicopter crash site on the eastern LZ.
150327 EDT	Extraction of Marine ground force to begin at 150530 EDT.
150348 EDT	Report states that there are 261 Marines to be evacuated - seven helicopter loads - can get only four loads out before darkness. (total number clarified at 150359 EDT as: 213 on the island and 48 aboard the USS HOLT).
150411 EDT	Night extraction under consideration.
150515 EDT	USS HOLT and USS WILSON to attempt to use boats to assist in extraction starting at 150615 EDT - helo extraction moved to 150630 EDT.
150649 EDT	Boats launched towards shore.
150712 EDT	Helicopter extracted 25 personnel from the site of the two crashed helicopters; enroute to the CORAL SEA.
150733 EDT	BLUE CHIP (COMUSSAG/7AF) indicated that Marines may have to remain overnight, discussing with ground commander.
150749 EDT	Based on ground commander's recommendation extraction is to be extended into the night.

**SECRET**

TIME

EVENT

150753 EDT

Reported that all personnel extracted from the east side of the island.

150917 EDT

Capt Davis, USMC extracted on the last helicopter, reported that he was relatively certain that all Marines were off the island.

NOTE: COMUSSAG/7AF verified the final extraction from Kaoh Tang Island by message at 150920 EDT.

**SECRET**



GLOSSARY

ACJCS	Acting Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
Amphibious Ready Group	Configuration of naval vessels primarily designed to support a Marine amphibious assault
A-6	Attack aircraft
A-7	Attack aircraft
Armed Reconnaissance	Mission with primary purpose of locating and attacking targets of opportunity
BDA	Bomb damage assessment
B-52	US Air Force bomber aircraft
Blue Chip	Radio call sign of USSAG
Chairman	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
CINCPAC	Commander-in-Chief Pacific Command
CJCS	Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff
COMSEVENTHFLT	Commander, Seventh Fleet (Western Pacific area)
CORAL SEA	USS CORAL SEA Aircraft Carrier
CRITIC	Critical intelligence information released by the National Security Agency with a FLASH precedence; may require attention of the NSC.
Cyclic	Launch/recovery operation of carrier-based aircraft
DDO	Deputy Director for Operations
DTG	Date Time Group
EDT	Eastern Daylight Time
ETA	Estimated Time of Arrival

GLOSSARY continued

ETD	Estimated Time of Departure
F-111	Attack aircraft
J-3	Operations Directorate of a joint military staff
Kaoh Tang Island	Also spelled Koh Tang Island
Landing Zone (LZ)	A specified location within an objective area used for the landing of aircraft; usually associated with helicopters
Lift	Transport by helicopter
NMCC	National Military Command Center
NSC	National Security Council
Ordnance	Bombs, rockets, bullets, etc.
P-3	US Navy turboprop long range patrol aircraft
POL	Petroleum, oils, lubricants
PACOM	Pacific Command
PACFLT	Pacific Fleet (Euphemism for Commander-in-Chief of)
Recce	Reconnaissance
Riot Control Agents (RCA)	Chemical agents used as a non-deadly means of crowd control
SAR	Search and Rescue
SECDEF	Secretary of Defense
Sortie	An operational flight by one aircraft
TACAIR	Tactical aircraft (fighters, attack aircraft)

GLOSSARY continued

TOT	Time-on-Target
Telecon	Telephone conversation
USSAG	United States Support Activities Group (Headquarters, Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Force Base)
USS HOLT	US Navy Destroyer
USS VEGA	US Navy store ship (delivers provisions for at sea fleet elements)
USS WILSON	US Navy Destroyer
Wave	A formation of forces (in this context a grouping of helicopters)

