

Operation Mayaguez
56th SPS, NKP
Email response to Story
Mayaguez e-mail from Airmen who were there

Author: Leon Cooper (VSPA Member)

Subject: Mayaguez --

I just found this web site and thought I would contribute a story about the Mayaguez incident. It is getting close to the 25th anniversary. Amn Ed Moran, who was one of the cops that was killed in the chopper crash outside of NKP, was probably one of the youngest of the cops to give their lives in the line of duty. As a former member of the 56th SPS and a participant of that mission, I remember how Amn Moran was involved. He was a very "gung-ho" troop always willing to give everything he had. He would have one day gone far as an SP. When the call went out to mobilize at NKP, there was no shortage of volunteers. Unfortunately, Amn Moran was the 51st person selected to go (as I remember it), and MSgt Walls the NCOIC told Amn Moran we had already reached the limit of 50. Amn Moran in his convincing way, convinced MSgt Walls to allow him to participate. I don't know if someone was replaced or if he was added as a 51st member. Unfortunately for Amn Moran, that was his last act of volunteering. In a couple weeks when the 25th anniversary of the Mayaguez incident comes around, please remember Amn Moran and the other 17 Security Policemen along with the chopper crew and linguist who gave their lives.

Author: Thomas Goodwin (VSPA)

In reply to: Leon Cooper's message, "Mayaguez"

Subject: Re: Mayaguez

Talk about the hair standing up on your neck. I try to block out that painful day. I was assigned to Day shift LE, as Flight Chief. I have even managed to block out the names of the people I knew on that bird. One of them was my desk Sgt, who was married to a Thai Girl and had several children. There was the young airman on town patrol. The TSgt from Operations. The SSgt, from K-9, who was on his second or third tour at NKP and had served with me there on my first tour at NKP. There were others. They were my friends. I found a web site that lists their names. It brings tears. I don't go there. I remember coming off duty that day. We were stunned. As we turned in our gear at the end of the shift We noted that the flag was still at full staff. A number of us went over to the flag pole and were just standing there looking at it. Then someone said "Lets put it at half staff." We lowered it. A CMSgt came out of the head quarters building and told us that we had to put it back up. He waited for a second and said something else. He got a reply that must have sounded like a big dog growling at him. He went back in the building. The flag stayed at half mast until LT Coe told us to put it back up, about ten days later.

Author: Gary Weeks

Subject: Re: Mayaguez

In reply to: Leon Cooper's message, "Mayaguez"

Coop: You should give me a call sometime or email, and we can recall that night together. I was also there on that night, in fact I drove one of the duces that went to the crash site, If you have any pictures from NKP I would love to see them... maybe by email? I was assigned to SAT-8 that night. I already posted to another Mayaguez bulletin, Gary Weeks, NKP 1975, Sgt on second thought, I'll hold my phone [waiting for your call].

Author: John Apple

Subject: Re: Mayaguez

I was a USAF Security Policeman stationed at U-Tapao RTAFB, in May, 1975, and was on one of the Fire Teams that was originally detailed to assault the Mayaguez. Other SP's from Nakhom Phanom RTAFB choppered down to link up with us, but one of those choppers went down out of NKP, killing all aboard. One of those, SSgt Gerald A. Coyle, was a friend of mine from our last base, Pope AFB, NC. We were put on hold, and the Marines came in to U-Tapao RTAFB, then left 24 hours later for the assault. Us SP's from U-Tapao RTAFB had to go out to the Cambodian border and guard several shot down choppers for a couple of days until they could be trucked out after the assault on Koh Tang Island. It was a strange time, but the courageous actions of young men in this incident is a credit to their devotion to Duty, Honor, and Country. May all of them Rest In Peace.

John Apple, North Carolina, SSgt, USAF, 1971-1975

Author: Woody R. Freeman, TSgt USAF, Ret.

Subject: Re: Mayaguez

First, I would like to thank you for your great tribute to the men that gave of themselves on 15 May 1975. I was a Flight Engineer assigned to the 40th ARRS at NKP, Thailand. My squadron along with the 21st SOS were the two helicopter squadrons that were tasked to recover the SS. Mayaguez and her crew. My helicopter (Jolly 44) was the last helicopter delivered to U-Tapao RTAFB for the operation. I had flown Functional Check Flights (FCF) on the helicopter all day at NKP to get it fixed so we could take it to U-Tapao RTAFB. Once we arrived in U-Tapao RTAFB, the crew was put in crew rest and my helicopter was turned over to another crew. Lt Robert Blough was the pilot that flew my helicopter on the mission.

I lost three good friends on SS Mayaguez rescue. Two of my friends were the Flight Engineers on the CH-53 that crashed 30 miles South of NKP with the Security Policemen on board. George McMullen and Paul Raber. My crew was the first on scene after their helicopter crashed. George McMullen and I were very close. I carried his body from the wreckage and placed it in my B-4 bag. Paul Raber and the two pilots were placed in body bags. The Security Policemen's bodies were handled by the medical team that arrived shortly after that. We could not move their bodies because of identification procedures. The flight crew was the only one's that were readily identifiable because of their positions on the helicopter. The other friend that I lost was Elwood E. Rumbaugh (Woody). He and I had just saw each other the night before the Mayaguez incident. He was the Flight Engineer on the helicopter that went in the water after being hit by the rocket. After helping the pilot out of the side window of his aircraft. He disappeared under the water, after exiting the helicopter. His body was never recovered. I am glad to see that some of the missing men are finally accounted for and have returned home. I will remember my friends and honor their memory.

To the Manning family, especially "Uncle John", Ron did not die in a useless incident. He died for his country and the honor of all those brave men and women that went before him. He, like all the others gave his most precious gift so that our country does not fall to tyrants like the Cambodians did to the Mayaguez crew. I would have proudly given my life in his place that day.

After flying Search & rescue my entire Air Force career I can say that we all were ready to make the ultimate sacrifice that day, because our fellow Americans needed us. We did not participate in a failed attempt to get the Mayaguez and crew back. We DID get them back. I offer my condolences to all the families that lost their loved ones that day. But, I thank God that we do have men and women that are in the breach to keep America free... Jolly Green Forever.

Woody R. Freeman, TSgt USAF, Ret.

Author: [Casteel, Paul A.](#), 635th SPS, U-Tapao 1975-1976 K-9 (VSPA LM 444)

Subject: Re: Mayaguez

I was part of the Mission from U-Tapao starting on the 15th of May 1975. I have three photographs: two at the CRASH site, and one with the return to UT. The Camp was called Camp Roberts, after MSgt Roberts. Local between Koh Tang and UT. I remember finding a Timex wrist watch just below the side door in the sandy mud in the rice field. And several days went by and another CH-53 came into the site, landed, and a Marine jumped out of the chopper and wrapped a combat load around my neck and shouted, "*You're in Cambodia!*" Then he returned to the chopper and left! I will share the photos with VSPA. I have a copy of the Orders also.

Excellent info on the Mayaguez. This will never fade away.

PC

34 years ago tonight -- [Phil Carroll - LM #336](#) (VSPA LM 336, Previous President) *Wed, May 13 2009.*

This has already been posted below, but I need to add a little on the subject. Thirty-four years ago tonight 18 of our Brothers perished en route to a rescue mission. I won't ever forget them, though I only knew one personally. I've had the honor of taking rubbings of their names from The Wall. For those visitors to this site who don't know about the story, I'll paste in a little summary of it here from an essay I wrote about Nakhon Phanom.

Before I tell that part of the story, though, I want to acknowledge what every other Skycop in Thailand in May 1975 went through during those tense days. Many thought that this was the start of a new war with Cambodia; there was good reason for a while to believe that Knife 13 had been shot down as it flew close to the border of Laos; everybody reasonably feared that the gathering rescue mission at U-Tapao would come under attack, and if it did the rest of our bases in Thailand were equally threatened; nobody knew anything for sure but that there had been an armed attack on a merchant vessel and a helo full of rescuers had suddenly dropped off radar into the jungle canopy at night. That was a frightening time. God bless them all, and all of you remembering them with me today.

On 12 May 1975 the civilian container ship "Mayaguez" was seized by Cambodians and its 40-man crew imprisoned. President Ford wanted an immediate and decisive military response to this piracy, and the Marines were too far away to respond quickly enough to suit him. According to a USAF Security Forces History of Combat Operations, "The men of the 56th Security Police Squadron trained as a unit and were hailed throughout 13th Air Force as a capable assault force.... The [President's advisors looked for the nearest unit capable of mounting an assault upon the ship under combat conditions. The only unit with such a reputation closer to the scene than the Third Marine Division was the 56th Security Police Squadron at Nakhon Phanom RTAFB.

Seventy-five hand-picked volunteers were quickly assembled and a rescue attempt was started. Sadly, a CH-53 helicopter, "Knife 13" carrying a flight crew of five, a linguist, and eighteen Security Police and K-9 troops, crashed into the jungle near the Laotian border in the middle of the night. All on board were killed. Days later the bloody rescue mission for the Mayaguez crew was finally carried out. Although a number of U.S. Navy, Marine and Air Force personnel, and 56th Special Operations Wing aircraft were lost, eventually the crew of the Mayaguez was released.

Date Posted: Wed, May 13 2009

Author: [William R Paddock 56th SPS,NKP \(1968\)](#) (VSPA LM 205)

Thanks Phil for reposting this info about the brave guys from the 56th SPS that lost their lives in May 1975 trying to rescue the men from the Mayaguez. I was at NKP during the entire year (1968) of TET and at NKP... it was not a "fun time". The guys from the 56th were always ready to volunteer to help another Brother(s)... it was always that way. Again I salute the men from the 56th SPS that lost their lives that fateful night... HAND SALUTE!!

Best Always, William (Bill)

Paddock. VSPA LM #205.

56th Security Police Sq., Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, VDHA
Assoc. Member #16019

Date Posted: Wed, May 13 2009,

Author: [Lew Goldberg/LM150](#)

Don Poss has a complete section for the Mayaguez : (VSPA Menus/ Operation /SS Mayaguez.

Date Posted: Wed, May 13 2009

Author: [Warren Maynard LM234](#) (VSPA LM 234) (*Thank You*)

Thanks for remembering my friends that we lost on this date. I was there and worked the SPS supply section, giving out the missing equipment. I would have went if any more volunteers were needed. They needed me to stay on base for the Security Police since worked at our supply section. Once again thanks for remembering my friends during this time. Warren Maynard, a proud member of the 56th SPS on this date.

Date Posted: Wed, May 13 2009

Author: [J P Mullen](#) (VSPA)

We Skycops were in fact called Security Specialists because we spend a great deal of time at Camp Bullis, Texas, being trained for what was known as the Domino Theory. As you stated, all Air Bases in Thailand were at great risk of becoming part of the Domino Theory. Pol Pot had already began his Operation Killing Fields in April of 1974. Those highly skilled assault units you mention, at NKP, were also found at Udorn and their failed war in Laos. As the 432nd Security Specialists at Udorn RTAFB rescued the last remaining Americans from the Embassy in Laos while Pol Pot was in control.

When Ho Chi Minh walked into the South on April 30, 1975, every SPS in Thailand expected the Domino Theory was coming true and awaited the invasion from the North as Charlie took the South. Then came the C5A Baby Lift Crash during the last Evac of South Vietnam. Many of us at Udorn RTAFB had gone thru the extensive combat prep camp together, and were divided up between NKP and Udorn RTAFB. The Mayaguez Operation also included Udorn Jolly Greens filled with SPS kids. It was learning of the Knife-13 crash that our involvement was cancelled asap, and President Ford violated the agreement that the US Marines were forbidden to return to Southeast Asia for any reason.

By this time, it was too late to cancel the Operations of the Southern SPS bases in Thailand. As the other post commented, we at Udorn and NKP were at greater risk of having Pol Pot take both of our bases while the Jolly's and Security Specialists were responding to the Mayaguez. Our only F-4's had already left us wide open to attack by leaving for Koh Tang. As you can tell by reading this very short post, being at NKP or Udorn in 1974 and 1975 was not like being on R&R in Bangkok, as most believe it was..

On and off, most of us were age 19 and returned to The World not even reaching the ripe age of 21. The Knife-13 crash and loss of our brothers was only one small part of the entire Mayaguez Mistake. The lack of intelligence and military planning left many marines and Air Force behind on the island of Koh Tang, who remain either MIA or POWs.

As it can be seen from the few replies on this site, few knew, few cared, and few wanted to know the story because they all wanted to believe the war and hell ended in 1973. For us, it had just begun. Now, many of us were ambushed by PTSD at some point since being back in The World. To have to prove stressors that rarely were documented because military mistakes are never front page news. And, most people think the Domino Theory is a "pizza special" and has nothing to do with the hell and horror of what Vietnam Veterans endured. We appreciate you making time to verify that our brothers died after 1973 in Southeast Asia and were serving this nation. Many have no idea that the Last Names on The Wall in DC are of those who died for this country after 1973, and in THAILANDS... not Vietnam. United We Stood... Divided We Fell... Which is in part the reason this country has gone to hell.

Date Posted: Thu, May 14 2009

Author: Joe Pizzimenti LM 557 (VSPA LM 557) (Salute)

I never knew the whole story ref The Incident until I met Ted Whitlock at the All Vets Reunion in April. Ted took the time to explain to me the mess that was created by the Powers that be in DC. The Men of the 56th SPS were heroes and were prepared to do their duty as the orders were handed down... they deserve the recognition and honor that never seemed to come to them.

I was already home from Nam by the time this happened and all I got was the biased News reports on TV. After all these years I SALUTE all those Security Cops who were prepared & gave it all for their fellow Americans along with the Helo crews who carried them into harm's way. The brotherhood and dedication shown by these men makes me both sad for their loss and proud for what they did. I know that they are sitting at God's Right Hand and are welcomed in heaven as only heroes can be... they have over 58,000 other welcomed guests standing with them

Date Posted: *Thu, May 14 2009*

Author: [Phil Carroll - LM #336](#) (VSPA LM 336, Previous President)

Gents, thanks for all for your comments.

Bill, HOOAH!

Lew, thanks for reminding everybody to check out Don's tribute on our own website. It's excellent.

Warren, God bless you, buddy. We'll keep'em alive in our hearts.

John, you've got a fantastic bunch of additional historical background there, thanks for posting and sharing with your brothers even though it's got to be hard to talk about.

Joe, Amen Brother!

For a really good account of the whole Mayaguez incident and the surrounding times, I highly recommend the following book: [The Last Battle](#), The Mayaguez Incident and the End of the Vietnam War, by Colonel Ralph Wetterhahn (USAF, Retired) 2001.

Date Posted: **Thu, May 14 2009**

Author: **Ted Whitlock (VSPA LM 98) (Sad Memories)**

Phil: It is with a heavy heart that I too remember the 13th of May 1975. I was the flight chief of the unit out of Korat RTAFB deployed to U-Tapao RTAFB. Several of your posts have it right. We did not know if the chopper was shot down or mechanical problems or what. We did know that we lost 25 men, 18 of which were fellow SPs. Those of you who have been there know the feeling when the adrenaline builds up and it did. Although we did not go, we were more than willing to go if for no other reason than we had already lost 18 fellow SPs and someone was going to pay for that!!! God bless those who gave their all, including the Marines who finally completed the Mayaguez mission at a great cost of many more men. May they will always be remembered by their AP/SP/SF brothers and sisters.

Date Posted: **Thu, May 14 2009**

Author: **John Apple**

I remember the night well, I was an SP SSgt at U-Tapao RTAFB. I'll never forget the dazed look on Charlie Hayes's face when he came into the Gym where we were staging and told me that Gerald Coyle was dead, killed in the chopper crash just after he and Charlie left NKP in separate birds. Coyle, Hayes, and I had worked together at Pope AFB, NC, just before we all shipped out to Thailand in 1974.

As I've done every year since I finally located Charlie Hayes (ret) a few years back, I've been in contact today with both Charlie and Sheryl Coyle, Gerald's daughter. She was only six when he was killed, and cherishes the stories Charlie and I and a few others have told her about her dad. I never forget our fallen brothers when the middle of May rolls around.

Welcome Home!

Phil

Date Posted: Tue, May 19 2009

Author: Konrad Kottke (VSPA) (Thankful but Sad)

Not a day goes by I don't think of my Brothers that passed on Knife 13. I was a young sergeant at the time assigned to the 56th SPS at NKP. I was the NCOIC of the perimeter alarm systems (BPS/VFP). This was an overhead job where I was working days. I was just getting ready to get off work when I was stopped by the Operations Officer who asked me to report to the armory, I had no idea on what was going on, Sgt William McKelvey (Mac) also was getting off for the day, he was NCOIC of the vehicle section, we worked out of the same building, we had been close friends since we both arrived in country 1973 (our wives were also friends) and we both had a child born in NKP about the same time. As we were waiting at the Armory, Sgt Greg Hankamer (Hank) showed up. I was also close with Hank and his wife. When I arrived in country Hank and I were assigned to the same flight (Tiger) and we worked together on an APC. I always remember Hank as a very cheerful and joking person, I remember the night we went to town, had a couple to many beers and ending up at a Tattoo shop... anyway, Hank being the first to start anything went in and got his Tattoo, I heard him say, Dam that hurts, and I changed my mind--never did get a Tattoo.

Anyway, I came very close to being on Knife 13 that night. After we were told what the mission was we were taken to the flight line and got in line to board a number of SOS Huey Choppers. I was in the same line with Mac and Hank as we started to board, but the chopper could only hold 18 Cops, and I was after the 18th and was switched to the next chopper. We took off and shortly after we were in the air our pilot said that one of our chopper had gone down, by unknown causes. We had no idea which one went down, not until we landed to regroup at U-Tapao RTAFB. After we landed and found out who was on board, the sadness and silence was more than anything I had ever seen. When we got back to NPK we had a memorial service I will never forget. I don't know why I was saved from going onto Knife 13, but I thank God every day and still pray for my SP Brothers. Reflection of this day 34 years ago. Security Police losses at NKP!

From: Allen Tucker

Reflection.

Were you in country 34 years ago? Do you remember the base activity loading F-4's with 500 pounders, that day at Udorn RTAFB Thailand? That day... like all others many live each and every day... remembering personal losses in many wars, to this very day. As young as we were, always a just cause in our actions. A country had asked as always for personal sacrifices. Who knew then, how much one would have to sacrifice? I'm sure to this day, that if it were to be done again, all involved would do the same. God bless those 21 men of 56th Security Police Squadron, Nakhon Phanom RTAFB, Thailand and 4 Flight Crew members of Aerospace Rescue Recovery Squadron ch-53 Tail -Number 68-1033. God bless all those involved in deployment and recovery operation of the Mayaguez. Thanks for being there in country and devotion to duty and what America stands for.

Allen L. Tucker, 432nd SPS/40th ARRS, Det 5 Udorn RTAFB 1974-1975.

Re: Reflection of this day 34 years ago. Security Police losses at NKP!

From: Joe Keene (JMKeene@tampabay.rr.com)
Never Forget:

Security Council discussion on Mayaguez incident



The National Security Council meeting in the Cabinet Room on the morning of May 13, 1975. President Ford is briefed by General David Jones USAF, Acting Chairman, Joints Chiefs of Staff, on possible military options at the onset of the Mayaguez situation.

Clockwise from the back:

**Jones; William Colby, Director CIA; unidentified;
President Ford; and James Schlesinger, Secretary of Defense**

Loss of 23 lives to defend the Mayaguez



An hour after this photo was taken, everyone aboard this CH-53 helicopter was killed when it crashed in a remote area of northwest Thailand. The passengers were all security policemen assigned to the 56th Special Operations Wing, Nakhon Phanom (NKP) Royal Thai Air Force Base, Thailand, and were to be a part of the assault force to recapture the USS Mayaguez and rescue its crew from Cambodian forces on Koh Tang. (U.S. Air Force Photo by Boyd Belcher.)



Marines on Way to Thailand; Khmers Hold Ship Off Coast

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WASHINGTON — With U.S. Marines bound for Thailand as part of an apparent show of military force, President Ford ordered the National Security Council to convene for the second time in 12 hours Tuesday night.

In announcing the meeting, White House Press Secretary Ron Nosenew said the U.S. merchant ship captured by armed Cambodians remained dead in the water near Koh Tang Island about 70 miles off the Cambodian coast. The report says the vessel was en route toward an undisclosed destination, Nosenew said. "It's right where it has been."

The White House spokesman said it was his understanding that the day's second NSC session was scheduled for 10:30 p.m. EDT as Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger could attend. Indications of a day of appointments in Moscow, Ford also met with the

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daily council at 11:15 a.m. "It is not an emergency meeting," Nosenew said. "It's a regular meeting."

The president said the ship would have arrived in Thailand but was held off the coast. When these circumstances are met, the ship will be released. The report said the ship was located for the first time.



We Take Care of Our Own

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