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mission simply goes on without them. So the loss of Knife 01-3 [Knife 13] had little impact on the Mayaguez rescue. But what would have been the role of those 18 SPs from NKP?

The 56 SPS planned involvement in the Mayaguez rescue is unknown to this author. I very simply was not allowed access to documents which held that information. However, assumptions may be drawn from facts. The function of Air Force Security Police in ground combat is focused on air base ground defense. It is for that which we are trained and equipped. Except for the few exceptions of special tactical assault teams comparable to civilian police "SWAT" units, SPs are used for defense. Yet, 13th Air Force asked for "combat assault" SP teams to respond to the Mayaguez incident. "The entire force was to be airlifted to Utapoa for a mass assault to recover the ship" (6:3). If the intent was for SPs to assault Cambodian forces defending the Mayaguez, they were not prepared for their mission. US intelligence underestimated the size of Cambodian defense forces on the island (4:109). If the SPs were intended for an offensive assault, the outcome could have been even more tragic considering the results of the US Marine assault which will be addressed later. This conclusion is subjective. I and others, will argue that the SPs were capable to handle the mission; however, based only upon training, others might contend that they were not. USAF SPs role in "Eagle Pull" was to provide air base ground defense at Phenom Penh airport while other US military units evacuated embassy and civilian personnel. This *is* our classic role in



military operations. Having been stationed at NKP RTAFB and a member of the SP "Eagle Pull" team in 1974, I can attest to our role and our air base defense preparation for that mission. Considering the Mayaguez operations at U-Tapao RTAFB at the objection of the Thai government, it would have made more sense militarily to use USAF SP forces in defense of that installation and the US resources committed to the Mayaguez rescue. US military forces then, and now, are specialized to do what they do best in a given situation. To use them otherwise is unwise.

One of the missions of the 21 SOS was to insert combat assault forces into hostile situations and the US Marine Corps were, and are, specialized to conduct offensive assault operations. They, with assistance of other highly skilled US military units, undertook operations to free the Mayaguez and her crew.

"On the night of the 13th, the 432nd Reconnaissance Technical Sq received imagery from both the Navy and the RF-4C aircraft of the 14TRS showing the ship. The Navy photos ... showed patrol boats at the side of the captured ship. At 1310 hours on the 13th, USSAG/7AF scrambled the Wing's two alert aircraft which flew to the freighter's location and fired in front of the ship in an attempt to stop its movement. At 1450 hours, USSAG/7AF directed the Wing to generate two F-4E aircraft each half hour periods until told to terminate. Eight aircraft were launched, four from

the 421TFS and four from the 25TFS. The ship attempted to move but was held at bay by the Wing's aircraft. When Khmer gunboats tried to run the blockage, at least one was sunk" (5:33).

These actions were taken to prepare the primary battle that rescued the Mayaguez. That battle occurred on 15 May.

Knife 21, commanded by Lt Col John Denham of the 21st SOS, and Knife 22, 23, 31, 32, and 41 departed U-Tapao at 0420 hours. The first four Knife helicopters approached Koh Tang together with Knife 21 and 22 going to the west beach and Knife 23 and 31 going to the east beach. Knife 21 sustained severe battle damage and was forced to ditch approximately 3/4 miles offshore, "after unloading their marines". Knife 22 was forced away from the HLZ (hot landing zone) by the intensive ground fire and was unable to off-load its marines. Knife 22's second attempt was also unsuccessful due to heavy enemy fire. Because of extensive battle damage, Knife 22 was only able to return to the Thailand mainland instead of U-Tapao" (7:11)." Because Knife 22 was unable to insert its marines, the western beachhead was not secured and the eastern beachhead was vulnerable. "Meanwhile, Knife 23 and 31 made their infiltration onto the east beach. Knife 23, at attempting to unload his marines, decided at the last moment to depart the area. As they attempted to leave, the tail boom separated from the helicopter, and they crashed approximately 20 feet offshore. The crew made it safely to cover with the Marines, where 1Lt Lucas, the copilot, set up a Forward Air Controller position using only his survival radio.

SSgt Gross, one of the flight engineers, was hit four times as he scrambled onto the beach. Meanwhile, Knife 31 received intensive fire and also tried to exit the area but burst into flames and crashed. 2Lt Vandegeer, the copilot, was killed by the groundfire, but the rest of the crew and most of their marines made it safely out to sea where they were rescued by the Navy. Knife 32 arrived on scene in time to see Knife 31 explode. Deciding not to attempt infiltration at that time they turned around only to see Knife 21 ditching into the water. After rescuing three of the four crew members (the fourth, SSgt Runbaugh, was never found), Knife 32 then made its insertion of Marines onto the west beach. During the landing, SSgt Morales, a flight engineer, and a Marine were wounded. Although extremely damaged, Knife 32 was able to return to U-Tapao for medical attention for the two wounded." (7:11) The battle for the Mayaguez was not going well for the Americans and the loss of lives, punctuated by aircraft losses, were severe. More failures were to follow.

"Knife 51 and 52 departed U-Tapao later that morning. Due to heavy enemy fire and sustained battle damage, Knife 52 was unable to off load its marines. Once in the area of Knife 22's downed helicopter Knife 52 suffered a hydraulic pressure loss and was forced to set down on the Thailand mainland. Knife 51, after making infiltration and picking up four wounded marines, provided vectors to assist Knife 52 to Knife 23's position, off loaded Marines at U-Tapao, and returned to the island". By this time the

Mayaguez and crew had been returned to US control (&:11,12).

"Knife 51, the last flyabl3 21 SOS helicopter, made several runs onto Koh Tang. Each load of Marines was taken to the USS Coral Sea and after the final load of 29 Marines, Knife 51 was refueled and returned to U-Tapao" (7:12). The battle for the Mayaguez was over but other military action continued.

The US had also planned punitive air strikes against the Cambodians. Because Phenom Penh failed to confirm the release of the Mayaguez crew, President Ford authorized the raids to be carried out (4:109). "On the 15th, naval tactical aircraft flying from the US aircraft carrier CORAL SEA struck a railroad yard, port facility, POL refinery, and airfield at Kampong Saom as well as the Phumi Phsar Ream Naval Base" (3:1). The Mayaguez incident was considered a victory by the White House.

President Ford was praised for his reaction under pressure and his standing in the polls shot up eleven percent. Later the grateful Mayaguez crew presented him with the ship's steering wheel. The national celebration overshadowed the fact that, to free the 39 crew members and ship, fifty marines were wounded and 41 servicemen had died (4:109). The military, especially those units directly involved, had no reason to celebrate. In the case of USAF SP, the bad feelings were increased because the military and public failed to associate them with the incident.

The helicopter crash which killed 18 enlisted SPs occurred early in the military operation. This meant that the US could

not release information which revealed rescue plans were in motion. Even after the details of the operation were released the news media failed to associate security police to the Mayague Incident. "One AF helicopter was known to have crashed in Thailand during the period but its part in the rescue operation was not clear" (1:3). Ask a security policeman about the Mayaguez incident and, if he or she is familiar at all with the history of the SP career fields, the loss of 18 SP lives will be mentioned; others are largely unaware of the association. We, like all other military units, are proud and respectful of our own who have made the supreme sacrifice for their country and want history to record their contributions.

This paper has presented an enlisted Security Police perspective of the Mayaguez incident. The SEA situation in early 1975 was best described as "turmoil" and events led to the Capture of the Mayaguez by the new communist government of Cambodia. US forces, to include the 56 SPS were put on standby to rescue refugees and embassy personnel from Phenom Penh but instead were used for the Mayaguez rescue. Political and military objectives, the questionable role of the SPs, and the subsequent helicopter crash which killed 5 crewman and 18 SPs were addressed. The rescue, hampered by poor intelligence and aircraft losses, was viewed by the US as a victory. And finally, the SP perspective that those lost are not given credit, or due respect.

This paper is dedicated to all who lost their lives in the Mayaguez incident.

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