

# Mayaguez

## The Retreat, 1999

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**On May 14, 1999, VSPA members Larry Breazeale, Gary Colbert and Kermit Payton met at Luke AFB, Arizona, at the invitation of the 56th Security Forces Squadron to participate in the Mayaguez retreat.** This retreat is held annually at Luke AFB to honor the Air Force Security Police who gave their lives in a rescue attempt of the S.S. Mayaguez on May 14, 1975.

During the retreat ceremony a lone Security Forces Trooper rang a brass bell when the name of each Security Policeman, killed in the mishap, was called out by CMSgt Coles. There was an enlarged picture of the deceased Security Police taken moments after they boarded a CH-53C, Knife Helicopter, at Nakhon Phanom Royal Thai Air Base, Thailand. In front of this display were M16's, with bayonets, stuck in the ground pointing downward. One M16 had a flight helmet on top, representing the flight crew, another M16 had a bush hat and the third M16 had a *Blue Beret* on top of it to honor the Security Policemen killed.

When the helicopter was out at sea just a few miles from the Mayaguez, it experienced engine trouble. Some believe the helicopter managed to fly back over a wooded area before crashing. All on board--18 Security Police--1 Linguist and 4 air crew members were killed.

The S.S. Mayaguez, was a sitting duck in the water in the Gulf of Thailand with Americans on board. Kahmer Rouge, Cambodian Communist terrorist, boarded and took the ship over. Later, on May 15, 1975, U.S. Marines boarded the ship expecting light resistance, instead they encountered 200 of the enemy.

The Security Police and crew that died en route to the Mayaguez were with the *56th Combat Support Group*. The 56th SFS [Security Force Squadron] at Luke AFB, feels a very strong link to these heroes. They feel the Security Police who died, "to try and save others," deserve a lasting tribute every year on May 14th. VSPA members displayed the VSPA Memorial Wreath at the retreat ceremony and were proud to be a part of the ceremony.

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