 **VANDEGEER, RICHARD**Air Force – 2LT (01) CO-PILOT (CH-53A, tail # [68-10925](https://www.vhpa.org/KIA/incident/75051555TXT.HTM), **KNIFE-31**)
Age 27, Male Caucasian, Married.
Born on 11 JAN 1948, from COLUMBUS, OH
Tour of Duty began on 13 MAY 1975, in THAILAND, with the
21ST SPECIAL OPS SQDN, 56TH SPECIAL OPS WING, 7TH AF
CASUALTY WAS ON 13 MAY 1975, in THAILAND
HOSTILE [KIA], Died While Missing, HELICOPTER CREW, AIR LOSS CRASH AT SEA. [Mayaguez Incident]
Religion: Protestant.
Body not Recovered (1995: *Declared Dead While Missing*).
Panel 01W – Line 132

Description: Previous US Army (1970-1971).

**2LT VANDEGEER, KNIFE 31—
The Search and Recovery of remains for the missing marines and corpsmen**:*(Courtesy of the Military Honor Wall: https:airforce.togetherweserved.com, USAF)*

**“The identification by the Army lab, known as CLHI**, took four years and the use of "the most cutting-edge technologies available" to sort **VANDEGEER’s** (KNIFE 31) remains from those of the others killed in the crash that took his life, said John Byrd, a CILHI staff anthropologist. " Byrd said the *seven water and land recovery operations* on Koh Tang Island, Cambodia for remains from VANDEGEER’s (KNIFE 31) helicopter started in 1991 and yielded a large number of "comingled" remains. Besides VANDEGEER’s (KNIFE 31) remains, CILHI recovered what it believed to be remains from 10 Marine infantrymen and two Navy corpsmen (See above) from the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment, on board VANDEGEER’s helicopter, known as KNIFE 31.”

**10 MARINES KIA — KNIFE- 31:**

PFC Daniel A. Benedett,
PFC Lynn Blessing,
PFC Walter Boyd,
LCpl Gregory S. Copenhaver,
LCpl Andres Garcia,
PFC James J. Jacques,
PFC James R. Maxwell,
PFC Richard W. Rivenburgh,
PFC Antonio R. Sandoval,
PFC Kelton R. Turner.

**02 US NAVY Hospital Corpsmen** missing (LOD - BNR) from CH-53 **KNIFE 31:**
HM1 Bernard Gause, Jr., and
HM Ronald J. Manning.

## The following is an accounting for the assault by forces of the USMC, USN, and USAF upon Koh Tang Island, Cambodia, and ensuing battle for control of the island, in search of captured SS Mayaguez crew and location of the ship. It is the best online summary-timeline of events I have located, and have used excerpts merged and credited with other online timelines of the incident. My goals are to account for actions by each USAF CH-53C KNIFE helicopter and USMC HH-53A helicopter, and JOLLY GREEN helicopters, and compile in one place with military casualties by names and photos, military awards by service and, name and action. I do not know who authored the well documented *SS Mayaguez Incident* report found at Wikipidea (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident>), beginning with the Fall of Saigon in April 1975, and the Khmer Rouge seize the American cargo ship SS Mayaguez, 12 May 1975, and the ensuing battle to recover crew and ship and return control to the United States.

## I encourage the reader to check it out for a fuller detailed information and references.

**TIMELINE SUMMARY ACCOUNT for Assault force actions —** [https:, Tail# , Tail# en.wikipedia.org, Tail# wiki, Tail# Mayaguez\_incident#cite\_note-31](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident#cite_note-31)

**AIR UNITS IN RESCUE ASSAULT FORCE**

*Courtesy of “Welcome To USAF Rotorheads”* [https://usafrotorheads.com/]

“Bob Blough provided the following list of flight crew members on the Mayaguez Operation:
http:, Tail# , Tail# www.rotorheadsrus.us, Tail# documents, Tail# 454.html

**21ST SOS CH-53C:**

**KNIFE 13, Tail# 68-10933
PILOT - 1LT Jimmy Kays**
CO-PILOT - 1LT Larry Froehlich
FE - TSGT George McMullen

CE - SGT Paul Raber

FE - SGT Robert P. Weldon

**KNIFE 21, Tail# 68-10926**
**PILOT - Lt Col John Denham**
CO-PILOT - 1LT Karl Poulsen

FE - SSGT Woody Rumbaugh
FE - TSGT Bob Boissonnault

 **KNIFE 22, Tail# 68-10928
PILOT - Capt Terry Ohlemeier**
CO-PILOT - 2Lt Dave Greer
FE - SSGT Mike Wilson
FE - SGT Norman Paul

2LTJames McDaniel's 1st platoon of Company G were disembarking K-21, the jungle erupted with small arms and automatic weapons fire along with RPGs and mortar fire.

**KNIFE 23, Tail# 70-1627
PILOT, 1LT Donald Backlund**CP - 1LT John Lucas
FE - SSGT Ron Gross
FE - A1C Eduardo Arrieta
SSGT James Barschow - Cameraman -

**KNIFE 31 CH-53A, tail# 68-10925**PILOT - Maj Howard Corson
CP - **2LT RICH VANDEGEER** (KNIFE 31)
FE **– SSGT JON HARSTON, FLIGHTMECHANIC— AIR FORCE CROSS.**

FE - SSGT Randy Hoffmaster

 **KNIFE 32, tail# 68-10932
PILOT – 1LT MICHAEL B LACKEY — AIR FORCE CROSS.**

CP - 2LTCALVIN O. WACHS
FE - TSGT MIKE OLSEN

FE - SSGT NICK MORALES

**KNIFE 51, Tail# 68-10927**
**PILOT - 1LT DICK BRIMS**CO-PILOT - 2Lt Dennis Danielson **1LT Richard C Brims — AIR FORCE CROSS.**

FE - SSGT Marion Riley

FE - A1C Phillip Pack,

PJ - TSGT Wayne Fisk
**TSGT Wayne Fisk, a pararescue — BRONZE STAR w/V and Oak Leaf Cluster** (in lieu of a 2nd Silver Star)

PJ - SGT Ronald Cooper

**KNIFE 52, tail# 70-1626
PILOT 1LT ROBERT RIKITIS**CP - 2LT DAVE LYKENS

FE - SSGT Donald McDowell

FE - TSGT William Dunbar

**NAIL CREWS**

**JOLLY GREEN 11, Tail# 68-10364**

**PILOT - 1LT Don Backlund**

CO-PILOT - 1LT Gary Weikel

FE - SSGT Harry Cash

PJ - MSGT John Eldridge

PJ - SSGT Stu Stanaland

PJ - A1C Brad Marx

APILOT - 1LT Ronald T. Rand –  BGen, USAF (Ret)

**JOLLY GREEN 12, Tail# 69-5793 (AM)**

**PILOT - Capt Paul Jacobs**

CO-PILOT - Capt Marty Nickerson

FE - SSGT Kaiser

PJ - MSGT Dave Gray

PJ - SGT Cook

**JOLLY GREEN 12, Tail# 69-5793 (PM)**

**PILOT - Capt Barry Walls**

CO-PILOT - 2Lt Comer – MGen, USAF (Ret)

FE - SSGT Jesse DeJesus

PJ - TSGT Dave Patterson

PJ - A1C Rheinheardt

**JOLLY GREEN 13, Tail# 69-5794**

PILOT - 1LT Chuck Greer

CO-PILOT - 1LT Charlie Brown

FE - SSGT King

PJ - SSGT Mark Froehlich

PJ - SGT Ron Lundrigan

PJ - SGT Steve Lemminn

**JOLLY GREEN 41, Tail# 69-5795**

**PILOT - 1LT Tom Cooper**

CO-PILOT - 1LT Dave Keith

FE - TSGT Little

FE - SSGT Jeff Donovan

PJ - SGT Tom Beranek

PJ - A1C John Ferris

**JOLLY GREEN 42, Tail# 69-5785**

**PILOT - 1LT Phil Pacini**

CO-PILOT - Capt Bob Dube

FE - TSGT Straughn, Jr.

FE - SSGT Jablonski

PJ - SGT Mike Brown

PJ - A1C Dunham II

**JOLLY GREEN 43, Tail# 69-5792**

**PILOT - Capt Wayne Purser**

CO-PILOT - 1LT Bob Gradle

FE - TSGT Bill Willingham

PJ - TSGT PeteHarding

PJ - SGT Tom Bateson

PJ - A1C McKiver

**JOLLY GREEN 44, Tail# 69-5784**

PILOT - 1LT Bob Blough

CO-PILOT - 1LT Hank Mason

FE - SSGT Bob Bounds

FE - SSGT Jim Howell

PJ - SGT Bruce Daly

PJ - A1C Dave Ash

**JOLLY GREEN 69-5784, Tail# 69-5786 FCF Crew**

**PILOT - Major Joe Guilmartin**

CO-PILOT - Lt Col Joe McMonigle

FE - SSGT Woody Freeman

 **Nail 68**–Major Bob “Underdog” Undorf

**Nail 47**– Capt Rick Roehrkasse

**Nail 69**– Capt Greg “Growth” Wilson

**Nail 51** – 1LT Will Carroll

**MILITARY AWARDS:**

**JOLLY GREEN 11, Tail# 68-10364,
PILOT 1st Lt Donald Backlund — Award Air Force Cross.

JOLLY GREEN 12, Tail# 69-5793 (AM)**

**PILOT - Capt Paul Jacobs**

 **JOLLY GREEN 13, Tail# 69-5794,**

**PILOT - 1LT Chuck Greer**

**JOLLY GREEN 41, Tail# 69-5795,
PILOT 1st Lt. Thomas D. Cooper Jr.,**

**JOLLY GREEN 42, Tail# 69-5785**

**PILOT - 1LT Phil Pacini,** and

**JOLLY GREEN 43, Tail# 69-5792**

**PILOT - Capt Wayne Purser - Awarded Air Force Cross**.

**JOLLY GREEN 44, Tail# 69-5784**

**PILOT - 1LT Bob Blough – Awarded the Silver Star**.

**SUMMARY REPORT ASSAULT ON KHO TANG ISLAND, CAMBODIA**

**KNIFE 32 (CH-53)**[https:, Tail# , Tail# www.adobe.com, Tail# acrobat, Tail# online, Tail# pdf-to-word.html?x\_api\_client\_id=chrome\_extension\_viewer&x\_api\_client\_location=pdf-to-word&mv=other&mv2=chrome\_extension\_viewer&trackingid=YKHWGCS5](https://www.adobe.com/acrobat/online/pdf-to-word.html?x_api_client_id=chrome_extension_viewer&x_api_client_location=pdf-to-word&mv=other&mv2=chrome_extension_viewer&trackingid=YKHWGCS5)

**15 MAY 1975

0600:** **KNIFE 32 (CH-53)** began flight at 0600 hours to insert 17 man Marine combat team onto Koh Tang. Diverted under intense fire to rescue three crewmembers of another chopper which ditched in sea and was sinking. Performed under difficult wind, sea, and weight problems. Completed offload of Marines sustaining heavy battle damage, with numerous groundfire and grenade hits. And a rocket hit the tail area which destroyed utility hydraulic lines. **KNIFE 32 (CH-53)** flew 200 miles back to U-Tapao RTAFB with many wounded on board and landed at 0815 hours.

The reaction of the American public was favorable. The President's overall approval rating rose 11% points.

U.S. military personnel awarded medals following the events, including:

**04 USAF AIRMEN WERE AWARDED THE AIR FORCE CROSS —**

**Capt Wayne Purser - Awarded Air Force Cross**, PILOT of JOLLY GREEN 43.
**1st Lt Donald Backlund *-* Award Air Force Cross**, PILOT of JOLLY GREEN 11.
**1st Lt Richard C Brims *-* Award Air Force Cross**, PILOT of KNIFE 51.

**SSGT Jon Harston *-* Award Air Force Cross**, Flight Mechanic of KNIFE 31.

**02 USAF AIRMEN AWARDED THE SILVER STAR —**

**1st Lt Bob Blough, PILOT**, **Awarded the Silver Star** — **JOLLY GREEN 44**

**TSGT Wayne Fisk, Awarded a 2nd Silver Star** — **KNIFE 51.**

**01 USMC AWARDED THE SILVER STAR —**

**1st Lt Terry Tonkin, USMC**, **Awarded the Silver Star** (Battalion's Forward Air Controller in the assault on Koh Tang — **KNIFE 51.**

**06:30, a CH-53**

**KNIFE 31 2LT VANDEGEER (RICH) (KNIFE 31)Co-PILOT** approaching the East Beach encountered intense automatic weapons and RPG fire from entrenched Khmer Rouge**. KNIFE 31** was hit by two RPGs, which ignited its left fuel tank and ripped away the nose of the helicopter. It crashed in a fireball fifty meters offshore, killing
**COPILOT, 2LT Richard Van de Geer, four Marines, and two Navy**[**Corpsmen**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corpsmen)**in the crash:**1 Marine drowned swimming from the wreck, and
3 Marines were killed by gunfire trying to reach the beach.
A tenth Marine died of his wounds off shore, clinging to the burning wreckage.

**Account for actions by CH53A KNIFE 23 — PILOT** [**1LT**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_lieutenant#U.S._Army,_U.S._Marine_Corps_and_U.S._Air_Force)**Donald Backlund**

**The second CH-53, KNIFE 23, was hit by an RPG which blew off the tail section and crash-landed on the East Beach** but it offloaded its 20 Marines and crew of five. They set up a defensive perimeter and the **KNIFE 23** co-PILOT used his survival radio to call in air-strikes, but were cut off from reinforcements and rescue for twelve hours.

**Account for actions by:
KNIFE 32,
JOLLY GREEN 41, J
OLLY GREEN 42, and
JOLLY GREEN 43 —**

**The two other sections of the first assault wave**, consisting of the remaining four helicopters, were diverted from the East Beach to the West Beach, and landed all of their Marines between 06:30 and 07:00. The final insertion by
**JOLLY GREEN 41** required support from an
**AC-130 gunship** to penetrate the Khmer Rouge fire on its fifth attempt.
**KNIFE 32,
JOLLY GREEN 41 and
JOLLY GREEN 42** eventually landed 81 Marines on the West Beach under the command of the company [Executive Officer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Executive_officer#United_States_Marine_Corps), and
**JOLLY GREEN 43** landed 29 Marines of the battalion command post and mortar platoon a kilometer to the southwest.

**07:00** **109 Marines and five Air Force crewmen were on Koh Tang Island** **but in three isolated beach areas and in close contact with Khmer Rouge troops.** Marines at the northern end of West Beach attempted to move down the beach to link up with Austin's command element to the south, but were beaten back by heavy Khmer Rouge fire which killed [**Lance Corporal**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lance_corporal)**Ashton Loney)**.

**Of the eight helicopters assaulting Koh Tang, three had been destroyed:**

**KNIFE 21, PILOT LTC John Denham** touched down on West Beach, his Marines began to stream out the back ramp. Just as they did, concealed Khmer forces let loose with automatic weapons, rockets and mortars. Holding steady for the Marines to scramble down the ramp, one of Denham’s two engines was severely damaged by enemy fire. With KNIFE 22 laying down suppressive fire with its miniguns, KNIFE 21’s crewmen jettisoned everything they could. The damaged CH-53 skipped across the waves, taking on water as Denham fought to keep it airborne for nearly a mile before it ditched in the sea. ***KNIFE 23,* PILOTed by 1st Lt. John Shramm**, At the Eastern LZ, Beach the choppers also made it in without resistance, but as the two helos hovered to off-load Marines, a murderous crossfire erupted. **KNIFE 23**, PILOTed by 1st Lt. John Shramm, began taking punishing hits to its rotor system and wrestled his own wounded CH-53 to the beach as the tail section tore off. Miraculously, no one was killed in the crash landing, and the 20 Marines aboard scrambled to the tree line for cover.
**KNIFE 23 Co-PILOT 1LT John Lucas**, was on his survival radio calling in airstrikes against the enemy positions that had his group pinned down in the tree line running along the eastern beach.

**KNIFE 31,** **PILOT Major Howard Corson**, burst into flames from the intense enemy barrage and fall to the East Beach.
Meanwhile Major Corson’s stricken chopper took hit after hit from heavy machine gun rounds and rockets. **Sergeant Randy Hoffmaster** returned fire with the waist minigun while the
**COPILOT, 2nd Lt. Richard Vandegeer,** fired an M-16 from his window. **A grenade round slammed into the cockpit, killing VANDEGEER**. Although Wounded and dazed, Major Corson somehow managed to maintain enough control to settle the aircraft down in the water. He stared down at his feet—nothing remained of the cockpit and the instrument panel that had been in front of him. Shouts from a crew member finally brought him to his senses while more flames engulfed the cockpit. **A badly burned Marine tried to unharness the limp body of VANDEGEER (KNIFE 31) but, under heavy fire, he was finally forced to abandon the attempt.** Four men were shot and killed or drowned near the burning wreckage of KNIFE 31. A fifth, stunned and wounded, stumbled his way nearly 100 yards to the tail ramp of **KNIFE 23** before he was cut down. In all, 13 men aboard KNIFE 31 were killed. Thirteen survivors, including Major Corson, were picked up at sea after using the KNIFE 31 wreckage as a shield, then swimming into the surf to escape.
 Among the survivors was **Marine Lieutenant Terry Tonkin, a forward air controller (FAC)**,and while swimming away from the beach on his back, with enemy bullets sending up geysers all around him, used Major Corson’s small survival radio to call in airstrikes.

**Four Helicopters were damaged too severely to continue operations:**
**KNIFE 22,

KNIFE 32,

JOLLY GREEN 41 PILOT 1st Lt. Thomas D. Cooper Jr.,**  made two attempts to land at the western beach with his Marines, but was driven back by intense enemy fire, including .50- caliber machine gun rounds that hit the right fuel tank and ramp area. For an hour, Cooper made two more landing attempts, only to be pummeled by heavy fire and mortar attacks.

While Cooper made his third aerial refueling, a Spectre gunship hammered Khmer positions near the western beach with 20mm and 40mm cannon and 105mm howitzer rounds, reducing one fortified emplacement to rubble. This allowed Cooper to make his fifth attempt at the western beach. While mortar rounds walked toward them, 10 Marines managed to get out of the back of Cooper’s aircraft before one of the rounds landed only 10 feet from the tail rotor, forcing Cooper to abort and lift off with five Marines still aboard.

As he returned to hover for the last Marines to deplane, a mortar round passed through the rotor blades and exploded only 20 feet away, blowing a hole in the aircraft’s belly. The HH-53 withdrew for the last time with its five Marines and returned to its staging base in Thailand. Severe damage prevented its use for the remainder of the operation.
**and

JOLLY GREEN 42**).
Meanwhile on the western beach, between 6:30 and 9:30 a.m., Jolly 42 and Jolly 43 successfully inserted their Marines after repeated attempts and heavy enemy resistance. Five Air Force personnel and 109 Marines were now deposited on Koh Tang Island.

**Of the helicopters used in the recapture of Mayaguez,**
**JOLLY GREEN 13** - **1st Lt. Charles Greer, PILOT**,
took heavy fire all the way into the landing zone near the wreckage of **KNIFE 23**. With rounds smashing into his chopper, Greer touched down on the beach while his crew raked the shoreline with their miniguns. Although in sight of the rescue helicopter, the Americans were pinned down. Jolly 13 remained in its exposed position, taking punishing hits from heavy automatic weapons. Fires broke out in the Jolly’s flare case and another in its auxiliary fuel tank. Greer thought his would be the third helicopter to litter the eastern beach. With no hope of recovering the men at the tree line and his helicopter engulfed in flames, Greer pulled back from the landing zone and nursed his chopper, peppered with 35 holes, severe rotor blade damage, and fuel, oil and hydraulic leaks, back to the Thai mainland.

had been severely damaged in the East Beach rescue attempt. This left only three helicopters

**HH-53s –

JOLLY GREENs 11,

Jollly Greens 12, and

JOLLY GREEN 43** (all of the original eleven available to bring in the follow-up forces of BLT 2, so the 2 CH-53s,

**KNIFE 51, 1LT** Richard C. Brims
A Nail forward air controller buzzed overhead in an OV-10A Bronco, rolled in on enemy gun positions and unleashed white-hot, “Willie Pete” 2.75-inch rockets. Higher up, a circling AC-130A Spectre gunship pounded enemy positions with a continuous barrage of 20mm and 40mm cannon fire. 1LTRichard C. Brims’ CH-53, **KNIFE 51,** ripped a minigun fury along a treelined beach of the western landing zone.
 The scene was surreal as the sun dipped, casting a peaceful, red-orange glow while tracers criss-crossed the dusky sky, and pulsing corridors of fire swept the darkening jungle. The extraction efforts continued into the darkness, with the hooches that were still burning from our rockets, serving as a navigation beacon for the rescue helicopters. On the ground, the din of whirling rotor blades, automatic weapons fire and exploding mortar and cannon rounds drowned out even the loudest commands. The air reeked of spent cordite, jet exhaust and salt spray.
 Now, as the last 27 Marines were fighting their way aboard **KNIFE 51** in the dusk, Air Force Tech. SGT. Wayne Fisk ran through intense fire in a half-crouch across the beach to a tree line to make sure no one was left behind. He spotted two young Marines laying down suppressive fire, unaware the helicopter was about to depart. Fisk got their attention and the three sprinted for the CH-53 and clambered up the ramp as it lifted off.
 Only hours later, with Marines scattered on several different ships, was it found that three Marines of an M-60 machine gun crew, Pfc **Gary L Hall**, Lance Cpl. **Joseph N Hargrove** LCPL **Andres Garcia**. and Private **Danny G Marshall** , had possibly been left behind alive. Further rescue efforts were deemed too dangerous to pursue. It was later confirmed that the three Marines were subsequently captured, tortured and executed by the Khmer Rouge.
 Fourteen hours of intense combat was over. Soon, a deathly shroud fell over Koh Tang Island. *Mayaguez*had steamed off, underway to Thailand once again, and the western landing zone was dark except for the eerie wink of an abandoned strobe light on the beach, marking the site of the last firefight of the last battle of America’s long and bitter Vietnam War.

By Ric Hunter (6, Tail# 1, Tail# 2022) **The War’s Final Firefight – the Mayaguez Incident**. HistoryNet Retrieved from
[https:, Tail# , Tail# www.historynet.com, Tail# wars-final-firefight-mayaguez-incident, Tail#](https://www.historynet.com/wars-final-firefight-mayaguez-incident/) .

**At 11:50**
**KNIFE 52, Lieutenant Robert Rikitis, PILOT**,

was low on fuel as he tried to insert his Marines one last time on the eastern beach. His aircraft immediately took hits, and what little fuel he had began leaking. He aborted and returned to his staging base U-Tapao RTAFB**.**

The four remaining helos successfully delivered Marines on the western beach under continuous automatic weapons and 60mm mortar fire. Severely wounded Marines were evacuated on each return trip.

By shortly after noon, reinforcements were complete, with more than 200 Americans on the island, nearly all concentrated on the western side. Faced with such fierce enemy resistance, ground commanders decided not to push across the island’s neck to link up with the 25 pinned down on the **Eastern Beach.** They would have to be extracted by helicopter and that would not be possible until Khmer resistance was reduced, if not obliterated.
 With one HH-53 miraculously repaired and added to the effort, four helos now remained to complete the extraction. Nightfall was only two hours away when two OV-10A “Nail” FACs began their watchful orbit overhead.

**KNIFE 51 and JOLLY GREEN 43**
arrived over Koh Tang Island and prepared to land on the East Beach, as
**KNIFE 52** approached, fire punctured its fuel tanks and the PILOT aborted the landing and headed back to U-Tapao leaking fuel.
**KNIFE 51 and**

**JOLLY GREEN 43** also abandoned their landings and assumed a holding pattern.[[7](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident#cite_note-Wetterhahn-7)

**At 06:30** on Koh Rong Sanloem the crew of *Mayaguez* were informed that they would be allowed to return to their ship, after having first agreed to a statement that they had not been mistreated.

**At 07:15** *Mayaguez*'s crew was loaded aboard the Thai fishing boat, *Sinvari* (which had been captured by the Khmer Rouge five months earlier) escorted by a second boat with Sa Mean and other Khmer Rouge. Once away from Koh Rong Sanloem the second boat picked up the Khmer Rouge guards from *Sinvari* and instructed the crew to return to *Mayaguez* and call off the American planes.

**At 09:35 an orbiting**
**P-3 Orion** spotted Sinvari and Wilson was ordered to intercept it, originally thinking it was a Khmer Rouge gunboat. **The P-3** then identified that Caucasians were aboard and at 09:49 *Mayaguez*'s crew was brought aboard ***Wilson***. Confirmation of the release of the crew was sent to the White House and at 11:27 (00:27 EDT) President Ford went on U.S. national television announcing the recovery of *Mayaguez* and the rescue of its crew, but obscuring the fact that the crew had in fact been released by the Khmer Rouge.

President Ford, at Secretary Kissinger's urging, declined to cancel the scheduled airstrikes on the Cambodian mainland until the Marines on Koh Tang had been withdrawn.

At 09:05 [A-6A Intruder](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grumman_A-6_Intruder#A-6A) and **A-7E aircraft** from [VA-22](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VFA-22), [VA-94](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VFA-94) and [VA-95](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_VA-95_%28U.S._Navy%29) escorted by F-4N fighters of [VF-51](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VF-51) and [VF-111](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/VF-111_%281956-95%29) aboard ***Coral Sea*** began the airstrikes, bombing landing barges and oil storage facilities at Kompong Som and cargo planes and [T-28 Trojan aircraft](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_American_T-28_Trojan) at Ream airfield and boats at Ream naval base.

During the attempted landing by
**JOLLY GREEN 43,** fire was seen coming from a semi-submerged **Swift Boat** that had been **shot up by an AC-130** the previous day, and a
**A-7 aircraft** were called in to destroy the boat with their 20 mm cannon.

At 16:20 hours,
***Nail 68*, an Air Force**[**OV-10**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OV-10) forward air control (FAC) aircraft, arrived and took over the direction of air support. At 16:23 ***Nail 68*** called on ***Wilson***to use its [5-inch gun](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5%22/54_caliber_Mark_42_gun) to destroy the semi-submerged Swift Boat.

At 18:15
**JOLLY GREEN 11, PILOT 1LT Donald Backlund,** approached the East Beach, but did not actually set down because the hulk of
**KNIFE 23** was sitting on the beach. Instead, the **PILOT (**[**1LT**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_lieutenant#U.S._Army,_U.S._Marine_Corps_and_U.S._Air_Force)**Donald Backlund)** skillfully hovered **JOLLY GREEN 11** several feet off the ground just north of the original beach LZ. The extraction was difficult because the helicopter would see-saw up and down. Only a few Marines at a time could board the helicopter's rear ramp in this fashion by timing their jumps to coincide with the downward motion of the aircraft. **JOLLY GREEN 11** was hit numerous times, but managed to transport its cargo of 20 Marines and five Airmen to the ***Coral Sea***.

At 20:00
**KNIFE 51** landed and began loading in the dark and under fire. Having loaded everyone save for themselves, [Captain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Captain_%28United_States%29) Davis and [Gunnery Sergeant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gunnery_Sergeant) McNemar combed the beach looking for stragglers.
**KNIFE 51 USAF Pararescue man**[Technical Sergeant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technical_sergeant#United_States_Air_Force) [Wayne Fisk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wayne_Fisk) was at the end of the ramp when two more Marines stumbled out of the darkness. Fisk asked Davis if all his men were aboard and he confirmed they were, and Fisk combed the beach one last time for stragglers. Finding none, he leaped onto the hovering CH-53 and at 20:10
**KNIFE 51** left Koh Tang for the ***Coral Sea***.

U.S. Marines left behind and subsequent controversy[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mayaguez_incident&action=edit&section=15)]

Due to the intense direct and indirect fire during the operation, the bodies of Marines and airmen who **were killed in action were left where they fell including**
**LCpl Ashton Loney)**, whose body was left behind in the darkness during the evacuation of the West Beach.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident#cite_note-Wetterhahn-7): 238

As the Company E commander Captain Mykle E. Stahl prepared to board
**JOLLY GREEN 44** he informed Captain Davis that all of his men were inside the perimeter, not realising that **three Marines of an M60 machine gun team** had set up a firing position behind a rocky outcrop beyond the right flank of the perimeter.

**KNIFE 51, PILOT, 1LT Brims** left the West Beach, there was confusion as to whether any Marines remained on Koh Tang. The PILOT, 1LT Brims, radioed the FAC that some Marines aboard claimed there were still fellow Marines on the ground, but this was soon contradicted by Davis who said that all Marines were off Koh Tang. Two hours after the evacuation was completed, with the Koh Tang Marines dispersed among three Navy ships, Company E commander Captain Stahl discovered that three of his Marines were missing.

The Marines checked all of the Navy ships but could not locate Lance Corporal Joseph N. LCPL **Andres Garcia**. , [Private First Class](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_First_Class) **Gary L. Hall**, and [Private](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_%28rank%29) **Danny G. Marshall** , members of a three-man machine gun team which had been assigned to protect the right flank of the constantly shrinking perimeter during the final evacuation.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident#cite_note-Wetterhahn-7): 254 Sergeant Andersen was the last member of the Marine force to see Hall, LCPL **Andres Garcia**. and Marshall alive at about 20:00 when he ordered them to move back to a new position which was located to the left of the position occupied by Captain Davis.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident#cite_note-Wetterhahn-7): 239[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident#cite_note-Dunham-9): 263

Just after 20:20 USAF [Staff Sergeant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Staff_sergeant#U.S._Air_Force) Robert Velie on the ABCCC aircraft received a radio transmission from an American asking when the next helicopter was coming to extract them. After Velie received the authentication code from the caller to confirm this was not a Khmer Rouge ploy, Velie's commander radioed the ***Holt*** to advise that Marines were still on the island. Holt radioed back that the Marines should swim out to sea for rescue, but when Velie passed this message back to the caller he was told this wasn't possible because only one of the three could swim. Velie advised the caller to take cover as air strikes were about to hit the area. The caller confirmed this and no further radio contact was received.

Half of Wilson's crew was on deck scanning the beaches and jungle for any sign of the missing Marines, but no signal was received from the Khmer Rouge or the missing Marines. With no indication that the three Marines were still alive and the certainty that more lives would be lost in any forced rescue attempt, a return to Koh Tang was ruled out and Wilson departed the area.
 **LCPL Andres Garcia, Hall and Marshall** were declared Missing in Action and then on 21 July 1976 their status was changed to *Killed in Action (Body Not Recovered).*

In 1985, an eyewitness report indicated that a wounded American had been captured on Koh Tang after the assault and was subsequently executed.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident#cite_note-Wetterhahn-7): 16 The NSA intercepted Cambodian messages which referred to 'the American that was captured' with orders not to talk about this.[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident#cite_note-14) In 1999 Em Son approached the [Joint Task Force-Full Accounting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joint_Task_Force-Full_Accounting) (JTF-FA) on learning that they were looking for further information regarding the events on Koh Tang.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident#cite_note-Wetterhahn-7): 277 Em Son advised that on the morning on 16 May he ordered his men to search the West Beach for any remaining Americans.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident#cite_note-Wetterhahn-7): 281–286

About 100 m from the beach one of the Khmer Rouge was hit by [M16](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M16_rifle) fire. The Khmer Rouge then fired mortars and encircled the firing position, capturing one American with a leg wound. Em Son's description of the American matched that of Joseph LCPL **Andres Garcia**. The Khmer Rouge continued their search and located an abandoned M60 machine gun, various equipment and the covered body of a black American soldier. Em Son ordered the dead American (presumably **Ashton Loney)**) buried and the prisoner taken to his headquarters. When Em Son was advised that the Khmer Rouge hit by M16 fire had died, **he ordered the American to be shot.**

Approximately one week after the assault, Em Son's men noticed that their leftover food was being disturbed and on searching they found boot prints in the mud. They set up a night ambush and on the third night they **captured two Americans matching the descriptions of Gary L Hall and Danny G Marshall** . Em Son radioed Kampong Som and was ordered to deliver the Americans to the mainland. The following morning the two Americans were taken by boat to the mainland and then driven to the [Ti Nean Pagoda](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ti_Nean_Pagoda&action=edit&redlink=1" \o "Ti Nean Pagoda (page does not exist)) above Sihanoukville where they were stripped to their underwear and shackled**. After one week, on orders from Phnom Penh, each American was beaten to death** with a B-40 rocket launcher.

**Hall's body** was buried in a shallow grave near the beach.

**Marshall’s body** was dumped on the beach cove.**Recovery efforts in 1999** by the JTF-FA later found bone fragments that might have belonged to
**Hall and Marshall** , but [DNA tests](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DNA_test) proved inconclusive due to the small size of the fragments.

**LCPL Andres Garcia, Hall and Marshall**  all received [Purple Hearts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Purple_Heart) from the U.S. Marine Corps.
**LCPL Andres Garcia’s family** did not receive the award until **1999**, after investigative journalist and author [Ralph Wetterhahn](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ralph_Wetterhahn&action=edit&redlink=1) published several articles in popular magazines about his findings.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident#cite_note-Wetterhahn-7): 268

**In 2007,**
**LCPL Andres Garcia. 's cousin, Cary Turner,** began a campaign to have [Joint POW, Tail# MIA Accounting Command](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joint_POW/MIA_Accounting_Command) (JPAC), the successor agency to JTF-FA, return to Koh Tang Island to **search for LCPL Andres Garcia. 's remains**.

**In October 2008** JPAC was reported to have found four sets of remains in an area indicated by Em Son as being **where the American suspected to be LCPL Andres Garcia. was buried**. One of the sets of remains was said to be Caucasian in nature, but DNA analysis was needed before the identity could be confirmed.[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident#cite_note-17)

**In 2016** the [Defense POW, Tail# MIA Accounting Agency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Defense_POW/MIA_Accounting_Agency) (DPAA), the successor to JPAC, announced that it had **recovered
Hall's ID card** and other items from an empty grave on the island and later acknowledged having recovered a US radio and [flak jacket](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flak_jacket) from near where
**KNIFE 51** had taken off.[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayaguez_incident#cite_note-Burke-13)

## Aftermath[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Mayaguez_incident&action=edit&section=16)]

### **Casualties**

**U.S. estimates of Khmer Rouge casualties were 13–25 killed on Koh Tang** with an unknown number **killed on Swift Boats and on the Cambodian mainland**.

**U.S. casualties were:**

**Killed In Action:**
10 Marines,
01 Marine killed in action, on the West Beach;
03 Marines Missing in Action and Presumed Dead.02 Navy corpsmen,
01 Air Force crewman (killed in the crash of **KNIFE 31**)
01 Air Force crewman (killed in the crash of **KNIFE 21**)

**Killed in Line of Duty:**
18 USAF Security Police (killed in crash of CH-53 **KNIFE 13** on the way to U-Tapao RTAFB):
05 Air Crew, 21st SOS (CH-53 **KNIFE 13)**

**Wound In Action:**35 Marines
06 USAF

**Between 1991 and 1999,** U.S. and Cambodian investigators conducted seven joint investigations, led by the JTF-FA. On three occasions Cambodian authorities unilaterally turned over remains believed to be those of American servicemen.

**In October and November 1995,** U.S. and Cambodian specialists conducted an **underwater recovery of** the
**KNIFE 31** crash site where they located numerous remains, personal effects and aircraft debris associated with the loss. [**USS Brunswick**](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Brunswick_%28ATS-3%29), a U.S. Navy salvage vessel, enabled the specialists to conduct their excavation offshore. In addition to the support provided by the Cambodian government, the Government of Vietnam also interviewed two Vietnamese informants in [Ho Chi Minh City](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ho_Chi_Minh_City) who turned over remains that were later positively identified.
 **As a result of these investigations the remains of**
**2LT Richard Vandegeer,
Lance Corporals Gregory S Copenhaver,
Andres Garcia,
Privates First Class Lynn Blessing,
Walter Boyd,
Antonio R Sandoval, and
Kelton R. Turner** were identified.

**In 2012 the remains of**  **PFC James Jacques,
PFC Richard W Rivenburgh and
PFC James Maxwell** were identified. An US Department of Defense Factsheet of US MIAs in Cambodia dated April 27, 2021 reports: “Witnesses have assisted in identifying recovery sites on Koh Tang, the island associated with the Mayaguez incident. Thirteen of the 18 Americans missing from that incident have been recovered and identified".

**KILLED IN ACTION:

USMC**

1. [LCPL **Gregory S Copenhaver**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=10439). The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20110928154756/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=10439) from the original on 28 September 2011. Retrieved 10 December 2019.
2. [LCPL **Andres Garcia**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=17765). The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20110928154802/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=17765) from the original on 28 September 2011. Retrieved 10 December 2019.
3. [PFC **Richard W Rivenburgh**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=43586). The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20110928154814/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=43586) from the original on 28 September 2011. Retrieved 10 December 2019.
4. [PFC **Walter Boyd**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=5113). The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20120226211304/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=5113) from the original on 26 February 2012. Retrieved 10 December 2019.
5. [PFC **Antonio R Sandoval**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=45470). The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20120226211307/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=45470) from the original on 26 February 2012. Retrieved 10 December 2019.
6. [PFC **Daniel A Benedett**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=3473). The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20120226211322/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=3473) from the original on 26 February 2012. Retrieved 10 December 2019.
7. [PFC **James R Maxwell**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=33119). The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20120226211337/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=33119) from the original on 26 February 2012. Retrieved 10 December 2019.
8. [PFC **James J Jacques**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=25484). The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20120226211333/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=25484) from the original on 26 February 2012. Retrieved 10 December 2019.
9. [PFC **Kelton R Turner**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=52883). The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20120226211340/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=52883) from the original on 26 February 2012. Retrieved 10 December 2019.
10. [PFC **Lynn Blessing**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=4360). The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20120226211346/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=4360) from the original on 26 February 2012. Retrieved 10 December 2019.
11. [LCPL **Ashton N Loney**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=31038). The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20110928154742/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=31038) from the original on 28 September 2011. Retrieved 10 December 2019
12. [**LCPL Joseph N Hargrove**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=21389). The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20110717043803/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=21389) from the original on 17 July 2011. Retrieved 10 December 2019.
13. [PFC **Gary L Hall**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=20814). The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20110717043845/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=20814) from the original on 17 July 2011. Retrieved 10 December 2019.
14. [PVT **Danny G Marshall**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=32493) . The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20110717043858/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=32493) from the original on 17 July 2011. Retrieved 10 December 2019.

**USN**

1. [HM1 **Bernard Gause**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=18113). **USN -** The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20120226211418/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=18113) from the original on 26 February 2012. Retrieved 10 December 2019.
2. [HN **Ronald J Manning**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=32233). **USN** - The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20120226211422/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=32233) from the original on 26 February 2012. Retrieved 10 December 2019.

**USAF**

2LT [**Richard Vandegeer**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=53321). **USAF 2LT -** The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20110717044014/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=53321) from the original on 17 July 2011. Retrieved 10 December 2019.

SSGT [**Elwood E Rumbaugh**](http://thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=44849). **USAF** SSGT -The Virtual Wall. [Archived](https://web.archive.org/web/20120226211434/http%3A/thewall-usa.com/info.asp?recid=44849) from the original on 26 February 2012. Retrieved 10 December 2019.

**KILLED IN LINE OF DUTY (USAF KNIFE 13):**

|  |
| --- |
| **Mayaguez incident** |
| Part of the [Vietnam War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam_War) |
| A black and white photo of a lake surrounded by trees  Description automatically generated with low confidenceThe wreckage of U.S. Air Force CH-53 helicopters KNIFE 23 (left) and KNIFE 31 (right), shot down during the battle, lying on Koh Tang's East Beach shortly after the battle |
|

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Date** | 12–15 May 1975 |
| **Location** | [Koh Tang](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Koh_Tang), [Kampuchea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Kampuchea) |
| **Result** | Successful release of SS Mayaguez and crew |

 |
| **Belligerents** |
|  [United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States) | Cambodia [Kampuchea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kampuchea) |
| **Commanders and leaders** |
| Randall W. Austin | Em Son |
| **Units involved** |
| [1st Battalion, 4th Marines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1st_Battalion%2C_4th_Marines)[2nd Battalion, 9th Marines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2nd_Battalion%2C_9th_Marines)[21st Special Operations Squadron](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/21st_Special_Operations_Squadron)[40th Aerospace Rescue and Recovery Squadron](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/40th_Aerospace_Rescue_and_Recovery_Squadron)23rd Tactical Air Support Squadron3rd Tactical Fighter Squadron[USS Henry B. Wilson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Henry_B._Wilson_%28DDG-7%29)[USS Harold E. Holt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Harold_E._Holt_%28FF-1074%29)[USS Coral Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USS_Coral_Sea_%28CV-43%29) [Carrier Air Wing 15](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carrier_Air_Wing_15) |
| **Strength** |
| ~300 | ~100 |
| **Casualties and losses** |
| 38 Killed in Action50 wounded3 captured (later executed)3 helicopters destroyed.—-**Crashed USAF CH-53:**23 Killed LOD, helicopter destroyed. | 13–25 killed on Koh TangUnknown killed on Swift Boats and Cambodian mainland15 wounded4 Swift Boats sunk |