



The Last Firefight

The desperate and confused battle triggered by the Mayaguez incident was a disturbing finale to America's war in Southeast Asia

BY RIC HUNTER



COULD IT GET ANY WORSE? Two weeks earlier, April 29, 1975. Saigon had fallen to the North Vietnamese—just a couple of weeks after the Khmer Rouge took Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh. Flying F-4D Phantoms out of Korat Royal Thai Air Force Base in Thailand, I had helped destroy anti-aircraft artillery and surface-to-air missile sites during the Saigon evacuation, and provided combat support for the evacuation of Phnom Penh. As events played out in Southeast Asia, America was on the run. It seemed the proverbial dominoes were indeed falling and, we wondered, would Thailand's capital, Bangkok, be next?

Rumors travel at warp speed on a small base like Korat, and on May 12 a wild one about an American ship hijacked in the Gulf of Thailand was spreading around the squadron dinner table. This one, however, was all too true. At 2:20 p.m. local time that day, about 300 miles to our south, a machine gunner on a Khmer gunboat had

FINAL ASSAULT Believing *Mayaguez* crewmen were being held by Khmers on Koh Tang Island, Marines and a wet-suit-clad Air Force pararescueman ran to an HH-53 Jolly on May 15, 1975, during the last firefight of the war.

fired a few rounds across the bow of a U.S.-flagged container ship, SS *Mayaguez*, triggering what would be a fittingly tragic and costly final firefight in what had been a tragic and costly war for the United States.

At Korat we reacted bitterly. Were we about to taste yet another defeat in Southeast Asia? Would this be another *Pueblo* incident? We were energized—and mad as hell.

After duty hours, the squadron's pilots and weapon system operators trickled into the operations building, where we learned that the Khmer Communists had hijacked the container ship *Mayaguez* in international waters eight nautical miles from Poulo Wai, an atoll claimed by Khmer Communists and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam. We also learned that President Gerald Ford was demanding the release of the ship and its 40-man crew. Being the nearest airborne firepower to the action, if a game was to be played, we wanted in on it.

At 2 p.m. the next day, two F-111A aircraft on an unarmed training mission from Korat spotted *Mayaguez* off Koh Tang Island. Four armed A-7Ds from the 3rd Tactical Fighter Squadron at Korat launched 45 minutes later to replace the F-111s and surveil *Mayaguez*. When the ship started to move, the A-7s fired rockets and 20mm Vulcan Gatling gun rounds across its bow, halting *Mayaguez's* passage.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered 24-hour surveillance, and AC-130A/H Spectre gunships from the 16th Special Operations Squadron at Korat, equipped with infrared and low-light level television, began orbiting above the island and *Mayaguez*. Washington also ordered, "Halt any boat movement to the mainland." Typically, we would try to turn or stop the vessels, and if they would not comply, we would ultimately seek clearance to destroy them.

At 3:30 a.m. on May 14, one of the Spectres received heavy .50-caliber and 40mm fire from a Khmer patrol boat near Koh Tang. It returned fire with 53 rounds of 40mm, forcing the boat to run aground.

At dawn the crisis escalated when four Khmer gunboats left Koh Tang for the Cambodian mainland. Spectre 51, on the scene, was directed to fire across the boats' bows and prevent them from reaching the coast. The gunship's 40mm and 105mm howitzer managed to turn three of the boats back. Flights of F-111As, F-4Ds and A-7Ds attacked in front of the remaining boat with 2,000-pound bombs, 2.75-inch rockets and riot control gas, but it refused to turn around.

A flight of four A-7Ds used 20mm cannons to try to disable the gunboat's engines, but while the stern was set ablaze, the strafing didn't kill the engines. The A-7Ds were then directed to sink the boat, which Lt. Col. Don Robotoy and his wingman did.

A few minutes later, at about 7:15 a.m., a different kind of boat—a wooden 40-foot Thai fishing craft, *Sinvari*—was observed leaving the island for the Cambodian mainland with several Caucasians, thought to be *Mayaguez* crew members, onboard. On my way from Korat in my Phantom, I was among the flight of A-7Ds and F-4Ds tasked with turning the fishing boat back.

We tried for four hours to force the boat back to Koh Tang. Frustratingly, several of us were unable to fire rockets in front of the boat because our F-4s had not been properly armed on the ground prior to takeoff. The only other armament on board was an SUU-23 centerline pod carrying a Vulcan Gatling gun. Adding insult to injury, when I selected the gun station, the centerline ar-

moment circuit breakers popped, leaving me without any weaponry. Enraged, I thought, "I've got a screwed up jet, just like this screwed up war." The only thing left for me to do was drop low and try to get a good look at the boat.

I rolled my F-4 on its left wing in front of *Simvari* and could clearly see people lining each side of the curved, upward-sloping bow. They appeared to be Caucasians, doubled over in the school-house air-raid position with their hands protecting their heads. As a few of them looked up at me, I felt profoundly helpless. Low on fuel, we left *Simvari* after about 30 minutes on target. Two A-7s watched it enter the port of Kompong Som and dock at about 10:15.

After we landed at Korat, our intelligence personnel told us *Simvari* made it to the mainland and that the *Mayaguez* crew was now most likely in prison there. *Mayaguez* Captain Charles T. Miller would later tell the *Honolulu Star Bulletin*: "You have to give our pilots a lot of credit. They can hit the eye of a needle. They did everything possible to get [the fishing boat] to turn around. It was clear that they saw we were in the boat. Two jets flew 70 feet above us...the Thais turned back once, but Cambodian guards put guns to their heads."

I will always regret not photographing *Simvari* and the captive crew with the 35mm camera I carried in my cockpit map case. I was too angry about flying a toothless Phantom to think of photography. If the entire crew had been accounted for at that point, perhaps the bloody battle that was about to ensue might have been avoided.

BECAUSE OF CONFLICTING intelligence reports, it was believed that some of the crew were still being held on Koh Tang Island. As a result, President Ford ordered simultaneous attacks on *Mayaguez* and on Koh Tang. At dawn on May 15, 11 Air Force helicopters—CH-53s and HH-53s—left from U Tapao in southern Thailand and approached Koh Tang from the northwest.

The Sikorsky CH-53 "Knife" and HH-53 "Jolly Green" were not ordinary helicopters. Much larger than Vietnam's ubiquitous UH-1 "Huey," they were armor plated and equipped with 7.62mm rapid firing miniguns. Both were rescue helicopters, with guns in the waist positions, but the HH-53 was air refuelable, had 450-gallon foam-filled tip tanks (self-sealing in case of damage) and had an additional minigun in the tail. Much more survivable than most choppers, the rescue helicopters would be taken to their limits on Koh Tang.

Three choppers separated and unloaded a reinforced 57-man platoon from the 1st Battalion, 4th Marines onto the destroyer escort *Harold E. Holt*, which had sped to the scene. Their mission would be to board and secure *Mayaguez*. As *Holt* slowly moved alongside *Mayaguez*, an A-7 dropped tear gas on the merchant ship. Gas-masked Marines then executed a hostile ship-to-ship assault at 7:25 a.m., only to find the ship deserted.

The other eight helicopters, with 170 Marines of the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines aboard, continued on to Koh Tang, an irregularly shaped island with its northern end resembling a slingshot.

Between the forks lay a U-shaped beach that would become the eastern, or primary landing zone (LZ). The western LZ would be situated across the neck of land.

The helos split as they approached the northern end of the island for a two-pronged assault. There was anti-aircraft artillery on the island, and it appeared to be heavily defended; because the survival of the ship's crew took precedence, there had been no naval bombardment to soften up the defenses. Knives 21 and 22 reached the western LZ first with no initial resistance. As Knife 21 pilot Lt. Col. John Denham touched down on the 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.

At the eastern LZ, 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. As he looked to his left, he saw Knife 31, piloted by Major Howard Corson, burst

into flames from the intense enemy barrage and fall to the beach. Shramm 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.

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 co-pilot, 2nd Lt. Richard Vandegeer, fired an M-16 from his window. A grenade round slammed into the cockpit, killing Vandegeer. Although seriously injured, Major Corson somehow managed to maintain enough control to settle the aircraft down in the water. Wounded and dazed, 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 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). While swimming away from the beach on his back, and with enemy bullets sending up geysers all around him, Tonkin used Major Corson's small survival radio to call in airstrikes. At the same time, 1st Lt. John Lucas, co-pilot of Knife



CRISIS UPDATE A tuxedoed President Gerald R. Ford interrupts a formal White House event to get a report on the unfolding crisis on May 14, 1975.

SHANE F. FORD/PHOTODISC LIBRARY

23, 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.

Three of eight initial assault helicopters were down, two on the beach of the eastern landing zone, one a mile at sea. Battle damage forced a fourth helicopter down once back inside Thailand, and two more were severely damaged. An hour into the assault, only 54 Americans were on Koh Tang—about one-third of the number planned—and they were split into two groups. The day's battle was just getting started.

THREE A-7D CORSAIRS CIRCLED OVERHEAD and observed the CH-53s taking hits. Armed with 20mm cannons, they quickly rolled in and raked Khmer gun emplacements, silencing several. Repeatedly, the A-7s flew low over the island, trying to attract enemy fire and locate their positions. After each A-7 pass, Khmer troops, later believed to number about 85, resumed their fusillade against the Americans on the island.

Their situation was deteriorating fast. Scattered in tree lines along the eastern and western LZs, the Americans were at times no more than 20 meters from enemy positions. They desperately needed more Marine firepower. The 25 Americans trapped on the eastern beach from the two shot-down CH-53s were in the worst situation. Recognizing this, the Khmers used them as bait to lure more helicopters into the crossfire.

Several attempts were made to rescue the trapped Americans. According to an official report for General Louis L. Wilson, commander of Pacific Air Forces, shortly after 8 a.m. 1st Lt. Charles Greer, pilot of Jolly 13, 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.

Meanwhile on the western beach, between 6:30 and 9:30 a.m., Jollys 42 and 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.

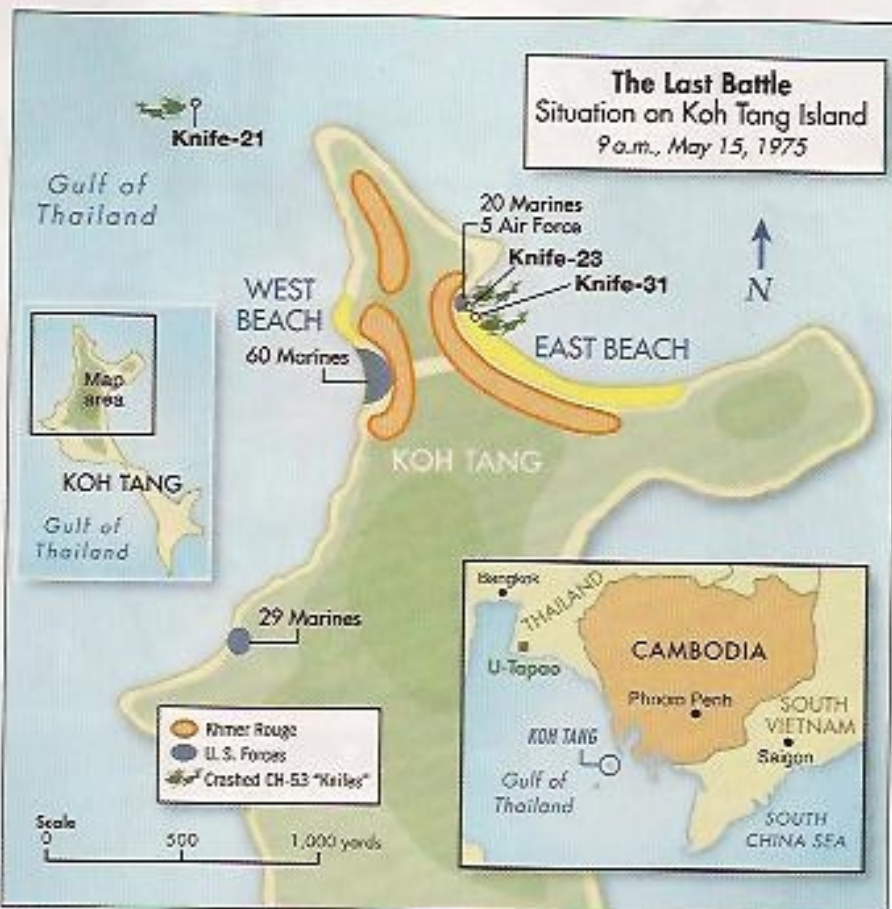
Jolly 41, piloted by 1st Lt. Thomas D. Cooper Jr., made two attempts to land at the western beach with his Marines, but was driven back by intense enemy fire, including .50-caliber machine gun rounds that hit the right fuel tank and ramp area. For an hour, Cooper made two more landing attempts, only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

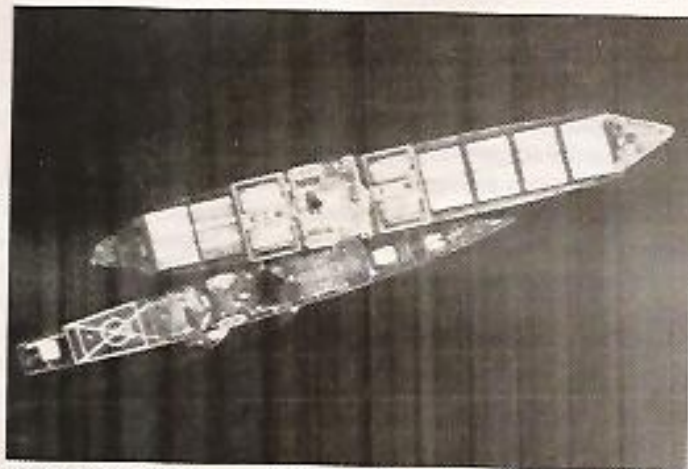
As he returned to hover for the last Marines to deplane, a mortar round passed through the rotor blades and exploded only 20 feet away, blowing a hole in the aircraft's belly. The HH-53 withdrew for the last time with its five Marines and returned to its staging base in Thailand. Severe damage prevented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

MEANWHILE, AROUND 7 THAT MORNING, the entire *Mayaguez* crew was released from captivity on the mainland and put back aboard *Sinvari* for transport back to *Mayaguez*, this time under a white flag and without Khmer escorts. At 10:05 a.m., as Lieutenant Cooper was making his valiant attempts to insert his Marines on Koh Tang, the *Mayaguez* crew, safe and unharmed, was picked up by the destroyer USS *Henry B. Wilson* and soon transferred back to *Mayaguez*.

Suddenly and without explanation, the hostage crisis was over. There was jubilation at the White House, but a fierce day of fighting was still to come as the challenge shifted to getting the Americans on Koh Tang disengaged and evacuated. Before that could happen, more Marines were needed to stabilize the situation, and air insertion was the only option. The 131 Marines and five airmen



SHORT WAR The fight on Koh Tang, which lasted 14 hours and cost 21 American lives, started at dawn with the downing of three of the helicopters ferrying Marines to the heavily defended island.



SHIP TO SHIP Destroyer escort *Harold E. Holt* pulls alongside *Mayaguez* for the first ship-to-ship assault by the U.S. Navy since the early 19th century.

were now in three groups. Those on the western side of the island were split: 82 in one group and 29 south of their position on the same beach. The other 25 were isolated across the neck of the island near the eastern beach. Just five choppers were left to carry nearly 100 more Marines in for the assault and then to extract them all. After the battle started, two additional choppers were repaired and added to the effort.

Lieutenant Robert Rikitis, pilot of Knife 52, 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. 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.

Back at Korat, I was excited and a little apprehensive when my squadron commander, Lt. Col. Phil Offill, called me into the command center and told me to pick my flight members for a four-ship flight and let him know the ordnance for the mission. I reviewed the squadron flight schedule and chose from aircrew available. We were needed sooner than expected. In mid-afternoon, our pre-mission briefing was interrupted with an urgent call to get airborne as soon as we could.



EMPTY VESSEL Early on the morning of May 15, gas-masked Marines from the destroyer escort *Holt* board *Mayaguez* to secure it, but find no crewmen or enemy aboard. The merchant ship, floating about a quarter-mile off the tip of Koh Tang Island, had been saturated with tear gas dropped from an A-7.

CONFIDENTIAL



INOE

KNIFE-23 & KNIFE-31

CRASH SITES

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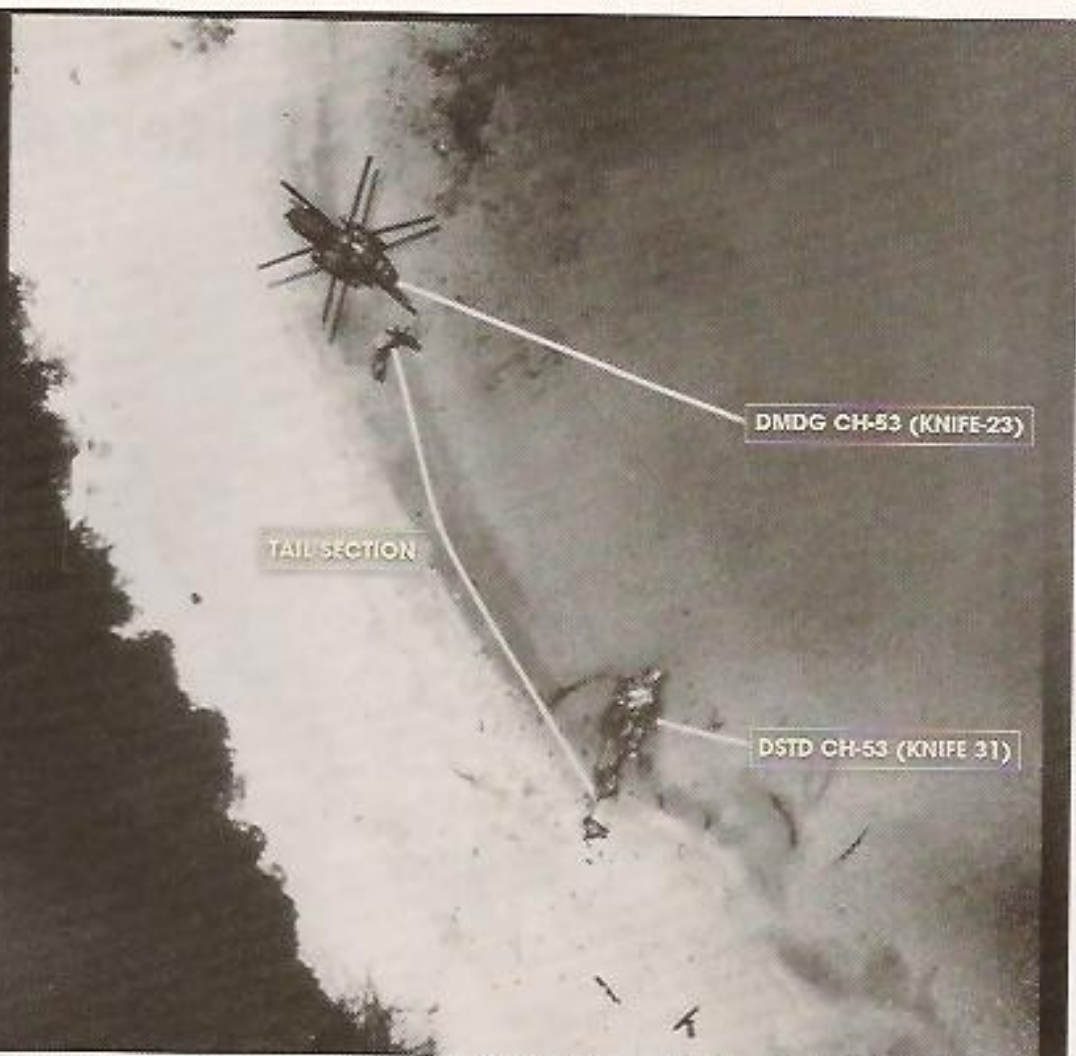
DURING-STRIKE
TOT-04442

FIGURE 5

8X ENLARGEMENT
SBTEES 15 MAY 75
0034 PAN



CONFIDENTIAL
NO FOREIGN DISSEM



KILLING CROSSFIRE Khmer gunners hidden in foliage along the beach on Koh Tang patiently held their fire as Knife 23 and Knife 31 descended to the ground to unload Marines before unleashing a crossfire of automatic weapons and rocket-propelled grenades, bringing down both helicopters.

After air-refueling over the Gulf of Thailand, our four F-4Ds, call sign "Bucktail," flew east to Koh Tang. Around 4:30, we checked in with "Cricket," an EC-130 serving as the Airborne Battlefield Command and Control aircraft orbiting the island.

"Cricket, Bucktail, four fox-fours with you, 68 miles northwest of the island."

"Bucktail, proceed inbound pronto, I've got work for you with Nail 68."

"Bucktail's pushing it up."

As the island came into view, I visualized the air power stacked overhead to make an extraction possible. Looking vertically, an OV-10A Bronco, "Nail 68," was lowest with another, "Nail 47," above him. We were next in the stack with Cricket, the EC-130, above us, and above them was a flight of four C-130s with 15,000-pound bombs waiting to clear jungle undergrowth for landing zones. Just departing Koh Tang was "Coach" flight, which had dropped eight 2,000-pound MK-84 bombs on the island.

Our F-4s had the only weapons suitable for use in close support of our forces engaged with the enemy. We checked in with the higher forward air controller, Nail 47.

"Bucktail, Nail 47, go ahead with your line-up."

"Roger, all four F-4s have 20mm, numbers one and three have LAU-3 rockets, two and four have MK-82s [500-pound bombs]"

"Nail 47, copy."

"Bucktail, green 'em up [arm weapons]."

"Bucktail, this is Nail 68, I'll take over now. Do you see me over the north end of the island?"

"Roger."

"OK, FAC is in to mark, where my rocket goes will be the target."

"Bucktail is tally-ho, the target is the hooches."

"Affirmative, you're restricted to a run-in heading to the southeast only. There are friendlies just to the northwest. Can you put your rockets where I just put that rocket?"

"Bucktail, affirmative. How many do you want?"

"Let's try two pods on the first pass. Knife two-dash-three, [the survivors of Knife 23, the downed CH-53 in the tree line] keep your heads down please. Bucktail, you're cleared hot."

"Bucktail's in hot, FAC in sight."

I pressed in close, working the gun sight precisely to the target, trimming the heavy jet to feel light as a feather and then unleashing the rockets. With that, 152 rockets tipped with white phosphorus that would burn through anything in their path slammed into the heart of the enemy encampment area.

As I came off target, I remembered my best friend in high school who was a 19-year-old Marine killed near Quang Tri, South Vietnam, on July 22, 1966. His name and the date he died were on my

The Mayaguez Crisis: Misery and Irony

Upon the Communist victories in Vietnam and Cambodia in late April 1975, their respective governments fell into a dispute about control of some of the islands in the Gulf of Thailand. In an effort to assert their power in the area, several Cambodian gunboats seized the American container ship *Mayaguez* on May 12 as it plied the regular shipping lanes, and the next day anchored it off Koh Tang Island, 50 miles south of the Cambodian mainland.

Although the United States had yet to recognize the government of the Khmer Rouge, President Gerald R. Ford attempted to find a diplomatic solution through Chinese channels. When that appeared unlikely, Ford ordered a rescue mission to Koh Tang, unaware

that a fishing trawler had already transferred all of *Mayaguez's* 40-man crew to Kompong Som on the mainland. Once the assault started on May 15, it encountered unexpectedly heavy resistance because, unknown to the Americans, the Cambodians had fortified Koh Tang in anticipation of a Vietnamese invasion that would, in fact, occur a month later.

Meanwhile, the Khmer Rouge government, realizing the trouble its gunboat crews had stirred up and fearing sustained U.S. bombing against Kompong Som's airport, had transferred *Mayaguez's* men to Rong Sam Lem Island, loaded them onto a recently seized Thai fishing boat and sent them back out to sea, where they were picked up by the destroyer *Henry B. Wilson*.

By then, however, the operation against Koh Tang had been underway for about four hours, four helicopters had been shot down and the second assault wave, initially recalled, had to go back to evacuate the first wave of Marines from the island.

Ultimately, the battle to rescue Americans who had already been released cost the lives of 17 Marines, two Navy corpsmen and two Air Force personnel. The names of those men killed on Koh Tang are inscribed on the last panel of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall. Eighteen Air Force security personnel, intended to be part of the operation's assault team, and five crewmen were also killed in a helicopter crash en route to U Tapao on May 13.

Jon Guttman

Zippo lighter. I felt for it through my flight suit pocket and said to myself, "This mission was for you, Tim Davies."

Nail 68's enthusiasm was obvious, "That's it, my friends, that's it!" Bucktail 2 and 4 then followed up with a dozen 500-pound bombs.

Khmer Communist forces were hit hard but continued strong resistance as our choppers cycled to and from the island into the evening. "Although all three helicopters [Knife 51, Jolly 11 and

12] raked the shoreline with minigun and submachine gun fire, Jolly 11 took ground fire from all quadrants, some less than 50 meters away," Captain Thomas Des Brisay said in his official report on the operation, when describing the last extraction effort on the eastern beach. "The Marines began an orderly withdrawal from the troc line, stopping every few feet to fire their weapons. Enemy resistance was almost fanatical."

At one point, Captain Brisay said that as they realized the Marines were escaping from their grasp, "Cambodian soldiers stormed the helicopter and reached hand-grenade range. Just as one of them started to throw his grenade the whole group was cut down by minigun and rifle fire."

Air Force pararescuemen poured M-16 fire at Khmer forces as they pulled wounded Marines aboard the CH-53. From defensive positions on the beach around the big chopper, other Marines returned fire through a pall of smoke.

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. First Lieutenant Richard C. Brims' CH-53, Knife 51, ripped a minigun fury along a tree-lined beach of the western landing zone.



EXTRACTION OPERATION Rescue ship Jolly-43, followed by Jolly-13, approaches Koh Tang's east beach in the face of Khmer Rouge rocket-propelled grenades and machine gun fire, which forced it to turn back.



SURPRISE RELEASE As the desperate battle intensifies on Koh Tang, the *Mayaguez* crew is released and sent on the Thai trawler *Sinvari* to the destroyer *Henry B. Wilson*, which picks them up and delivers them safely back aboard *Mayaguez*. The final battle of the Vietnam War ultimately cost 21 American lives.

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 Hall, Lance Cpl. Joseph Hargrove and Private Danny 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. ☆

Ric Hunter retired as an Air Force colonel with 3,800 hours in high performance T-38, F-4 and F-15 aircraft, and three Top Gun Awards in the F-15 Eagle.

COMBAT DOGS: BEST VIET CONG DETECTORS

VIETNAM



SAIGON'S MYSTIQUE
Why reporters never seem to get enough

over the borderline
**7 weeks in
CAMBODIA**

June 1970:
1st Cavalry
troops inside
Cambodia

**Escape
from
POW hell**

**The
last 21
names
on the
Wall**

