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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MIA MARINES IDENTIFIED FROM MAYAGUEZ INCIDENT

Six Marines missing in action from the Vietnam War have been accounted for and their remains are being returned to their families for burial in the United States.

They are identified as Lance Cpl. Gregory S. Copenhaver, Port Deposit, Md.; Lance Cpl. Andres Garcia, Carlsbad, N.M.; Pfc. Walter Boyd, Norfolk, Va.; and Pfc. Kelton R. Turner, Los Angeles, Calif. The names of two Marines are being withheld at the request of their families.

On May 12, 1975, Khmer Rouge gunboats captured the SS Mayaguez in the Gulf of Thailand approximately 60 nautical miles off the coast of Cambodia. The vessel was taken to Koh [island] Tang. Alerted to the capture, U.S. Navy and Air Force aircraft began surveillance flights around the island. After efforts to secure the release of the ship and its crew failed, U.S. military forces were ordered to undertake a rescue mission.

Three days after the Mayaguez seizure, six Air Force helicopters were dispatched to the island. One of the helicopters came under heavy enemy fire as it approached the eastern beach of the island. The aircraft crashed into the surf with 26 men on board. Half were rescued at sea, leaving 13 unaccounted-for.

The United States, Cambodian and Vietnamese government efforts to resolve the cases of these unaccounted-for Marines was massive. Between 1991-99, U.S. and Cambodian investigators conducted seven joint investigations, led by the Joint Task Force-Full Accounting.

Additionally, 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 helicopter crash site where they located numerous remains, personal effects and aircraft debris associated with the loss. The USS Brunswick, a Navy salvage vessel, enabled the specialists to conduct their excavation off shore.

In addition to the support provided by the Cambodian government, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam also interviewed two Vietnamese informants in Ho Chi Minh City who turned over remains that were later positively identified.

With the accounting of these six Marines, 2,022 Americans remain missing in action from the Vietnam War. Another 561 have been identified and returned to their families since the end of the war. Analysis of the remains and other evidence was made by the U.S. Army Central Identification Laboratory Hawaii, which also conducted all the remains recovery operations. The CILHI made extensive use of mitochondrial DNA as one of the forensic identification tools to establish the identity of these men.

The U.S. government welcomes and appreciates the cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam that resulted in the accounting of these servicemen. We hope that such cooperation will bring increased results in the future. Achieving the fullest possible accounting for these Americans is of the highest national priority.