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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

August 28, 1975

ADMINISTRATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR:

ROBERT LINDER

FROM:

JIM CONNOR



The attached material was returned in the President's outbox with the following notation:

"Let me have log etc. for Oval Office"

You are requested to have this material prepared for display in the Oval Office. It is our suggestion that this be done by means of a very thin plastic page notebook.

cc: Don Rumsfeld

Attachment:

Letter from Robert A. Griffin  
Enclosing log of the SS MAYAGUEZ

**August 27, 1975**

**Dear Mr. Griffin:**

**Thank you very much for your letter of August 5 enclosing a portion of the Log of the SS MAYAGUEZ for May 15, 1975. It was thoughtful and generous of you to provide the original chronology which you maintained as the MAYAGUEZ was retaken and its entire crew safely returned. Future historians will certainly find this document, as well as the narrative of your own participation in the MAYAGUEZ experience, an invaluable assistant in fully understanding the events of that day.**

**It was a pleasure to be able to meet with you here at the White House last month, and I commend you again for the skill and courage which you dedicated to the success of the MAYAGUEZ mission.**

**With personal best wishes,**

**Mr. Robert A. Griffin  
USNS Greenville Victory (T-AK 237)  
FPO New York, New York 09501**

**GRF:JHH:RLE:aby**

THIS IS THE ORIGINAL LOG KEPT BY ME ABOARD  
THE MAYAGUEZ. IT WAS TYPED ON THE MASTER'S  
TYPEWRITER IN HIS STATEROOM ABOARD THE SS  
MAYAGUEZ.

THE PENCIL NOTATIONS ON THE BOTTOM OF THE  
SHEET WAS INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM THE  
USS HOLT. THE TIME OF 0834 FOR MSC PERSONNEL  
ABOARD I BELIEVE TO BE ERRONEOUS SINCE  
CAPTAIN HARRIMAN WAS ON THE BRIDGE OF THE  
SS MAYAGUEZ AT APPROXIMATELY 0745. I TRIED  
TO JOIN HIM AT 0755 BUT WAS HALTED. MR.  
HARRIMAN WAS TO RAISE THE FLAG ON THE VESSEL  
BUT ALLOWED THE MARINES TO DO "IN THE BEST  
TRADITION OF THE CORPS."





Let me  
have log etc for  
Oral Office

INTER-OFFICE CORRESPONDENCE

DATE: Thursday 15 May 1975

TO:

FROM:

SUBJECT:

1015 USS HOLT LET GO LINES PREPARING TO TAKE UP TOW  
1017 ATTEMPTING TO PASS TOW LINE THRU BRIDLE  
~~1037~~ USS HOLT BACKING EASY  
1040 USS HOLT NOW SLOW AHEAD  
1045 TOW LINE FAST -- ANCHOR CHAIN CUT (PORT) AND AWAY  
1045 SS MAYAGUEZ UNDERWAY IN TOW WITH USS HOLT  
1117 SPEED 3 KNOTS IN TOW  
1130 SMALL FISHING BOAT PROCEEDING TOWARD SHIP FLYING WHITE FLAG.  
USS WILSON STATIONED ASTERN TO INTERCEPT IF NECESSARY.  
1140 MASTER OF VESSEL RETURNED ONBOARD BY KIMBER ROUSE. REPORTS ALL CREW  
OF SS MAYAGUEZ TO BE RETURNED. ASSUMED COMMAND WITH CLINTON HARRIMAN,  
USNS GREENVILLE VICTORY BRIEFING MASTER.  
~~1144~~ SMALL FISHING BOAT NOW MOORED ALONGSIDE USS HOLT.  
~~1145~~ US MARINE SECURITY DETACHMENT PREPARING TO DISSEMBLE  
1205 ALL CREW MEMBERS NOW ONBOARD.  
1205 FISHING BOAT AWAY FROM USS HOLT AND PROCEEDING UNDER OWN POWER.

*R. Griffin*  
R. GRIFFIN

USNS GREENVILLE VICTORY

0831 Master Onboard  
0820 Flag raised on SS Mayaguez  
0834 MSC personnel onboard

*J*

Report of SS MAYAGUEZ Incident:

ROBERT A. GRIFFIN, Yeoman-Storekeeper(P), MSCA 43460

1. At approximately 2230 on 13 May while in my hotel room on Liberty I received a telephone call from the MSC Phil office requesting I report to MSC Office at the request of the Master. I queried as to the reason but was told that the information could not be divulged over the phone. I immediately thought of trouble at home and rushed back to the base. I arrived at the MSC Office and was informed of the need for volunteers to go to Cambodia and take over control of the SS MAYAGUEZ. I informed the MSC officer that I was the Yeoman-Storekeeper aboard the USNS GREENVILLE VICTORY and did not understand what purpose I could serve on this mission but yes, I would certainly be willing to go. From the MSC Office I walked to the ship where I met the Master, First Officer and COMSCO Phil. I was shown a message which requested six volunteers to sail the SS MAYAGUEZ from Cambodian waters and advised of the dangers I would probably be facing. I told them I still would volunteer and was honored that I was considered for this mission. I was then informed of the names of the other volunteers and knew that a capable crew was to be involved. I was still a little puzzled over why they would need a man in my position and I was informed that I would be a helmsman and also assist in duties on deck. Since I had handled ~~the~~ our own vessel before I knew I was capable. I also was to assist in communications since I had 8 years of Morse communications in the Air Force prior to joining MSC, and a signalman might be required at some point of the voyage. After the briefing I was given a short time to pack and at midnight we departed the USNS GREENVILLE VICTORY for the Naval Air Station at Cubi Point, RP.
2. On arrival at the aircraft we were informed that there was no more space available and that the MSC personnel would have to wait for another aircraft.

LCDR Capie, COMSCO Phil, then stepped in and made space for us on the aircraft. Needless to say I was excited at this opportunity to be a part of this important operation ~~which~~ ~~negated~~ the uncomfortable hot and cramped space on the aircraft.

U-TAPAO

3. After landing at ~~U-TAPAO~~ RTAFB in Sattahip, Thailand we made a dry run out to the runway where we were informed we would be moving out any minute. Mr. Harriman went to a briefing while we remained on the runway. Upon his return he briefed us and told us we would stand by until approx. 1200 when we depart for the SS MAYAGUEZ by helicopter. We were then given transportation back to the base gym where cots were set up.

4. At midmorning a Marine major and an entourage of other military officers arrived with aerial recon photos of the SS MAYAGUEZ. One of the military plans was to saturate the bridge of the SS MAYAGUEZ with gunfire and anti-personnel gas. Mr. Harriman and myself requested that gunfire be kept to a minimum in the bridge area because of the need for the compass and the danger of destroying the radar and wheel. (I did have a small military compass with me which I brought for just that reason.) The MSC Engineering volunteers also briefed the military officer on procedures for effective dispersal of tear gas in the Engine Room if necessary.

5. Throughout the day the time for launching of the aircraft to Cambodia was pushed back. We were informed that diplomatic processes were being tried in lieu of armed intervention. It was 1800 on 14 May when ~~I WAS~~ <sup>I WAS</sup> finally able to get some sleep. The mission was scheduled for 0400 on 15 May. At 2100 ~~I WAS~~ <sup>I WAS</sup> roused from ~~my~~ <sup>MY</sup> sleep on orders to get ready to depart at once for the aircraft. Again, it was a dry run and the original time for 0400 was still set.

6. At 0330 we boarded buses for the run out to the airport and on boarding the helicopter I was given a flak jacket, helmet and gas mask. The Marines

on our chopper were very helpful and assisted in adjusting this unfamiliar equipment for us. At 0400 we departed. While orbiting near Koh Tang island I was watching one of the helicopters to the rear of us. Suddenly a very brilliant flash appeared which I thought was a flare. It was then I saw the gesture of the Airman in the rear of ~~the~~ our chopper and realized the helicopter I had been watching was shot down. I was surprised that I wasn't scared - maybe I was just too tired to be scared - but the one thought in my mind was getting to the SS MAYAGUEZ and sailing her away.

7. At approx. 0530 we were over the USS HOLT and descended to approx. 4 feet of her deck. Since the chopper was too heavy and large to come all the way down I had to jump the 4 feet to her deck. I was then directed to proceed to the upper deck midships where I took cover behind ~~and~~ an exhaust vent. Enemy gunfire from Koh Tang was very evident. The USS HOLT then began to proceed to the USS MAYAGUEZ and all personnel were instructed to clear the decks in anticipation of hostile fire from the SS MAYAGUEZ and as precaution against the impending gas attack from US aircraft. I went to a room with the other MSC volunteers and there we donned our gas masks and rechecked our equipment. When the Marines were boarded over the side we were instructed to report to the bridge of the USS HOLT in preparation for boarding the SS MAYAGUEZ. Mr. Harriman, OIC of the MSC personnel on the mission called us all together. I was instructed to go to the bridge with him. At 0755 I boarded the SS MAYAGUEZ but was stopped by a Marine major who ordered me to return to the USS HOLT since the ship had not been completely checked out yet. I tried to inform the major of my duties and intentions but he could not understand me since it is very difficult to talk and be heard while wearing a gas mask. I tried to get Mr. Harriman's attention so he would know where I was but to no avail. Rather than jeopardize our position I returned to the bridge of the USS HOLT. Immediately after the flag raising ceremony I was allowed to reboard the SS MAYAGUEZ. I reported directly to Mr. Harriman on the bridge

of the SS MAYAGUEZ as instructed. I checked the ~~steering system~~ <sup>WHEEL</sup> and found it intact and ready for use when power was restored. I then proceeded to the bow to assist Mr. Lonsdale in readying the tow line. While flaking out <sup>of</sup> the tow line I came in contact with a pocket of gas. My hands, arms and neck started to burn but getting the ship ready was of primary importance. Although hostile action was intense on Koh Tang Island and undispersed pockets of gas were still on the ship, flak jackets, helmets and gas masks had to be removed in order to work easier and faster. At any moment we expected firing to start being directed at the SS MAYAGUEZ. The anti-personnel gas was lying in pockets under the mooring lines and every time it was moved more gas would burn the exposed parts ~~of~~ of the body. (Next time I'll be sure to bring long sleeve shirts). After the line was flaked out Mr. Lonsdale had the situation in hand in making up the bridle so I reported back to the bridge to offer further assistance to Mr. Harriman. Prior to reporting ~~I washed~~ <sup>I WASHED</sup> down my face, neck, hands and arms with fresh water to relieve the burning. Upon reporting to the bridge Mr. Harriman requested I try to find the ~~Deck~~ Bridge Log Book. I searched the bridge area and finally found it in a corner in the chart room. I inspected the pages and found none torn out or missing. The chart used by the Mayaguez at the time of boarding was still on the chart table but since we were going to use it I left it there. I took the Bridge Log and locked it in my suitcase to prevent any unauthorized party from confiscating it. I then went down to the radio shack to familiarize myself with the equipment onboard. The radio appeared undamaged and a hand key and speed key were still in place and connected. If necessary - when full power was restored the radio could be used. I was unfamiliar with the switchover procedures to Emergency Battery so I left that alone. Prior to leaving the radio shack I secured the Radio Log and some scraps of paper which appeared to have Cambodian or Thai hand lettering on them and locked them in my suitcase. Upon returning to the bridge I commenced in keeping our own Deck Log. On the bridge I found the Aldis Lamp



which I was concerned about, since there were no signal lights installed on the bridge of the SS MAYAGUEZ. While the tow line was being passed to us from the USS HOLT I assisted Mr. Harriman on the bridge by keeping in touch with the bow by sound powered telephone. The bow is completely out of sight of the bridge due to the height of the containers on deck and this was our only way of coordinating the hook up. I also found the Dangerous Cargo Manifest and brought it to the attention of Mr. Harriman. Plans by the USS HOLT were to tow the SS MAYAGUEZ under the 'noses of the Cambodians'. Once the nature of the cargo was known (cotton, paint, naptha and assorted gases) it was deemed advisable to get the MAYAGUEZ out of range of Koh Tang and enemy gunfire ASAP. We were still lying approximately 1 mile from shore. At approximately 1120, Mr. Rodriguez, one of the MSC Engineering volunteers, came to me for assistance in finding the source of a tank near the Emergency Generator. I took him to the Chief Engineers office where I presumed the blueprints of the SS MAYAGUEZ were kept, and found a plan of the Emerg. Diesel Generator and a Deck plan. At this point a man came up from behind and said, "Who the Hell are you?" My reply in the best of MSC tradition was - "Who the Hell are you ???". After our initial greeting and shock I met the Chief Engineer of the SS MAYAGUEZ. He informed me the crew would be returning and they would take over from here. I reported back to the bridge and met Mr. Miller, Master of the SS MAYAGUEZ, who was engaged in discussions with Mr. Harriman. I informed Mr. Miller that I had been keeping a log of activities since boarding and turned it over to his Mate on Watch. I also returned the Ship's Log and Radio Log upon advice from Mr. Harriman. I then offered to remain on duty and assist the crew of the MAYAGUEZ in any way I could, so I remained on the bridge until approx 1400 hours assisting the Watch officer.

At 1900 word was received we would be transferred to an ATS tugboat for return to Sattahip, Thailand. On 16 May at 1230 we arrived in Sattahip. Mission accomplished.

4  
—  
August 5, 1975

encl  
Dear Mr. President,

My name is Robert A. Griffin and I was one of the six Military Sealift Command, Atlantic crew members to respond to the request for volunteers to sail the SS MAYAGUEZ from Cambodian waters.

R6  
Two weeks ago while we had the honor of meeting you in the Oval Office of the White House while Captain Miller presented you with the ship's wheel from the MAYAGUEZ you remarked that you would like to have a copy of the Log describing events of that famous day. While I was aboard the MAYAGUEZ I was keeping a brief Log of events which I would like to present to you. This Log eventually became part of the official log of the MAYAGUEZ since I presented a copy of it to Captain Miller upon his return to the MAYAGUEZ. This is the original however with my signature attached.

I am also enclosing a rough draft of my personal experiences while aboard the MAYAGUEZ. The purpose of this is to point out that the spirit of the American Merchant Marine and your own U.S. Government employees will defend the rights of America to International Waters. Mr. President, since I regard this as a personal letter please allow me to get one thing off my chest. I was very ashamed of Captain Miller for giving up his ship in that manner and very surprised that he received a medal for his actions. They had better not try anything with any ship I am on or they will be in a lot of trouble and the other five volunteers I was with (one of them presently the Master of this vessel) feel the same way. We are Americans and we refuse to be disgraced or to disgrace our country.

Thank you Mr. President.

*Robert A. Griffin*  
Robert A. Griffin