

BOAT RAMMING STIRS CRITICISM

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But 2 Coast Guardsmen
Have Another View

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. (AP) —Separate barrages of criticism from a Florida congressman and a Miami-based Cuban refugee group were leveled Wednesday on the handling of a Cuban ship's deliberate ramming of a lifeboat carrying three men.

But two Coast Guardsmen who watched the 15-hour drama reach a climax Tuesday off the Virginia coast emphasized it occurred in international waters and could have been classified the result of a "mutiny."

Lt. Cmdr. R. H. Elkins, Master Boatswain's Mate P. W. Caviness, Rep. Paul G. Rogers, D-Fla., and the militantly anti-Castro Citizens Committee for a Free Cuba all were commenting on actions by the 26 de Julio

TRIO'S FATE UNCERTAIN

The 292-foot Cuban cattle boat, which carried 21, was seized at gunpoint Monday night by four men who wanted to take it to the Norfolk area and from there seek political asylum, Coast Guard sources said.

One of the dissident crewmen dropped out for unknown reasons and when the remaining three attempted to escape in a lifeboat Tuesday afternoon, the 26 de Julio deliberately

Whether the trio was killed is uncertain, although Elkins quoted the master of the Cuban ship, Ricardo Puri, as saying the three were hauled aboard, wet but in good shape. No bodies were sighted after the incident, the Coast Guard said.

Caviness, skipper of one of two Coast Guard vessels present at the ramming, said when it began he lacked orders to take immediate action and without them "I would do the same thing this morning."

STRONG ACTION URGED

And Elkins noted the trio had apparently taken the ship by gunpoint on the high seas and "as this was his (Puri's) vessel, he could classify this as a mutiny."

But Rogers insisted Tuesday

night that "there should be standing orders on what to do when people are trying to flee to this country. It's time this government took strong action."

The Cuban group scored what it termed "the refusal of the United States to react," and said the ramming incident 10 miles east of Cape Henry "underscores our (the US) deteriorating prestige in Latin America."

Did the US refuse to react during the estimated 20 minutes the 26 de Julio made two ramming passes at the lifeboat? Caviness says no, once he received orders from Coast Guard superiors.

But, he told a news conference Tuesday in Little Creek, "I wasn't prepared to go out there and take action that might involve the whole nation and might be over my head."