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GUN SHOT DENIED

Nixon outing cut short as rumors fly

KEY BISCAIYNE, Fla. (UPI) — President Nixon ended a cruise he took yesterday afternoon with his friend Bebe Rebozo and flew home to his villa and, for some reason, a rumor began flying that a shooting incident ended the outing so abruptly.

But Secret Service and White House officials categorically denied the rumor.

SCENIC ROUTE

The boating trip ended on Coco Lobo Island on Elliott's Key 19 miles south of his Key Biscayne villa. He returned to his compound by helicopter because of the pressure of time and he wanted to take an aerial view of the keys, according to deputy press secretary Gerald Warren.

The whisking of the President from the island by helicopter set off rumors that he was being evacuated after a shot had been fired.

Jack Warren, public information officer for the Secret Service said "there was no activity that would endanger the President of the United States."

He also "categorically denied" that anyone had been taken into custody.

Mr. Warren's first knowledge that Mr. Nixon was on Mr. Rebozo's houseboat, also named "Coco Lobi II," came when he was asked by reporters to check reports of the incident.

COMMUNICATIONS GOOD

Presidential Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler, assuring reporters that nothing unusual had happened, said there had been "a slipup in communications."

The outing lasted for about two hours.

It was the second day in a row that Mr. Nixon had deserted his compound with Mr. Rebozo without keeping his aides informed of his whereabouts.

Mr. Nixon and Mr. Rebozo took a drive on Thursday afternoon to Coral Gables and around the University of Miami campus. Reporters were informed after the motor trip was under way and Mr. Ziegler told them that he was unable to determine the President's location.

Mr. Ziegler also informed newsmen yesterday the President also had taken a boat trip Thursday afternoon which he had not told them about earlier.

"It was a nice boat ride over there — and nothing more," Mr. Ziegler said.

Cuban ship seizure rankles

Caribbean alert; Navy on the way

MIAMI (UPI) — U.S. Navy and Air Force — armed and ready to intervene if necessary to protect American commercial vessels in the Caribbean — are on special alert today. A special task force is expected in the Caribbean later today.

The alert was called after Cuba said it would not free an American captain machine-gunned and captured with his Panamanian ship.

The State Department warned Havana that it would not tolerate any more attacks on Americans on the high seas.

NIXON REACTS

From his Key Biscayne, Fla., villa, President Nixon demanded that Cuba release Capt. Jose Villa, 55, captured along with his crew Wednesday night when his 1,400-ton ship Johnny Express, which flew the Panamanian flag, was attacked by two Cuban torpedo boats in the Bahamas.

Havana radio, quoting an editorial in the government-controlled newspaper Granma, said it would not "take a single backward step" and that Mr. Nixon's demand for Capt. Villa's release would be "flatly rejected."

Mr. Nixon met Thursday with the wife and children of Villa, whose 235-foot cargo vessel was strafed and seized in international waters about 120 miles off Cuba. There were 13 other crewmen aboard and several of them, including Villa apparently were wounded in the machinegun and mortar attack.

Cuba claimed the vessel was a "pirate ship" being used by CIA.

Cuba said thru the Granma editorial: "The hysterical statements and shouting of the U.S. government will not make the Cuban people take a single step backward in the determination to face the aggressors on whatever ground is necessary."

SHORE LEAVE

"Nixon, the Pentagon, the CIA and other imperialist hierarchs and lackeys are abundantly aware of this. Nixon's demands, blackmail and threats will be flatly rejected."

After the State Department-warning that all further attacks on unarmed commercial vessels in the Caribbean would be intolerable, the Pentagon said it was taking unspecified defensive measures. It was learned that U.S. Air Force and Navy fighter pilots were placed on alert and that sailors were recalled from shore leave.

Forces for the Caribbean alert could be withdrawn from the U.S. Navy base at Guan-

tanamo Bay, Cuba, Air Force bases along the Gulf Coast, including Florida, and from Navy bases at Norfolk, Va., Charleston, S.C., and other installations along the South Atlantic coast.

The Navy said the Norfolk-based Caribbean Ready Group, which consists of a destroyer, attack transport ship and four other vessels, had been alerted for possible duty. The Caribbean Ready Group is a task force normally assigned as a backup for survey and patrol of the Caribbean. The Navy would not say when the ships would depart.

On Dec. 17, Cuba seized a sister ship of the Johnny Express, the Layla Express, also with 14 crewmen and of Panamanian registry, and charged the ship with landing arms and infiltrators on the Cuban coast in 1968.

The Layla Express, like the Johnny Express, was operated by the Babun brothers, a Cuban exile family identified with forces strongly opposed to Castro. The Babuns, however, have denied any links with the CIA.

EXILE LEADER

Granma charged several weeks ago that "several Cubans were murdered in cowardly fashion and others wounded by a pirate vessel and it was necessary to amputate the leg of a young girl who was among the wounded."

The editorial said Cuban exile leader Jose Elias De La Torre had taken credit for the raid and called him "as CIA agent and buddy of Mr. Nixon." The editorial repeated an earlier promise that "no pirate ship will have any guarantee of safety."