

## Miami-Based Freighter

MIAMI, Fla. (AP) — A Miami-based freighter radioed it was sinking in the Atlantic Wednesday after being attacked and rammed by a Cuban gunboat off the eastern coast of Cuba the U.S. Coast Guard said.

The fate of the 15 crewmen was not known.

"We have a plane at the scene but it hasn't found anything," a Coast Guard spokesman said about six hours after the Johnny Express radioed it was under attack.

"It's possible it's sunk, been

captured or is under way elsewhere," the spokesman said. The search was continuing in darkness.

Cmdr. Howard Istock said Jose Villa, skipper of the Johnny Express, reported he had been shot in the back and two crewmen had been wounded.

Istock, chief of intelligence for the 7th Coast Guard District, said the last radio message from the Johnny Express was at 2:40 p.m. EST.

"It said that the ship had been rammed and was sinking," he said.

Istock said two Coast Guard planes from Florida and a Navy plane from Guantanamo Bay Naval Base were en route to the scene. "But if the boat sank and the Cubans took the crew aboard, there's nothing we can do."

The attack occurred near the Bahamas and about 100 miles off the eastern coast of Cuba, some 350 miles southeast of Miami.

The Johnny Express, operated by Miami-based Bahama Lines, was en route from Haiti back to Miami. Bahama Lines officials said the ship was unarmed.

The 235-foot vessel is a sister of the freighter Lula Express which was seized by the Cuban Navy Dec. 5 on charges that

## Sinking After Cuban Attack

some of its crew members were Cuban counter-revolutionaries.

Istock said the shipping line reported it received the Johnny Express' first mayday shortly before 1 p.m. He said the ship

reported it was going between Little and Great Inagua when a Cuban torpedo boat approached 50 yards off and opened fire with a machine gun.

"At first the Coast Guard said it did not plan to send any

ships or planes to the scene because "it's not a U.S. ship and not in U.S. waters."