

# Coast Guard Follows Cuban De

From News Dispatches

PORTSMOUTH, Va., Feb. 27—A Cuban ship put three would-be defectors overboard yesterday, then rammed their lifeboat bobbing in the sea off the coast of Virginia.

Wheeling for a second pass, the 910-ton Cuban fishing vessel slashed toward the defectors and their damaged lifeboat. U.S. Coast Guard crewmen aboard a nearby cutter reported hearing small-arms fire as the Cuban vessel steamed by the drifting men.

A few minutes later, the Cuban vessel

radioed the Coast Guard cutter Point Brown that it had recovered the refugees plus their boat and was leaving local waters. "The trouble is settled now. We go back to Cuba," the ship radioed the Coast Guard in broken English.

But the Point Brown, whose crew had observed the attack, trained its deck guns at the Cubans, holding them in the area. Meanwhile, another Coast Guard vessel, the seagoing tug Chock, steamed toward the scene with a boarding party of customs and immigration officials.

In Washington, Coast Guard spokesmen insisted that the Point Brown remained in U.S.

## fection Drama

territorial waters until after the ramming. They said further that the Cuban ship, the "26th of July," was 10 miles offshore when the ramming occurred.

Coast Guard jurisdiction ends three miles off the U.S. coast, at the U.S. territorial limit.

But, aerial photos taken by UPI show the tug Chock alongside the 26th of July's port side, with the cutter Point Brown standing by a hundred yards distant. The cannon on the Point Brown's foredeck was manned by

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any survivors. The Point Brown's armament consists of one 50-cal. machine gun and one 81-mm. mortar mounted over-and-under fashion on the foredeck.

Later, the unarmed tug Chock reached the scene and took up its position alongside the 26th of July, named for the anniversary of Fidel Castro's abortive attack on the Moncade Barracks in Cuba in 1953.

UPI cameraman Fred Lawrence, aboard a chartered plane circled the Cuban ship for about 30 minutes. "We saw a lifeboat hanging on the side of the ship with some people

deck with three men aboard it. The three began rowing toward shore, toward the Point Brown's observation point.

At 2 p.m., the Cuban vessel, under way with her anchor dragging, ran down the small

three crewmen, the photo revealed.

Whether the would-be defectors were alive, injured or dead was not immediately ascertained by the Coast Guard. The cutter that combed the area after the ramming found no survivors, but the Cuban skipper claimed over the radio that the would-be defectors had been plucked from the water and were safe aboard his vessel.

Nor could the Coast Guard explain what the Cuban ship was doing off the coast of Virginia. Its first contact with the Cubans reportedly was at 3 a.m. yesterday, when the Cubans radioed that a few of the 21 passengers aboard sought political asylum in the United States.

### May Have Seized Ship

There was speculation, however, that the defectors put adrift had seized control of the ship and ordered its captain to steer a course for Norfolk, Va.

After the ramming, observed by the Point Brown from a distance of 3 to 5 miles, the cutter sped to the scene, having been directed by Coast Guard authorities to rescue

in it. But we couldn't tell whether the boat had been lowered into the sea or taken up," he said.

Lawrence said "the Coast Guard radio told us there was a possibility the Cuban ship might fire on us and for us to get out of there immediately in that event." The photographer reported that the 26th of July headed out to sea at about 4 p.m., some two hours after the ramming.

### Chronology of Incident

Coast Guard headquarters in Washington refused to say how its cutter detained the Cubans on international waters for two hours—by gunpoint or persuasion. In response to queries, however, the service offered this chronology of the incident:

At 1 p.m., the Cuban ship was anchored 10 miles off Cape Henry, Va. Crewmen aboard the cutter Point Brown, three to five miles inshore, observed three men waving flags on the 26th of July's deck.

At 1:40 p.m., a small boat, apparently a lifeboat, was lowered from the Cuban ship's

boat. At this point even though the Point Brown was allegedly three to five miles away, its crew reported hearing small-arms fire.

Minutes later, the cutter was ordered by higher Coast Guard authority to steam to the scene and attempt rescue of the men in the water.

At 2:25 p.m., the Point

Brown began its search but found no survivors. At this point, the Cubans asked permission to pick up the damaged lifeboat.

At 3:30 p.m. the Cuban skipper radioed he had picked up three men, but the cutter's crew only observed the pickup of one. Then the 26th of July steamed eastward, out to sea.