

Cambodia Seizes

By Michael Getler
and Carroll Kilpatrick
Washington Post Staff Writers

An unarmed U.S. merchant ship was fired upon and seized by the crew of a Cambodian gunboat in the Gulf of Siam early yesterday morning.

The capture of the civilian vessel, reportedly some 60 miles off the Cambodian coast, immediately was branded an "act of piracy" by President Ford, who warned of "serious consequences" unless the ship and its 40-man crew were promptly released.

The episode was greeted with both shock and anger in Congress, with reaction ranging from a call for "immediate punitive air and naval attacks" by Sen. James L. Buckley (Cons.-R-N.Y.) to a call for "a little patience" and caution at the outset from Sens. Jacob K. Javits (R-N.Y.) and Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.).

After an emergency 45-minute meeting of the National Security Council at noon yesterday called by Mr. Ford, both White House and State Department spokesmen said the United States was taking immediate steps to obtain prompt release of the ship. But State Department spokesman Robert L. Funseth, said it would not be "helpful at this time" to discuss publicly just what the United States would do about the seizure.

Shortly after word of the seizure reached Washington early yesterday morning, U.S. reconnaissance planes

were ordered into the area. An American aircraft carrier, believed to be the Coral Sea, and several destroyers also were heading toward Cambodia but they were said to be a few days sailing time from the coast.

White House press secretary Ron

ently has been claimed by Vietnam and Cambodia for several years.

However, Sea-Land Corp. said the ship was 85 miles from the closest shoreline of Cambodia.

The United States considers all waters more than three miles off shore

Nessen, who announced the seizure of the vessel—the Mayaguez, owned by Sea-Land Corp. of Menlo Park N.J.—said the ship was captured, after being fired upon about 60 miles off the Cambodian coast and about eight miles from a small rock island that appar-

as being international waters, and President Ford yesterday charged that the ship had been seized "on the high seas" and forced into the Cambodian port of Kompong Som.

Cambodia, however, is one of about 40 nations claiming that territorial

waters extend 12 miles seaward. This could raise a question of whether the presence of the ship some eight miles off the coast of a tiny, disputed island will be used as a rationale by the new Communist government in Cambodia for intercepting it.

There was a variety of reasons offered yesterday as to why the Cambodians seized the ship. Some sources thought the newly victorious Cambodians "might just be feeling their oats." Others speculated that they were trying to insure their claim to offshore islands and to extended offshore waters which may contain oil.

Late yesterday, Nessen also said he had been told that a Panamanian ship

U.S. Merchant Ship

also had been stopped by the Cambodians several days ago, and subsequently had been released.

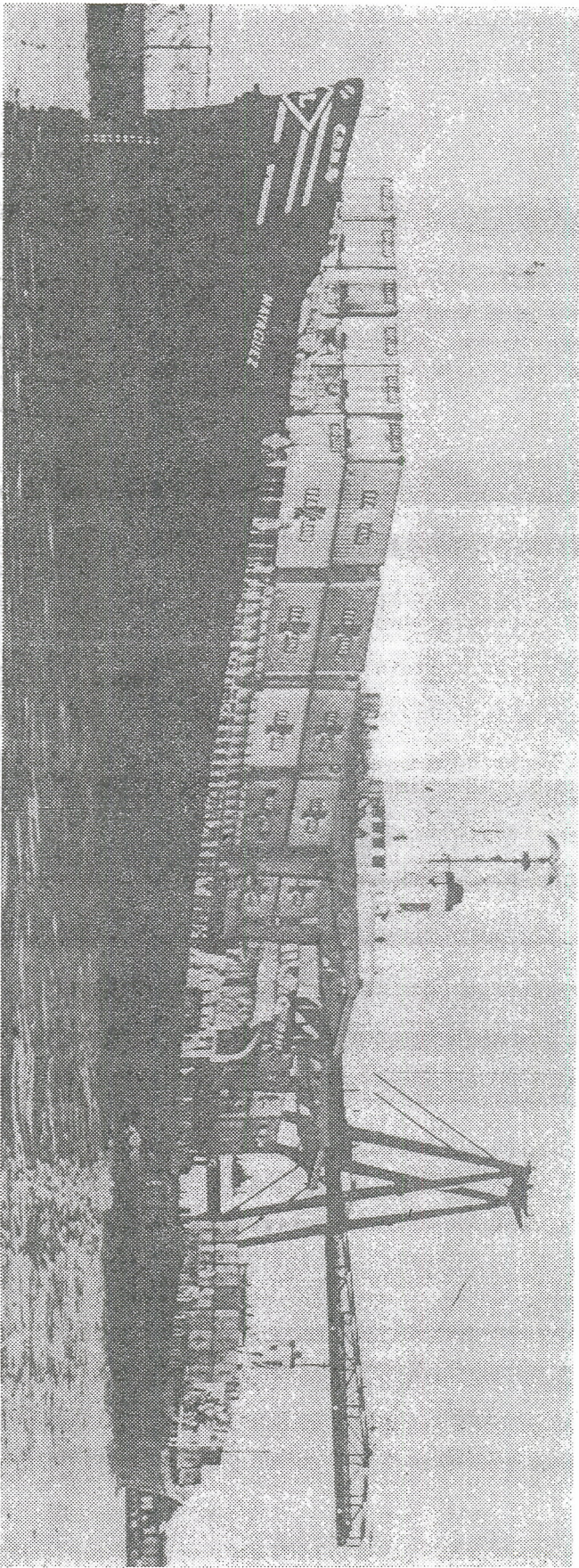
Information on the entire episode available yesterday was very sketchy.

According to the Sea-Land Corp., about 5:30 a.m. yesterday (Eastern Daylight Time), the captain of the vessel, Charles T. Miller, radioed that he was being fired upon and boarded by what appeared to be a Cambodian gunboat.

A company official said the Mayaguez left Hong Kong, its home port, on May 8 and was due to arrive in Sattahip, Thailand, yesterday or today.

The ship, one of a fleet of 10,700-ton container-type cargo ships, was reportedly sailing in commercial shipping lanes and was carrying what is

See SHIPS, A13, Col. 5



Containership Mayaguez, seized in the Gulf of Siam, is shown at the docks of its owner, Sea-Land Corp., in Menlo Park, N.J. It had a crew of 40.

United Press International

Cambodians Seize U.S. Merchantman

SHIP, From A1

described a mixed cargo, including some military cargo that the firm described as "PX supplies, commissary supplies and some spare parts, but no guns, no ammunition."

The list of crew members indicates that all but four members of the 40-man crew have American addresses.

Nessen yesterday said as far as he knew no one on the ship had been injured. Pentagon sources said last evening it still was not clear whether the vessel had reached the Cambodian port Kompong Som.

Concern over the safety of the crew would apparently make quick military retaliation low on the likely lists of U.S. options, and both Pentagon and State Department officials stressed that steps being taken to gain release of the ship and crew involved diplomatic and not military steps.

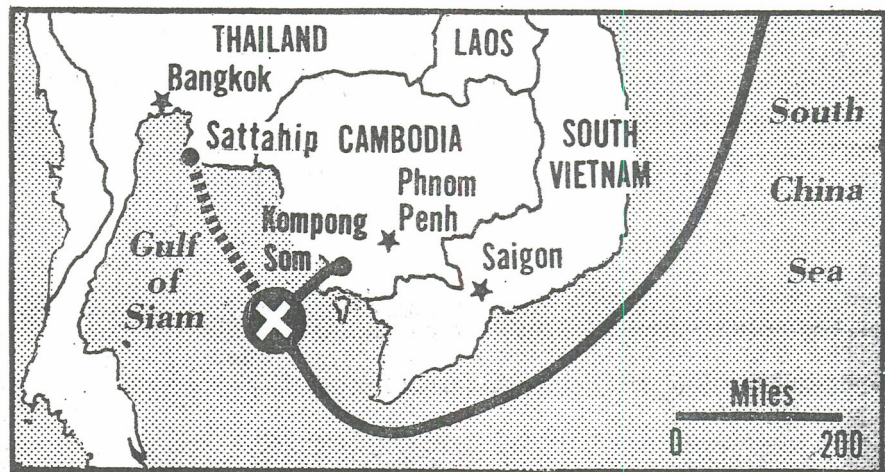
State Department officials said only that "we are using diplomacy" in the effort to get the boat released.

It was clear that the United States had contacted China — probably the only country that has influence in Phnom Penh.

Chinese envoy Huang Chen was called to the State Department yesterday afternoon to see Deputy Secretary Robert S. Ingersoll who is acting Secretary of State while Henry A. Kissinger is in the Midwest.

Nessen told reporters yesterday that no matter what Cambodia claims as its territorial waters, "we consider the ship to have been in international waters."

Asked if the ship might have been engaged in espionage in any way,



By Hal Hoover—The Washington Post

Intended course of ship bound for Thailand and point of seizure.

Nessen told reporters: "The answer is a flat no."

The President's stern demand to the Cambodians was applauded by retired Navy Cmdr. Lloyd M. Bucher, who was the captain of the spy ship Pueblo, which was captured by the North Koreans in 1968.

"I suspect that what must be done here is very strong and very immediate action in order to prevent this tail-twisting of the United States from going on" more and more frequently, he said.

Bucher said he didn't know what action the United States could take to recover the crew because he didn't have all the facts. "But I do know this. It is the federal government's responsibility to protect flag carriers on the high seas and in this instance it's a pretty clear-cut seizure which is entirely illegal."

In his call for swift military counteraction, Buckley said: "In no other way can we underscore the fact that we

will no longer tolerate acts of international banditry."

Sen. John Sparkman (D-Ala.), chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the United States should attempt to retrieve the vessel "any way we can," adding that "if a person shoots at you, you've got a right to shoot back."

Sen. James B. Allen (D-Ala.) called the seizure "an outrage which we cannot let go unchallenged. I don't favor precipitate action, but it's a question of national honor . . . and if force is necessary, then force must be used."

Javits said he agreed with Mr. Ford's description of the seizure as piracy and that the President, under the War Powers Act, "would have the right to act."

However Javits said the capture may have been an ill-considered move by the new Khmer Rouge government.

"I believe a little patience is deserved, rather than cause a new incident or attack," he said.

Humphrey said, "We should stop, look and listen. Use reason first."