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Mutineers Seize Khmer Boat

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The crew of the Cambodian patrol boat that seized the U.S. merchant ship Mayaguez later overwhelmed the patrol boat's Khmer Communist officer, threw him overboard, and sailed to Thailand seeking asylum.

The unexpected arrival of the Cambodian boat in the Thai port of Sattaship later last week has become a source of acute political embarrassment and nervousness for the Thai government, which quickly painted over the Cambodian mark-

ings and hung a Thai flag on the vessel.

The mutiny aboard the Cambodian vessel is a new bizarre twist in the Mayaguez incident, which began May 13, Cambodia time, when a Cambodian patrol boat fired on and seized the unarmed U.S. ship about 60 miles off the Cambodian mainland.

The next day, U.S. Marines already had recaptured the Mayaguez while other Marines were battling their way onto Tang Island, near where the freighter was anchored.

But by Friday morning,

reports of a strange episode involving a mutiny by a Cambodian patrol boat crew also began arriving in Washington from U.S. military officials and from the U.S. embassy in Thailand.

According to these reports, the Cambodian sailors who showed up in Thailand said they were members of the Cambodian navy under the former government, and that when the Khmer Rouge took over Cambodia, they and their patrol boat were forced into service by the new government.

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The sailors told Thai officials, U.S. sources report, that their craft—a 170-foot-long boat with the markings E-311 on the hull—had been pressed into service to intercept a number of vessels sailing near Cambodia in the past several weeks. One of these, they said, was the Mayaguez.

The Khmer Communists had put a number of their own officers and soldiers aboard the patrol craft and, according to the defecting sailors' account, each time they seized another vessel some of the Communist officers and soldiers would go aboard the captured vessel to take command of it.

When the Communist force aboard the patrol craft was reduced to one officer, and possibly one or two soldiers, the 10 sailors from the original crew mutinied, threw the officer over the side, set sail for Thailand,

“painting over the hull number markings and putting on new flags.”

The Thais apparently also are afraid that the new Cambodian government will demand return of the ship and crew.

Sources in the State Department and the Pentagon say that information from the Mayaguez crew and an independent assessment of the ships of the former gov-

and asked for political asylum there.

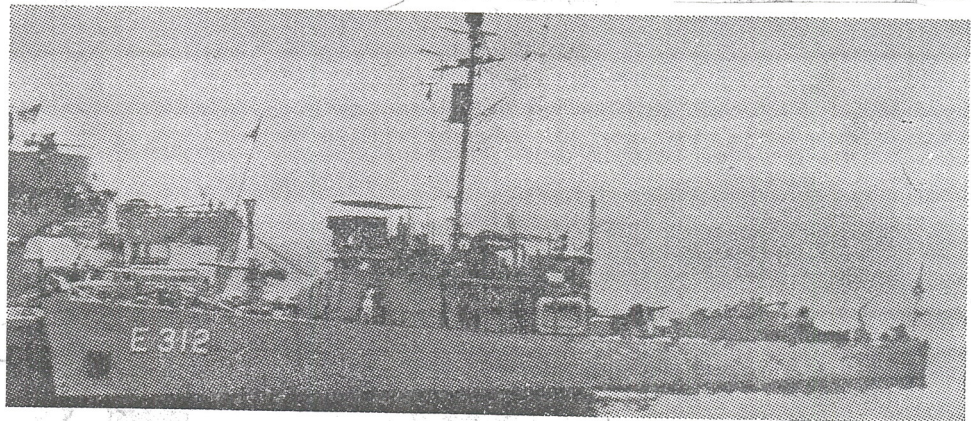
The issue has largely been kept quiet since Thailand is extremely nervous about its relations with the new government in neighboring Cambodia. Thai officials,

who first passed on this information to the Americans, are now likely to deny that the patrol boat was involved in the Mayaguez affair.

“They are trying to make the boat disappear,” one senior U.S. official says,

ernment now in Khmer Rouge hands indicates that the E-311 was involved in the Mayaguez hijacking.

The vessel, which reportedly mounts a 3-inch gun, may have been one of a number of American patrol craft given first to the French and then to the former Cambodian government. American sources here, however, were unable to confirm that.



Jane's Fighting Ships

This U.S. patrol boat, transferred to the French in 1951 for use in Indochina, appears to be similar to the one seized in mutiny from the Khmer Rouge last week.

Compare above with photo taken by a crew member of the Mayaguez of “Cambodian gunboat as its crew took over the ship,” SFC and NYT 20 May 75 (two views).