

## World of Books



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**Four Days in May**

**William Hogan**

**P**ERHAPS the most remarkable thing about Roy Rowan's "The Four Days of Mayaguez" (Norton; \$7.95) is that in little more than three months after those tense hours in the Gulf of Thailand, a hardbound book on the affair has been researched, written, manufactured and distributed.

A Far Eastern correspondent for *Time* magazine, Rowan joined the American container ship *Mayaguez* right after the reseizure of the vessel, which had been taken by Cambodian revolutionary forces while on a routine voyage from Hong Kong to a U.S. military installation near Bangkok. The book is based on in depth ship-board interviews with the crew, which had been transported by fishing boat to a Khmer Rouge military compound, after its release.

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**R**OWAN'S BOOK is a story of merchant mariners caught in a tense situation in which each believed his head would be chopped off before the whole thing was over. None was. Their chief danger came from strafing, bombing and massive tear-gassing by American fighter jets involved in the risky, and apparently ineptly coordinated, attempt to rescue crew and ship.

Read strictly as an adventure story — and Rowan writes a good one in this instant history — the book is an

eye-opening account of the modern merchant marine at work and under stress. Captain Charlie Miller, 62, and his 49 crewmen, right down to messman and oilers, become real people, pawns in an abstract ideological and diplomatic chess game.

The ship's distress signal, issued while well-armed (mostly teenaged) Cambodians were boarding it on the high seas, set off a chain of political and military events. One cannot, from time to time, help but feel that the whole misadventure is a fiction straight out of *True* magazine.

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**T**HE BOOK does, however, put into perspective the fragmented and often confusing running story of those four days in May, and Rowan narrates it in a spritely manner which suggests "A Night to Remember," Walter Lord's hour-by-hour account of the sinking of the *Titanic*.

The author does not attempt to make moral, political or military judgments in this account. He did manage to tape an interview with President Ford in the Oval Office in an effort to trace the atmosphere and tensions there during the crisis. The *Mayaguez* decisions did catapult the President's ratings in the polls and to that extent this is a pro-Ford story. If those jets had got that fishing boat, Rowan (and Mr. Ford) would have had another story.