

## 26 Sailors Freed, But Havana Holds Ships and Skipper

NYTimes — DEC 29 1971

PANAMA, Dec. 28 (AP)—Twenty-six crewmen of two freighters seized earlier this month by Cuban gunboats arrived in Panama last night, but Cuba is still holding the captain of one boat on espionage charges.

The sailors from the Lyla Express and the Johnny Express flew here aboard a Panamanian Air Force plane. Their release was arranged by a three-man delegation from Panama invited to Cuba by Premier Fidel Castro. Most of the crewmen are Guatemalans, Dominicans, Haitians and Spaniards.

The two ships are registered in Panama but owned by the Bahama Lines of Miami, which is operated by a family of Cuban exiles. The ships were in international waters when they were seized—the Lyla Express off the Cuban coast on Dec. 5, and the Johnny Express, 120 miles off the Cuban coast in the Bahamas on Dec. 15.

The Johnny Express was shelled and her captain, José Villa Díaz, a naturalized United States citizen, was wounded. Cuba said that the vessels were "pirate ships" that had taken part in raids against Cuba and that Captain Villa had confessed to being an agent of the United States Central Intelligence Agency. Mr. Castro has said that Captain Villa will face a revolutionary tribunal.

Mr. Castro also charged that Pablo Gari Parmon, a Spanish crewman from the Johnny Express, had admitted participating in "infiltration voyages" and said that he was being held.

Captain Villa's wife, Isabel, visited President Nixon in Key Biscayne on Dec. 16 and pleaded for his aid in obtaining the captain's release. Mr. Nixon promised that he would do everything in his power to have Cuba release the captain.

Pentagon sources disclosed last week that naval and air units in the Caribbean had been ordered to provide armed assistance to any vessel that Cuba might attempt to seize on the high seas.

The Panamanian Foreign Office said that talks would continue with Cuba on the status of the two freighters, which Cuba is still holding.