

Unarmed U.S. Ship
Seized by a Cambodian
Gunboat

'Act of Piracy,'

SF Chronicle

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Ford Says

Washington

A Cambodian gunboat fired on and seized an unarmed U.S. merchant ship yesterday in the Gulf of Thailand. President Ford called it an "act of piracy."

Mr. Ford warned Cambodian officials that failure to release the container ship immediately "will have the most serious consequences."

At the same time, an administration spokesman emphasized that the United States is pursuing diplomatic, not military, initiatives to obtain the release of the ship.

White House Press Secretary Ron Nessen, who announced the seizure of the U.S. merchant ship Mayaguez and its crew of 40, said later that a Panamanian ship was stopped by Cambodia in the same area May 7 or May 8 but apparently has been allowed to leave. He said that ship reportedly was en route to Bangkok.

It was unclear from Nessen's report how long the Panamanian ship was detained.

As Mr. Ford met with the National Security Council to discuss the seizure, the State Department said diplomatic efforts were under way for the return of the vessel.

(Secretary of State Henry Kissinger said last night in St. Louis the United States government had "no direct communication" with Cambodian authorities when he left Washington yesterday.

"I think the President's

statement speaks for itself," he said "He has called it an act of piracy and demanded the release of the ship and its crew. At present, there are efforts to bring about this release. This is not the time for me to give a checklist of possible American responses.")

Warships from the U.S. Seventh Fleet reportedly were ordered to start moving to the Gulf of Thailand.

Pentagon sources said the aircraft carrier Coral Sea and several other ships had

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been ordered to sail for the Gulf.

They said that the ship movements do not mean the United States has decided to use force. It is standard procedure, they said, to send ships to a trouble spot so that if they are eventually needed they will be available.

Nessen said the Mayaguez and its crew were seized 60 miles off the coast of Cambodia about eight miles from a small rock island apparently claimed by both Cambodia and Vietnam.

He said the Mayaguez was fired on before it surrendered.

The Sea-Land Corp. of Menlo Park, N.J., which owns the vessel, said the ship was 85 miles from the closest shoreline. A company spokesman said the Mayaguez was en route from Hong Kong to Thailand with a capacity cargo of 274 containers holding "a variety of goods."

The United States considers all waters more than three miles seaward to be in international territory. Cambodia, however, is one of about 40 nations which for several years have claimed jurisdiction over waters extending 12 miles from shore, American officials said.

Because the Mayaguez re-

portedly was within eight miles of an island claimed by Cambodia, this apparently would put it in waters claimed by Cambodia but viewed as international territory by the United States.

"You can easily deduce we consider it outside of territorial waters," Nessen said.

Sea-Land identified the captain as Charles E. Miller of Fountain Valley, Calif., and subsequently released the names of the other 39 crew members. Most of them are from California, Sea-Land said.

Jack Mayor, vice president of Sea-Land in Washington, described it as a C-2-class cargo ship of about 10,000 tons loaded with "just general cargo . . . anything from soup to nuts."

Mayor said, "We have some military cargo but it's not classified stuff of any kind."

Another Sea-Land spokesman said that the Mayaguez's movements are controlled from the company's Oakland, Calif., office but that Hong Kong is the vessel's home port.

Sea-Land normally uses all-American crews, the company spokesman said.

Nessen, asked if he viewed the seizure as "a major crisis," said:

"I don't want to characterize it."

He replied "no" when asked whether the ship was a spy ship.

He said the United States has not been in communication with the Cambodian government.

Nessen said that "as far as we know" no one on the ship was injured.

"We are taking immediate steps to obtain the prompt release of the ship," State Department spokesman Robert Funseth said shortly after Nessen announced the seizure.

Funseth said the steps being taken involved diplomatic, not military, initiatives, but he declined to be more specific.

A.P. & U.P.