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CIA SHIP?

'Explorer II' in Port 3 Weeks; Humphrey Admits Agency Probe

By EDNA BUCHANAN

"Explorer II" has not ventured out to sea for three weeks now, according to her Miami Beach neighbors.

Local speculation about the oft-talked-of mystery ship now revolves about whether her stay at dockside stems from close security of the Central Intelligence Agency by both the press and the administration in recent weeks.

Vice President Hubert Humphrey, while giving the agency a verbal pat on the back, confirmed in Bal Harbour earlier this week that "the whole CIA operation is now under complete review by a presidential task force."

Painted black and gray, radar equipment jutting from amidships, "Explorer II" is nearly invisible at dusk. The 105-foot craft, berthed directly across a channel from the Miami Beach Coast Guard Base on MacArthur Causeway, has been openly referred to as a CIA operated vessel for some time. But that identification has never been confirmed.

"She doesn't look it," said one Coast Guardsman, "But she's the fastest thing in the water." Up until three weeks ago, observers said, the Explorer slipped out of harbor two or three times a month, returning in several days as

quietly as she departed.

Other Coast Guardsmen who see the vessel every day say her engines are running constantly and she has a Spanish-speaking crew of between 25 and 30 men.

At 1 a.m. yesterday, a dark-haired man in a windbreaker was standing watch on the Explorer's deck. The ship's engines were running, as they do 24 hours a day. The man on deck spoke no English and very little Spanish, according to his answers to questions. He replied he didn't know who owned the ship and just shook his head when asked the name of his employer.

A reporter who ap-

proached the vessel armed with a camera this week looked through the lens and saw a camera aimed right back from aboard ship.

For months, newsmen and other curious persons have reported that their photos were taken by crewmen when they got too close.

A spokesman from the Coast Guard's Marine Inspection Office said yesterday that the ship is not listed in the official volume of "Merchant Vessels of the United States."

The Marine Division of the Coast Guard said the craft's owner is listed as "Exploration Inc.," at 440 NE 110th St., Miami Shores.

There is no telephone listing for the firm and what's more, the address is not in Miami Shores.

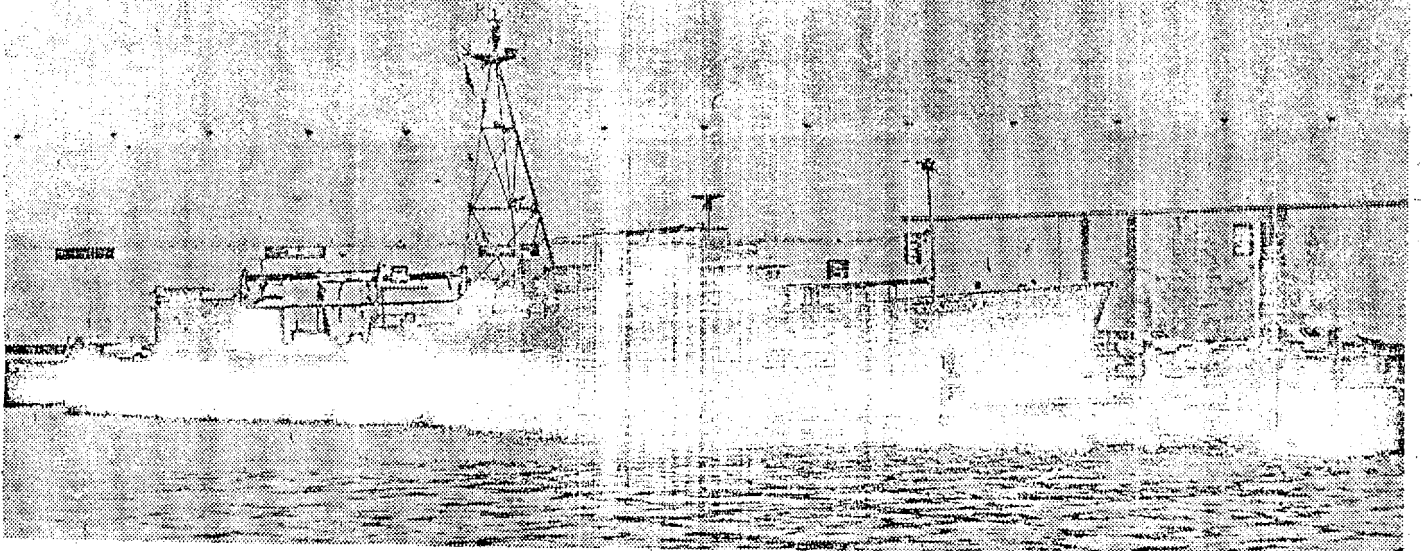
According to the Miami City Directory that address is listed to a woman.

The dock owner who rents space for the Explorer was evasive yesterday and said, "We handle her for an agent in Jacksonville. That's all I want to say about it."

The camera-wielding crewman claimed association with Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton yesterday when questioned by a reporter.

In heavily-accented English, he said that the Explorer is "an oceanographic ship," gathering samples for the college. Asked what they do, he explained that they test water salinity and gather samples of sea life.

A magazine writer in town recently revealed he has been checking on CIA vessels based in local waters and Miami-area CIA fronts (he named several local firms) and said he is on assignment from a major publication to do an article on



'Explorer II' Rides at Dockside — with Engines Running as Always

(Sun Photos by Edna Buchanan)

