world

Soviet mystery

Anchored minesweeper blocks trade channel

United Press International STRAIT OF HORMUZ, Oman ince the start of the Tehran embassy siege the Soviet Union has anchored a warship in the middle of the Strait of Hormuz, the world's nost important shipping lane. No one knows what the mystery vessel is

doing there. "The Russians have had a ship there since early November," said a senior Omani naval officer. "It has varied from the most modern guided missile cruiser down to what they have now, which is a leaky old mineseper with a wooden hull.

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A narrow gap of water between Oman's Musandam peninsula and the west coast of Iran, the Strait connects the Persian Gulf with the Arapian Sea

Two-thirds of the industrialized West's crude oil imports - from Saudi Arabia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates transits the Strait daily on their vay to Western refineries, an oil tanker passing through every 19 mi-

At its narrowest, the strait is 24 es across. Oman claims its 12mile territorial limit from the east

side and Iran the same from the Omanis who have sole responsibility for keeping the area trouble-free. west. Nothing remains as interna-tional water at the heart of the strait.

However, as it widens into the Arabian Sea, the strait is about 29 miles wide, leaving a five-mile band of international water between the territorial limits of Iran and Oman. There sits an anchored T-58 Russian minesweeper with about 30 men on

board 'They aren't doing anything we is completed next year, the world's can detect," said Capt. Malcom Fewtrell on his Omani patrol craft." most strategic shipping lane will con-tinue to be guarded by one marine patrol craft with a 3-inch gun. Surprisingly, the Omanis feel lit-tle more naval protection is really 'They rarely even have their radar

It would be natural to suspect the boat as an electronic surveillance 'snooper" ship. But, noted Fewtrell, a British contract officer working for the Omani navy, it has no more antennae than any other Russian boat

naval commander. "If terrorists blew up a tanker in the strait, all we would have to do is They are in a position to see virtually everything that goes in and out of the strait," he said. "They could route the traffic around it. There's just be doing a shipping count. "Then again, you could argue they plenty of room for that. Once it sank, we would sail right over it. The water here is up to 300 feet deep." Saudi Arabian oil minister Sheikh

just put it there to get everyone wondering and worrying what the hell it's there for

Ahmed Zaki Yamani once suggested Most wondering is done by the that desperate terrorists might try to

hijack a tanker sailing through the strait, but experienced sailors dis-The Iranian navy, once supreme in the gulf, has rarely been seen since miss this prospect as totally unrealistic the fall of the shah, and its ships are

"You've got to be a right little James Bond to go up the side of a tanker steaming at 15 knots," said not believed to be in good condition. The Omanis have only limited facilities for protecting the crucial waterway. They are building a radar Fewtrell. "If I were a madman, I might try and naval base on Goat Island in the it, but no professional sailor would. strait to monitor traffic, but until that

It's virtually impossible." The Omanis do take one threat

seriously — mines. They are cheap, easy to lay and difficult to sweep. A few well-placed mines could bottle up millions of barrels of oil in the gulf. They are all the more dangerous since neither the Americans, the Omanis nor any other gulf state has a minesweeper in the vicinity.

Ironically, the only minesweeper around belongs to the Soviet navy. And nobody knows what it's doing there

13 Liberian officials killed by firing squad

United Press International MONROVIA, Liberia — Firing squads executed 13 former ministers and officials of the ousted Liberian regime Tuesday, including the brother of slain President William **Tolbert**

A large crowd shouting "kill the dent pro tem of the Senate.

rogues" and "let us be free" watched as the 13 were led to their deaths near the military training center in Monrovia.

Among those executed was Frank E. Tolbert, the former president's eldest brother, who had been presi-

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LONDON — Britain's ambassador to Iran, Sir John Graham, reurned for consultations Tuesday and staff in Tehran is being cut drastic-

U.S. Embassy in Tehran

But they said this did not amount

in the Iranian capital.

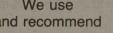
'All this talk about threats to the

strait or some terrorists sinking a tanker there is very much over-exaggerated," said a senior Omani

later built up again.

in the country





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THE BATTALION

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