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The Battalion

WORLD & NATION

12

Thursday, February 1, 1990

Coast Guard fires at ship
Cuban freighter escapes from drug inspection

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A Coast Guard cutter sprayed a Cuban-operated freighter with cannon and machine-gun fire Wednesday when the vessel refused to stop for a drug inspection, but the ship escaped into Mexican waters, officials said.

The 250-foot Hermann, which is registered in Panama, took several hits from the cutter Chincoteague as they steamed across the open Gulf of Mexico, Coast Guard spokesman Joe Gibson said.

When the ship reached Mexican waters, the cutter held fire and asked the Mexican government to take over to see if it was carrying drugs, he said.

"We were in international waters," Gibson said. "We cannot pursue vessels into other countries' waters."

Gibson said no Mexican vessels were nearby and the ship steamed on toward the central Mexican coast.

Capt. Aristides Palma Palma, harbormaster in Tampico, said by telephone that the Hermann would dock there later in the day.

The Cuban Embassy in Mexico City charged that the Hermann was attacked in Mexican waters, but that was denied by Mexico's Foreign Ministry and the U.S. government.

Cuba's official news agency Prensa Latina said the ship, carrying a 12-man crew, had a cargo of 10 tons of chromium and was operated by the Guamar Shipping Co. of Cuba. However, Gibson said the Coast Guard talked to the ship's master by radio and he claimed the vessel had no cargo.

The master also knew that Panama had given permission for the Coast Guard to board, but he still didn't stop, Gibson said.

Gorbachev remains party head,
denies rumors of resignation

MOSCOW (AP) — Mikhail S. Gorbachev on Wednesday denied a report he might resign as head of the Communist Party while remaining Soviet president, and a leading newspaper called him too valuable to risk losing.

Another newspaper, the party daily Pravda, urged authorities to strengthen the powers of the presidency to protect Gorbachev from efforts to oust him.

Correspondents covering Gorbachev's meeting with Brazilian president-elect Fernando Collor de Mello asked about a Western television report that he was considering quitting the party leadership.

"All this is groundless," Gorbachev said in remarks that led the So-

viet television news Wednesday night. "It is in someone's interest to propagate such things."

He added that similar rumors are becoming common in the Soviet Union, and "it demonstrates that we are a different country, a different society. Everything is discussed, and discussed openly."

Gorbachev has strengthened the presidency and tried to shift power from the ruling Communist Party to the elected government. But it is far from clear whether the reforms have gone far enough for him to dare relinquishing the top post in the party, which has been the source of power for all previous Soviet leaders.

The Pravda article, based on a debate among prominent figures, ap-

peared to tell readers that party power still is paramount and that the presidency is not strong enough to be the country's main leadership post.

The political turmoil comes while the Soviet Union is torn by nationalist and ethnic violence in Azerbaijan, drives for independence in several republics and an economic crisis.

It also comes just five days before what is expected to be a fiery meeting of the party's Central Committee — the one body with the official power to remove Gorbachev as party leader.

Progressives hope to present an alternative party program at the meeting.

Army deserter arrested after 30 years

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A man arrested for deserting from the Army nearly 30 years ago knew he might be picked up at the airport when he returned to the United States from East Germany. But 30 relatives who came to greet him were stunned.

"I think this must be what it was like in East Germany before the wall came down," Arnold Kephart's sister, Alice Smith, said. "We do live in a free country, or so we thought."

Kephart, 53, was being held at the Fort Riley, Kan., Army base Wednesday on a warrant charging him with desertion.

He was arrested Tuesday night at Eppley Airfield by military and civilian police as relatives looked on. Kephart was allowed to talk to his 86-

year-old father and sister before being taken away.

Some family members came from as far away as Arkansas to greet Kephart, who was accompanied by his son, Frankie, and who, according to his attorney, had tried to escape from East Germany several times.

Kephart believed he might be arrested at the airport, Smith said.

"We thought it was a possibility, but we didn't think it would be handled in this manner," said Smith's husband, Roy. "... They just took him off the plane."

Kephart's attorney, James Martin Davis, said military police didn't show him an arrest warrant and wouldn't allow him to speak to his client until

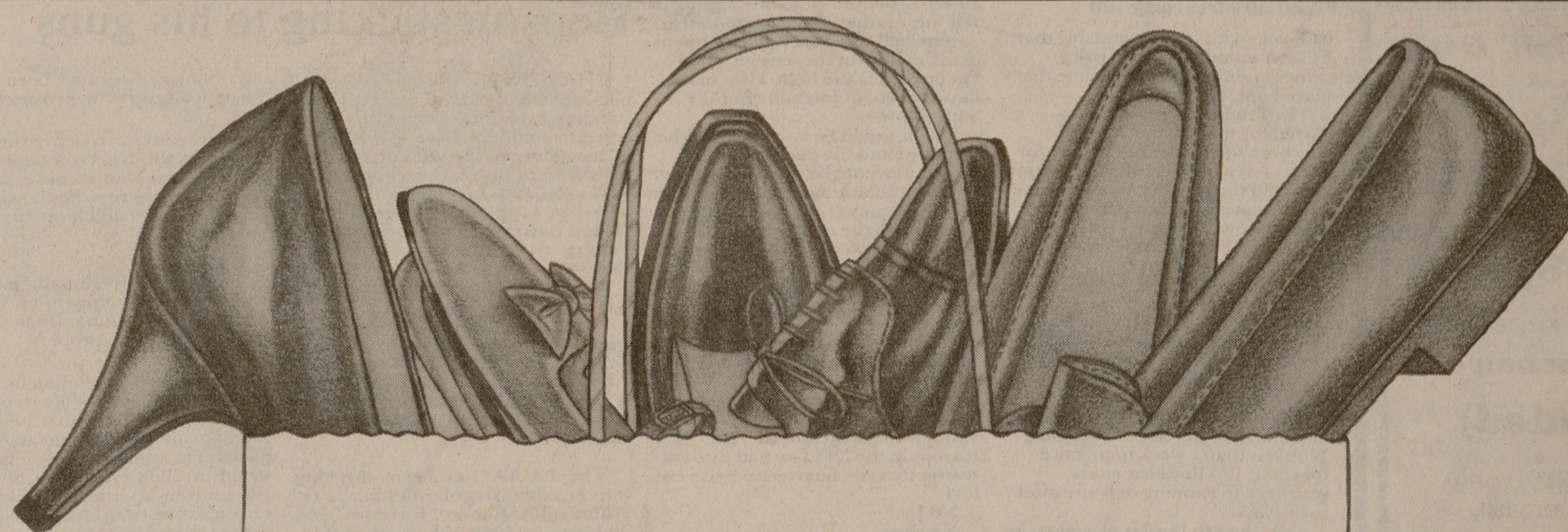
civilian police intervened.

"It was an absolute worst-case scenario for the image of the United States military," Davis said. Kephart and his son "thought they'd left a totalitarian country," he said.

An Army spokesman said he wasn't aware of all the circumstances surrounding the arrest, but defended the Army's action.

"How many ways can you arrest somebody?" Lt. Col. Dick Bridges said in a telephone interview from Washington.

Kephart will be transferred Thursday to Fort Sill, Okla., Capt. Ed Garven, a Fort Riley spokesman, said.



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McMoscow
gets first taste
of McDonald's

MOSCOW (AP) — American fast food got off to a fast start here Wednesday, with thousands of people lining up beneath golden arches and hammer and sickle for their first taste of a McDonald's "gamburger."

They also eagerly tried "dub burgers" and "Eilay-o-foel" sandwiches. The consumers seemed unfazed by the long line that snaked out the door. They moved briskly, thanks to the cash registers at the world's largest McDonald's, the first of 2 planned in the Soviet Union.

"I only waited an hour and I think they served thousands before me," a happy middle-aged woman from the aluminum plant on Dmitrovskoye Highway said.

"And it was only 10 rubles for all this," she said, pointing to a bag packed with unfamiliar treats like cheeseburgers and fish sandwiches. "I'm taking it back for the girls at the factory to try."

Unlike nearly all other Western companies opening in Moscow, McDonald's is selling for rubles, which are worthless outside the Soviet Union and won't even buy much in their homeland, with its chronic shortages. It took McDonald's of Canada 14 years, but thousands of Soviets finally got a first-hand look at such alien concepts as efficiency and fast friendly service.

Normally dour citizens broke into grins as they caught the infectious cheerful mood from youthful Soviet staffers hired for their ability to smile and work hard.

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