

Fate of 40 Cuban refugees unknown

by UPI

MIAMI -- U.S. and Cuban officials say they have no idea what happened to a boat packed with 40 Cuban refugees that vanished en route to Florida almost two months ago. The 32-foot fishing boat they were in was designed to carry only nine people but seas were relatively calm when they left Cuba in the pre-dawn hours one day in late November, The Miami Herald reported Monday. The boat's captain, known only as El Grifo, was a smuggler who stood to make \$400,000 on this one voyage alone. The refugees, including 12 children, were all from Matanzas Province. Some phoned relatives in Florida as they set out, only never to be heard from again, the newspaper said. No wreckage or remains have been found. The U.S. Coast Guard lists the group as missing and Cuban officials insist they have no knowledge about the missing migrants, the Herald said. If it's confirmed the boat capsized and those aboard drowned, it would be the worst such case since Cuban government boats rammed and sank a vessel, leaving 41 dead, the Herald said. "We have reached out to both Mexico and the Bahamas, and nothing's turned up," said Ana Carbonell, chief of staff for U.S. Rep. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, R-Miami.

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