

# The "Other" Boatlift: Camarioca, Cuba, 1965

Soon after Fidel Castro seized power in Cuba in January, 1959, a steady stream of refugees began making the dangerous passage to Florida in a myriad of small boats and craft. The first Coast Guard rescue of these refugees occurred on 22 July 1959 when a group of nine were picked up in a small boat off the Dry Tortugas near Key West. By 1 June 1965 the Coast Guard had rescued or assisted 6,862 Cuban attempting to make the journey to freedom by sea.

## Camarioca

On 28 September 1965 Fidel Castro made the surprising announcement that beginning on 10 October 1965, the port of Camarioca would be opened so that any Cubans desiring to leave for "the Yankee paradise" could do so. Any boats of Cuban exiles that wished to return to Cuba to evacuate relatives would be permitted into Camarioca. The Cubans who wished to depart Cuba had to submit an application to the Ministry of the Interior. They would also forfeit any land or property they had in order to leave.

Camarioca remained open until 15 November 1965. A total of 2,979 Cubans took advantage of Castro's offer during the time the port remained open. Those migrants who were still at the port, numbering in the thousands, were ultimately taken by officially chartered passenger vessels to Florida. Soon thereafter the U.S. and Cuban governments negotiated what became known as "Freedom Flights" using commercial aircraft to transport those Cubans who wished to immigrate to the U.S. safely.

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**Official Coast Guard Photograph (click on image for large-format file)**



**official caption, date, photo number & photographer (if known):**

No official caption/date; archive photo number S4-58; photographer unknown.

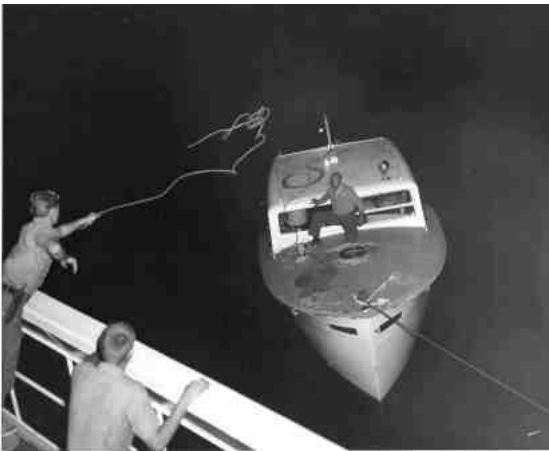
A sign posted on the end of a public pier in Key West, late 1965.

A number of the following images were scanned from unlabeled contact sheets in the Immigration -- Cuba -- Camarioca (1965) file from the Historian's Office.



Official caption: "Off loading Cuban refugees at the Miami sea buoy."; photo dated 4 May 1964; Photo No. 7CGD-050464 #12; photographer unknown.

Cuban refugees began leaving Cuba in mid-1959 in a steady stream up to 1965 when the Camarioca boatlift began.



Official caption: "Night time distress cases are frequent during the small boat exodus from Cuba. This stranded boat was towed back to Key West by a U.S. Coast Guard craft."; dated 5 November 1965; Photo Release # 6122; photographer unknown.



No official caption/date; archive photo number S4-60; photographer unknown.



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photographer unknown.



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photographer unknown.



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photographer unknown.



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photographer unknown.

Here the cutter *Ariadne* (WPC-101; later WMEC-101) based out of St. Petersburg departs on a Cuban patrol of the Florida Straits, fall, 1965. In late August, *Ariadne* evacuated 39 Cubans from Cay Sal in the Bahamas and delivered them safely to Key West. She rescued 36 more from Cay Sal in October, 1965.



No official caption/date/photo number;  
photographer unknown.

Key West pier.



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photographer unknown.



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photographer unknown.

The CGC *Diligence* (WPC-616, later WMEC-616) in Key West. She had entered commissioned service in 1964. Note the early shield device in her recently approved "racing stripe."



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photographer unknown.

The sport-fishing vessel *Chipless*, out of Fort Lauderdale, ties up in Key West with a group of Cuban refugees picked up in Camarioca.



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photographer unknown.



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The fishing vessel *Little Mike* approaches a  
pier in Key West.



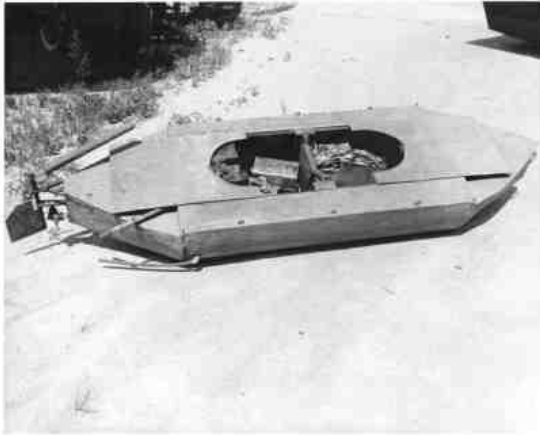
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A February 1967 copy of a "Resettlement Re-Cap" article on this craft noted: "*To freedom in an 8-foot 'kayak' made of metal and powered by a lawn mower! . . . Two Cubans, Lauriano Ricoy and his wife, left their homeland in this frail, cramped craft and after five days in the Straits of Florida were picked up by a Coast Guard cutter, about 34 miles east of Marathon, in the Florida Keys. They have since resettled to New Orleans.*"

The Coast Guard Artifact Program still has this craft in its collection.



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photographer unknown.



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photographer unknown.

A group of Cuban refugees are put ashore in Key West from the cutter that rescued them.





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