

Coast Guard rescues three from Chinese fishermen

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Coast guard officers yesterday escort crew members of a Chinese fishing vessel for questioning at the Coast Guard Administration Maritime Patrol headquarters in New Taipei City's Tamsui after an operation boarding the Chinese fishing vessel No. 7666.

Photo: Huang Chieh, Taipei Times

Eight Chinese fishermen were apprehended and taken in for questioning yesterday after the Coast Guard Administration (CGA) mounted a commando-style operation to rescue three of its officers the fishermen had allegedly taken hostage in the Taiwan Strait.

The incident began with confrontations between Taiwanese and Chinese fishermen in waters off the coast of Hsinchu County on Wednesday, and escalated when the three coast guard officers were allegedly abducted after boarding a Chinese ship.

CGA officials said it was necessary to take decisive action and dispatched armed patrol vessels with specially trained officers to prevent the hostages being taken to China.

CGA officials said one officer sustained minor injuries during the raid.

All three hostages were safely back in Taiwan yesterday, but slightly shaken from the ordeal, officials said.

Officials confirmed that coast guard officers carried 9mm handguns, M16 assault rifles and Remington 870 12-gauge shotguns, and fired 14 shots to overpower the hostage-takers when storming the Chinese fishing vessel No. 7666.

The incident began on Wednesday afternoon, when 25 crab cages belonging to a Taiwanese ship became entangled in the fishing nets of Chinese fishing vessel No. 7666 about 36 nautical

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miles (67km) offshore of Hsinchu County in the Taiwan Strait, and the cages with its catches were towed toward China's coast.

CGA 35-tonne class patrol boat PP-3570 was alerted and arrived to help negotiate, as both sides initially agreed to resolve the matter at a nearby Taiwanese port.

Personnel were exchanged as a safety precaution, with the chief officer from the Chinese side boarding the Taiwanese fishing boat, while three coast guard officers headed by a squad captain surnamed Ku (庫) boarded the Chinese vessel, officials said.

However, at about 11:30pm, the Chinese vessel reneged on the verbal agreement and turned around to head to China, with the three coast guard officers held as hostages aboard, officials said.

After receiving emergency calls, the coast guard dispatched three additional patrol boats — the PP-10037 (174-tonne class), PP-3580 and PP-3538 (both 35-tonne class), to rescue their fellow coast guard officers, they said.

The four patrol boats corralled the target vessel and mounted a commando-style raid to overpower the crew and boarded the Chinese ship at about 2am yesterday to rescue the three captives, CGA officials said.

None of the eight Chinese crew members were injured, officials said.

The crew members were taken for questioning at the CGA Maritime Patrol Directorate-General Headquarters in New Taipei City's Tamsui District (臺南市).

Since it involved hostage-taking and other illegal activities, officials said public prosecutors would likely lay charges against the Chinese fishermen pending further investigation.

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