

Tick-Talks defendants were on trip

Prosecutor seeks bond revocations

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Three codefendants in Operation Tick-Talks accompanied Rafael Villaverde on a boating trip to Bahamian waters in which his friends say he disappeared, Coast Guard officials and Villaverde's brother said Saturday.

Dade Assistant State Attorney Rena Cohan said she will be in court Monday to seek revocation of bonds for the three drug-case defendants, Frank Castro, Manuel Perez and Juan B. Fernandez.

"The only inference you can draw ... is they were out of the jurisdiction of the court without permission," said Cohan, who added that she had been told that the three had accompanied Villaverde.

The three defendants could not be reached for comment Saturday.

Villaverde's brother, Raul, gave additional details Saturday about the fire that he said sank the 36-foot cabin cruiser, *Michela*, Wednesday morning.

His account, which he said was based on conversations with the six other passengers, conflicts with the account given Friday by Ed Carhart, Rafael Villaverde's attorney.

The *Michela*, towing a 28-foot boat, departed from Miami with Villaverde, Perez, Castro, Fernandez, Jorge Morejon, Sixto Arce and Orlando Morejon, the owner of the boat, Coast Guard officials said they were told by family members.

The trip began, Raul said, as a celebration of what the defendants considered a legal victory

— consolidation of the drug charges they faced in Operation Tick-Talks.

In August, 51 defendants were charged in the investigation, so nicknamed because a listening device was hidden in a loudly ticking clock.

"They were on a fishing trip and they were having a good time ... they were not leaving the country," said Raul, also a defendant in the case.

Raul said he was told by some of the passengers that the fire started below deck in the engine compartment after a pipe burst.

Earlier, Carhart had said a stove exploded. Saturday, he said he received inaccurate information from the family.

Raul said the six survivors jumped from the burning boat and swam to the smaller vessel. Rafael started to flee, he said, but returned to the cabin.

"Rafael ran to pick something up," Raul said. "He came out on fire. He jumped into the water."

The others were unable to start the engine on the second boat, Raul said, but they threw Rafael a line. Raul said winds and current made the second boat drift.

"He [Rafael] was badly burned in the face," Raul said. "They were never able to get to him."

He said the survivors told him they first received help Wednesday night from a tugboat, then were towed to Great Harbor Cay by a schooner named *Southern Comfort*.

The six were questioned by Bahamian police, Raul said, then flown Saturday to Miami, where they were questioned by U.S. immigration officials, then released.

Raul also disputed claims by Coast Guard officials that the survivors had not cooperated with officials in the search.

A two-day, air-sea search of the area near the Berry Islands in the Bahamas turned up no debris or evidence of the sinking, the Coast Guard said.

Attorney Carhart said: "... I really don't buy the story that this is some kind of faked disappearance."