

Maersk captain to return to U.S. Friday

by UPI

WASHINGTON -- The captain of the U.S.-flagged cargo ship Somali pirates tried to hijack last week will return home Friday, the shipping line's leader said Thursday.

Speaking to the crew of Maersk Alabama who arrived in the United States early Thursday, Maersk Chief Executive Officer John Reinhart confirmed that Capt. Richard Phillips will return home Friday, CBS reported.

Phillips was held hostage in a lifeboat by Somali pirates after they attempted to seize the Maersk Alabama April 8. He was freed after U.S. Navy SEAL snipers shot and killed three gunmen and arrested a fourth. The skipper was aboard the USS Bainbridge, which was supposed to reunite Phillips and his crew in Mombasa, Kenya, but was diverted to help another U.S.-flagged ship repel a hijacking attempt Wednesday.

"He (Phillips) will be returning home and be home with his family on Friday night," Reinhart said. "He said to me to tell all of you that he misses you. He knows that you're a team. He admires your spirit. He says that you performed like the great merchant mariners that you are."

The plane carrying the Maersk Alabama crew touched down shortly before 1 a.m. at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland to cheers from a crowd of family and friends, CNN reported.

John White, one of the container ship's crewmen, said they cheered on board the plane as it passed over Washington, The Washington Post reported.

"God bless America," he said.

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