

Negotiating for Freedom

Former CAP Cadet Aids in Rescue of Capt. Richard Phillips off Somali Coast



The ScanEagle Unmanned Aircraft System can track an object for 20 hours at a time while providing a real-time video downlink.

By *Mitzi Palmer*

For U.S. Navy Lt. Cmdr. and former CAP cadet Jason Kipp, motivation for bringing Capt. Richard Phillips home to his family came in the form of a simple newspaper clipping.

The clipping was of Phillips' wife, Andrea, holding up a picture of her husband, taken hostage by a group of pirates off the coast of Somalia. One of Kipp's fellow crew members on the USS Bainbridge had posted copies of it throughout the ship to remind the crew of their goal.

On each copy was written: Motivation.

FIVE DAYS OF NEGOTIATIONS

The morning of April 8 started out quietly for Kipp and the rest of the crew traveling in the western Indian Ocean on board the Bainbridge. After all, that Wednesday was set aside for painting and preserving the ship.

By nightfall, Kipp found himself en route to aid in negotiations with Somali pirates for the release of Capt. Richard Phillips of the U.S.-flagged merchant ship Maersk Alabama.

"When we received the call for help, Bainbridge was about 300 miles away from the scene," said Kipp. "We quickly set out at best speed towards the [Maersk Alabama's] position and soon learned that Capt. Phillips had offered himself as a hostage to save the rest of his crew."

According to Kipp, the pirates had demanded safe passage and would not release Phillips until they were safely ashore in Somalia.

"It was clear they did not intend on negotiating," said Kipp. "As they continued their attempts to maneuver

the lifeboat carrying Phillips toward land, the pirates said their only two options were to either die at sea or make it to their destination.”

Kipp and the rest of the Bainbridge crew were joined by the USS Halyburton, an accompanying helicopter and other U.S. forces on Friday afternoon to help block the pirates’ efforts.

“By Sunday, we were growing more and more concerned about the safety and well-being of Capt. Phillips,” commented Kipp. “The pirates indicated he had not eaten or had anything to drink in at least 24 hours, so we convinced them to let us send over some food and water.”

In return, one of the pirates asked to be taken back to the Bainbridge for medical treatment and to talk face-to-face with the crew.

“We agreed,” said Kipp, “but even with him on board the Bainbridge, the remaining three pirates still refused to turn over Capt. Phillips.”

Kipp recalled that late Sunday afternoon the pirates had become noticeably more agitated. Bainbridge officers had convinced the pirates to let them tow the lifeboat since it was low on gas, but the seas made for an extremely uncomfortable ride.

“It was a turning point in the mission,” said Kipp. “At one point, we had visual contact of an on board pirate holding an AK-47 at Capt. Phillips’ back, and we knew his life was in jeopardy more now than ever. Negotiations had failed and it was time to end the mission.”

Earlier in the negotiations, President Barack Obama had authorized the U.S. forces involved to engage in “potential emergency actions” if

Phillips’ life was in imminent danger.

Shortly after 7 p.m. Easter Sunday, after Navy SEALs fatally shot the three pirates, Phillips reached the Bainbridge alive and healthy.

Once on board, Phillips was given the original newspaper clipping that kept the Bainbridge crew motivated throughout the five days of negotiations.

“It was a proud moment for our entire crew,” noted Kipp. “Nothing in our training could have prepared us for this mission. It was teamwork, patience and absolute commitment to regaining Capt. Phillips’ freedom that drove us to succeed.”

USING SCANEAGLE

As one of four tactical action officers on board the Bainbridge, Kipp’s task during the mission was to maintain watch on the lifeboat holding Phillips from the ship’s combat information center.

He did this by using various camera and optical



Photo by Cadet Lt. Col. Zachary King, New Jersey Wing

CAP National Cadet Advisory Council senior adviser Col.

Lawrence L. Trick is the Naval Air Systems’ Command chief engineer for ScanEagle. The system was used by Navy Lt. Cmdr. Jason Kipp to rescue Capt. Richard Phillips.

This still frame was taken from video produced by the USS Bainbridge’s ScanEagle Unmanned Aircraft System on April 9, the second day of negotiations.

technology systems, including the ScanEagle Unmanned Aircraft System.

“ScanEagle was crucial to our ability to keep visual contact of the lifeboat,” said Kipp. “Its most valuable feature is its ability to provide real-time video feed without being seen.”

Built by Boeing subsidiary Insitu, ScanEagle is the only unmanned aircraft in its class. It has a stabilized camera turret to house either an electro-optical camera for daylight or infrared camera for nighttime. The daylight camera has acuity almost 50 percent better than that of the unaided eye at the telescopic end. After launch, ScanEagle can track an object for up to 20 hours at a time, even if the target is moving.

ScanEagle has been used by the Navy since 2005. Its



Photo courtesy of U.S. Navy

Newspaper clippings posted throughout the ship motivated the crew on this mission.

installation on the Bainbridge was overseen by Lawrence L. Trick, ScanEagle’s chief engineer for Naval Air System Command. He is also a Civil Air Patrol colonel and a former commander of CAP’s Maryland Wing.

Trick first met Kipp through CAP when he served as his cadet squadron commander. Trick says Kipp was one of the most motivated cadets in his wing and was

his choice as the top Maryland Wing encampment cadet in 1989.

“He was always going, always making himself and his fellow cadets better,” commented Trick, now senior adviser for CAP’s National Cadet Advisory Council. “I always knew he would do well, and it was great to work with him again on ScanEagle.” ▲

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