

Office of Naval Intelligence Lauded
For Leadership in Ship's Rescue from Pirates

ONI Public Affairs

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Recognizing the crucial role of the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) in support to Navy operations during the 2009 rescue of the container ship motor vessel (M/V) *Maersk Alabama* and its captain from Somali pirates, Maersk Line, Limited presented ONI with a scale model of the ship in a ceremony at the National Maritime Intelligence Center facility, Sept. 15th.

The four-foot long model is a scale replica of the ship that was seized by armed pirates on April 8, 2009, as it passed through the Indian Ocean off the coast of Somalia. The incident was a stark example of the threat international piracy poses to the freedom of commercial maritime navigation.

"Seventy percent of the Earth is covered by water. Eighty percent of the world's population lives near an ocean and 90 percent of all international trade travels by sea," said CAPT Robert Rupp, Commander, Office of Naval Intelligence. "So what happens on the water, above the water or under the water is the U.S. Navy's concern, and as the flagship for Naval Intelligence, it is our concern."

The *Maersk Alabama* was bound for the port of Mombasa, Kenya with a cargo of food aid for Somalia, Rwanda and Uganda when pirates boarded, seizing the vessel and taking its master, CAPT Richard Phillips, hostage. In Washington, D.C., officials activated the Maritime Operational Threat Response (MOTR), a multi-agency plan for reacting to maritime emergencies affecting the security of the U.S. ONI was designated to lead the MOTR activity.

"We sit at the nexus between the Intelligence Community and the U.S. Navy, and our ability to inform the White House at the same time we are informing a cruiser or destroyer commanding officer what threat is happening is truly significant," said CAPT Rupp.

As U.S. Navy ships sped to the incident scene, ONI provided extensive, continuous intelligence on pirate tactics, other pirate vessels in the area, and even design details of the lifeboat to which the pirates had retreated with their hostage. The ONI analysts' depth of knowledge is due in large part to the extensive merchant marine background they share, and to long-established lines of communication with the shipping industry.

"I talk to them in my own language and they translate it for the Navy," said Steven Carmel, Senior Vice President, Maersk Line, Limited, the company that owns the M/V *Maersk Alabama*.

With threats against the life of CAPT Phillips escalating aboard the ship's lifeboat, Navy SEAL snipers killed the three pirates holding him, ending the tense stand-off.

"For those five days in April, ONI was the pivot point for the operation to rescue CAPT Phillips and free the ship," said CAPT William Bray, Commanding Officer of ONI's Nimitz Operational Intelligence Center.

Presenting the ship model to ONI, Mr. Carmel noted the vital importance of the U.S. Navy in ensuring the free-flow of maritime commerce. “We are very mindful that freedom of the seas upon which we depend to carry the world’s commerce, doesn’t happen by accident,” Mr. Carmel said. “You people at ONI are instrumental in making sure that the environment is right for world trade and economic prosperity for everyone.”