

U.S. captain, chief engineer kidnapped from supply vessel off Nigeria

Pirates kidnapped two Americans on a U.S.-flagged platform supply vessel off Nigeria in October 2013, then released them about three weeks later in what experts say was likely a hostage-for-payment deal.

Pirates attacked the 222-foot *C-Retriever*, owned by Edison Chouest Offshore of Cut Off, La., in the Gulf of Guinea on Oct. 23 and took the captain and chief engineer hostage. The fate of the two men was unknown until Nov. 12, when the U.S. State Department announced that they had been freed.

“We welcome the release of the two U.S. citizens who were kidnapped from the *Retriever*,” said State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki. “For privacy reasons, we will not provide any additional information on the two individuals or the circumstances of their release.”

Details about the kidnapping — including the names of the two men, the number of pirates involved and the number of crewmembers aboard *C-Retriever* — were not made public. The State Department did not respond to requests for more information and a spokeswoman for Edison Chouest declined comment.

Orlando Wilson, chief operations and tactical consultant for Risks Inc., a Florida-based company that provides security services throughout the world, said the pirates likely held the two men onshore while contact was made with Edison Chouest. Wilson spent five months in Nigeria in 2012 as a security consultant.

“That’s what they usually do,

unlike in Somalia where they take the vessel (for ransom),” Wilson said in an interview before the men were freed. “The crewmen have probably been taken into the bush and they’ll keep them there until the negotiations start. Generally in Nigeria, once the ransom is paid, the people are released.”

allowed to carry armed guards, mainly using U.K. or U.S. private maritime security companies. ... Things are very different in the Gulf of Guinea, though, where (attacks) nearly always take place inside territorial waters.”

Providing armed protection there requires shipowners to hire guards



Christian Serrano

While global maritime piracy has dropped to its lowest level since 2006 — led notably by a sharp decrease in attacks near Somalia — incidents off Nigeria’s coast have jumped by 30 percent in the past year, according to the International Maritime Bureau (IMB). Much of the increase is due to the fact that Nigeria does not allow foreign armed guards on ships transiting its waters, experts say.

“Piracy attacks on the east side of Africa normally take place far out in the international waters of the Indian Ocean,” said Audun Mikalsen, managing director of Afromarine Ltd., a London-based company that provides shipping services in sub-Saharan Africa. “Vessels are normally

Edison Chouest’s supply vessel *C-Retriever*. In October, the captain and chief engineer of the 222-foot PSV were kidnapped in the Gulf of Guinea. The two men eventually were released unharmed.

locally, adding uncertainty and a layer of legal complexity, said Cyrus Mody, assistant director of the IMB.

“The owner is left to deal with what happens if they are going to oil platforms that are outside territorial waters,” Mody said. “Platforms tend to have a certain degree of security and they may or may not allow another team to come within their safety zone. Basically it is a logistical challenge for embarking and disembarking guards and keeping within the framework of the legality.”

Rich Miller