U.S. citizens caught in wide net of deportation

Born in Belize, Rennison Castillo had lived in the U.S. since he was 7. He passed his citizenship test in 1998, dressed in a freshly starched Army uniform.

Seven years later, the U.S. government locked Castillo in a Tacoma, Wash., immigration jail. At the holding cell, an officer chained him up and told him he would be deported.

Over and over, Castillo said, he told officers he was a citizen. He pleaded with them to check their computer files.

It took eight months for him to convince authorities to release him.

His story is shared by many U.S. citizens thrown out of the country or jailed because they are arrested as illegal or deportable immigrants. They are caught in the net of an overburdened enforcement network and then stuck in a legal system where the odds are stacked against them.

Pirates vow to retaliate

NAIROBI, Kenya — President Barack Obama promised Monday to work with other nations "to halt the rise of piracy," while Somali pirates vowed revenge for the deaths of three colleagues shot by snipers during the daring high-seas rescue of an American sea captain.

The pirates' threat raised fears for the safety of some 230 foreign sailors still held hostage in more than a dozen ships anchored off lawless Somalia.

Sunday's nighttime operation was a remarkable achievement for snipers on a rolling warship in choppy seas, but few experts believe the victory will quell a rising tide of attacks in one of the world's busiest shipping lanes.

One of the American sailors whose captain was rescued after the five-day standoff urged Obama on Monday to take the lead in ending piracy.

"It's time for us to step in and put a crisis into a wake-up," said Shane Murphy, chief mate aboard the U.S.-flagged Maersk Alabama.

At a Washington news conference, Obama said: "I want to be very clear that we are resolved to halt the rise of piracy in that region and to achieve that goal, we're going to have to continue to work with our partners to prevent future attacks."

"We have to continue to be prepared to confront them when they arise, and we have to ensure that those who commit acts of piracy are held accountable," the president said.

Pirates said they were undaunted.

"From now on, if we capture foreign ships and their respective countries try to attack us, we will kill them the hostages," Jamac Habeb, a 30-year-old pirate, said from one of Somalia's piracy hubs, Eyl. "U.S. forces have become our No. 1 enemy."

Sunday's stunning resolution came after pirates had agreed to let the USS Bainbridge tow their powerless lifeboat out of rough water. A Murth pirate surrendered earlier Sunday and could face life in a U.S. prison.

Interviewed from Bahrain, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command chief Vice Adm. Bill Gortney said Navy SEAL snipers killed three pirates with single shots shortly after sailors on the Bainbridge saw the hostage-takers "with their heads and shoulders exposed."
MISTAKEN IN THE BORDER NIGHT

Americans locked up as illegal immigrants

BY SUZANNE GARDO

The Associated Press

Pedro Guzman has been an American citizen all his life. Yet last year the 31-year-old Los Angeles native—in jail for a conviction for possession of a controlled substance—was locked up as an illegal immigrant because he cannot read or write. And he will be wrongfully detained and kept in jail for months while immigration authorities try to prove that his footprints and fingerprint matches are not his.

For almost three months, Guzman slept in the streets, bathed in filthy rivers and ate out of trash cans while his mother scoured the city of Tijuana, its hospitals and morgues for any document showing he was an American citizen. By the time she found him, he was finally found trying to cross the border at Calexico, 100 miles away, in a drive to crack down on illegal immigration. The United States has locked up or deported citizens over the past eight years. A month-long Associated Press investigation has documented 55 cases over the past eight years. The Associated Press

"This is an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility, particularly for Mexican-Americans on the border."

Lisa Brodyaga

In January 2006, he went back to Mexico to be with his dying grandmother. When he tried to cross back at Laredo, Texas, in March, he carried his birth certificate, his passport and state ID cards from Nebraska, California and Texas, where he had worked.

But by that time border security had become far stricter. Agents looked up Martinez in their database and found the earlier problem at Nogales. They claimed his U.S. passport was fake, he said. He said he asked to call his mother to help prove his citizenship, but was refused.

Martinez's lawyer, Florence Mireles, said in a Feb. 7, 2008, affidavit that he called border inspectors to ask why they had taken Martinez's documents. The response, he said, was false. An officer didn't believe Martinez was a U.S. citizen because he didn't speak English.

"If you're afraid of him, Martinez signed the papers. In an affidavit in his lawsuit, Mireles said he didn't understand that by signing he was admitting to not being being in the U.S."

It took his parents two years to find an affordable attorney. Finally, at a meeting in Hidalgo, Mexico, attorney Lisa Brodyaga showed border inspectors a copy of Martinez's birth certificate that included his fingerprints and a thumbprint and tax records. He was allowed back into the U.S.

Brodyaga said the cases of U.S. citizens detained or deported show more than bureaucratic bungling.

"I've been doing this for 20 years and I've seen bureaucratic bungling. This is more than that," she said. "This is an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility, particularly for Mexican-Americans on the border."

Top left: At his home in Lakewood, Wash., Remonse Castillo shows the ID card he was issued while at the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Wash., during the eight months he was detained there.

Top right: Detainees rest on bunks inside the "B" cell and bunk unit of the Northwest Detention Center in Tacoma, Wash., during the eight months he was detained there.

Bottom left: Pedro Guzman is a mentally ill U.S. citizen who was deported to Mexico.

Bottom right: Detainees sit inside a holding cell at the detention center in Yakima, Wash., during the eight months he was detained there.

"If you're afraid of him, Martinez signed the papers. In an affidavit in his lawsuit, Mireles said he didn't understand that by signing he was admitting to not being being in the U.S."

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