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Salvador sea survivor heading home via Honolulu

• By Miki Toda

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In this video image taken from AP video, Jose Salvador Alvarenga, wearing a hat second from bottom, a Salvadoran man who says he drifted in an open boat across the Pacific for more than a year, gets on the plane at an airport in Majuro, Marshall Islands Monday, Feb. 10, 2014. Alvarenga thanked people for taking care of him after he washed ashore in the island nation late last month and said he was "doing very well" before starting his journey home. (AP Photo/AP Video)

MAJURO, Marshall Islands >> A Salvadoran man who says he drifted in an open boat across the Pacific for more than a year thanked people in the Marshall Islands for taking care of him and said he was "doing very well" before starting his journey home via a stopover in Honolulu Monday.

Marshall Islands President Christopher Loek bid Jose Salvador Alvarenga farewell at the airport.

“Thank you for the support, the support by your people,” Alvarenga told him in Spanish in a soft voice.

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Alvarenga, clean-shaven and walking without assistance, said he was “doing very well.”

He told officials during his two-week recuperation at a hospital and a hotel in the capital, Majuro, that he left Mexico in late 2012 with another fisherman, who later died, when a storm threw them off course and he drifted across 6,500 miles of open ocean. He said he survived on fish, birds and turtles.

About 50 officials, volunteers and reporters gathered at the airport to see him off. He was flying first to Hawaii and then on to El Salvador to be reunited with his family.

Alvarenga, accompanied by Diego Dalton, an official from El Salvador’s embassy in Tokyo, said that people of the Marshall Islands were “very good” to him, and called them “my very good friends.”

Alvarenga’s spritely appearance a week ago while greeting hundreds of well-wishers in Majuro had many questioning his story. But he looked much weaker Thursday during a brief public appearance at the hotel, and had to be assisted into the room by two people while others stood by ready to help.

His family in El Salvador has spoken to him by phone since the story broke out. Alvarenga’s 14-year-old daughter, Fatima, said last week that she didn’t remember ever seeing her father, who left El Salvador when she was just over a year old.

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Castaway set to fly home from Marshall Islands

Agence France-Presse / 12:27 PM February 10, 2014



In this Monday, Feb. 3, 2014 photo shown on a tablet device and released by Willing Kajidrik of the Marshall Islands Sea Patrol on Sunday, Feb. 9, 2014, Jose Salvador Alvarenga, left, eats inside the cabin of a patrol boat while being transferred to Majuro, Marshall Islands, after being rescued. AP

MAJURO – Castaway Jose Salvador Alvarenga was set to depart the Marshall Islands on Monday for his homeland of El Salvador after medics cleared him to travel, a source familiar with the situation said.

The fisherman, who says he survived 13 months adrift on the Pacific Ocean, needed a green light from doctors after suffering from ill-health in the wake of his ordeal, which ended when he washed up on a remote atoll 12 days ago.

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Officials have imposed a media blackout around the exhausted survivor since he conducted a flurry of interviews soon after arriving in Majuro, but a source told AFP he was expected to leave Monday night on a flight bound for Hawaii.

From there, he will travel to El Salvador, most likely via the US West Coast, to be reunited with the family who had long thought he was dead.

The 37-year-old has been in and out of hospital since arriving in Majuro, suffering from dehydration and a range of ailments linked to surviving by eating raw fish and bird flesh and drinking turtle blood and his own urine.

Alvarenga told AFP last week that his crewmate— named as 24-year-old Ezequiel Cordoba – could not stomach the makeshift diet and did not survive the 12,500-kilometer (8,000-mile) trip from Mexico.

The Salvadoran appeared in good health when he first arrived in Majuro but has since complained of back pain, swollen joints and lethargy.

Franklyn House, a retired US doctor who met Alvarenga last week, said he also appeared to be suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome.

He had been due to leave last Friday but El Salvador’s foreign ministry said one of its diplomats had met him and “confirmed that the health of Mr Alvarenga is broken” and must improve before his departure.

In an interview with AFP from his hospital last Tuesday, Alvarenga said he had suicidal thoughts during his trip but was sustained by dreams of reuniting with his family and eating tortilla and chicken.

His mother has said she is eager to oblige when he returns home.

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“We will make him a big meal, but we won’t feed him fish because he must be bored of eating that,” she told AFP. “We will make him a big plate of meat, beans and cheese to help him recover.”

Read more: <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/576178/castaway-set-to-fly-home-from-marshall-islands#ixzz6PMlfXBQJ>

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