

Stowaways in the steering gear trunk



A container vessel had departed from Lagos and the next port of call was in Malaysia. Before departure, the crew performed a stowaway search as per the Ship Security Plan. No stowaways were found.

The vessel departed and after disembarkation another search was carried out. Still no stowaways were found.

The following day the Bosun heard knocking sounds coming from the hull in the steering gear room. He informed the Master straight away. The crew started to investigate the sounds and could hear knocking coming from what they believed was the rudder trunk.

There was no access to the rudder trunk as it is space taken up by the rudder stock. The rudder trunk is only accessible from the outside of the vessel. This was a so-called unbalanced rudder, which means that the rudder stock is attached aft of the rudder hinges. The hinges are at the forward end of the rudder. The vessel was in open sea and the Master brought the vessel to a stop. The crew lowered a camera on the stern to see if they could see anything by the rudder. When they recovered the camera and watched what they had filmed they could see three people sitting on the rudder.

The crew lowered the rescue boat and picked up the three men. The stowaways had used a small rowing boat to reach the vessel and had then managed to climb up the rudder and then into the rudder trunk. So that the stowaways could disembark, the vessel had to divert to Cape Town.

There is never access to the rudder trunk from the inside of the vessel as it is just an open void considered part of the hull.

It is extremely unlikely that a person would be able to sit on the rudder and not be washed out of the rudder trunk during a sea passage. If people in the rudder trunk are not found before departure or shortly after departure, they will most likely be lost at sea.

To prevent stowaways achieving access, please consider the following if the vessel is in a port with a high risk of stowaways:

- Inspect the rudder and if possible the rudder trunk with the rescue boat before departure if the rudder is above the waterline.
- Install protective grating or steel bars onto the steering gear trunk to prevent access from the rudder.

Discussion

Go to the "File" menu and select "Save as..." to save the pdf-file on your computer.

You can place the marker below each question to write the answer directly into the file.



When discussing this case please consider that the actions taken at the time made sense for all involved. Do not only judge, but also ask why you think these actions were taken and could this happen on your vessel?

1. What were the immediate causes of this incident?

2. Is there a risk that this could happen on our vessel?

3. What could you have done to prevent this?

4. Do we search the outside of the vessel when we are in a port with a high risk of stowaways?

5. Do we lower the rescue boat to inspect the rudder and steering gear trunk before departure?

6. If we have a void space for the steering gear trunk, do we have steel bars to prevent access?

7. What sections of our SMS and SSP would have been breached, if any?

8. Do our SMS and SSP address these risks?

9. How could we improve our SMS and SSP to address these issues?

10. What do you think was the cause of this incident?

11. Is there any kind of training that we could take to address these issues?