

12

Piracy



12.1 Piracy attack while waiting for berth

A laden product tanker was drifting 20 miles outside a West African port where it would discharge its cargo. There had been pirate attacks in the area and so the Master had ordered preventive measures to be implemented as per the SSP.

Two ABs were assigned to the poop deck and forecandle, and they were also assigned to monitor the main deck. The crew prepared the deck and attached a single coil of barbed wire on the poop deck, forecandle and on the railing around the vessel; locked all doors and turned on all the outside lights. The Chief Officer noticed that a couple of lights were broken amidships and told the Bosun to repair them the next day.

Delays in berthing

The agent had called the Master and informed him that the berth would be occupied for another two days and would be in contact when the berth was ready.

After midnight the Second Officer was on watch and monitoring a VHF channel dedicated to local navy broadcasts. The main engine was kept running so the vessel could manoeuvre instantly, and two ABs carried out regular patrols on deck.

Boarded by pirates

Shortly after midnight a small boat slowly approached the vessel. It stopped amidships by the broken lights where the freeboard was only 2 metres. The boat crew put a ladder on the railing, which had a carpet attached to protect them from the barbed wire, and climbed on board.

None of the ABs saw the small boat approaching. The boat did not give a stable echo reading on the radar as it was made of wood and the choppy sea interfered.

The five men who climbed on board were pirates and armed with machine guns. They made their way to the poop deck and surprised the AB on watch.

Death threats made

The pirates demanded that the AB should take them to the bridge or they would kill him. When the pirates had secured the bridge they asked for the Chief Engineer to be brought to the bridge. He was beaten when he arrived and told that he would be killed if he tried to sabotage the engine and that any engineer would be killed if they tampered with the engines.

The Second Officer was told to show two of the pirates to the Master's cabin and the other three remained on the bridge with an AB and the Chief Engineer. The Master was forcefully woken up, beaten and forced to open the safe and give all the money to the pirates. When the Master was taken to the bridge, ten more pirates had arrived. A larger vessel was drifting alongside which looked like a fishing boat.

One of the pirates identified himself as the leader and explained to the Master that all the crew should be summoned to the mess room. If anyone resisted or tried to sabotage anything on the vessel he would be killed.

All the crew, except the Master, were placed in the mess room and their hands were tied. The Master remained on the bridge. One of the SSAS buttons was under a radar console but the Master was not close to it and was too scared to push it.

Ship-to-ship transfer

The pirates took control of the vessel and sailed it for ten hours when they stopped beside another smaller tanker. They started a ship-to-ship operation and when the other tanker had been loaded it sailed off. The other two pirate boats had followed and were drifting alongside the vessel. The pirates took the Master to the mess room and tied him to a chair. He finally freed himself and when he reached the bridge he realised that the pirates had left, because both pirate boats were gone. He called the office and informed them what had happened.

What can we learn?

- Best management practices should be followed and need to be adapted to every different area the vessel is visiting. It is essential that a piracy risk assessment for the trading area has been completed as described in 'Best Management Practices to Deter Piracy 5 (BMP5)' and 'Guidelines for Owners, Operators and Masters for Protection Against Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea'.
- It is not common for pirates in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) to use ladders, but in this attack, ladders were used to board the vessel, so preventive measures should be analysed and implemented. Physical barriers which increase the height will make it more difficult for the pirates to attach the ladders. A proper risk assessment needs to be completed.
- It is imperative that all required equipment is in working condition. In this case a number of floodlights were broken.
- Ships operating in the GoG area are strongly urged to plan according to the following:
 - 1 Arrive at the pilot station, port, anchorage or STS area 'just in time'. Plan transit times with consideration to safe speed and maintaining distance offshore or use an offshore waiting area.
 - 2 Rendezvous - where possible, avoid waiting and slow steaming. Consider offering several alternative rendezvous points and advise rendezvous points at the last minute. If waiting, keep well off the coast (up to 200 NM). Do not give away waiting positions. Do not drift and keep engines ready for immediate manoeuvres.
 - 3 Vessels should proceed within the 200 NM range at full speed.
 - 4 Anchoring - where practicable, a prolonged stay at anchorage is to be avoided.
 - 5 Minimise use of VHF and use e-mail or secure satellite telephone instead. Where possible, answer only known or legitimate callers on the VHF, bearing in mind that imposters are likely, and may even appear in uniform.
 - 6 The greatest risks of piracy are at night and these need to be factored into all planning. Where possible, operations should start and end during daylight hours.
 - 7 The use of privately contracted armed guards on board is banned in Nigerian waters.
 - 8 If using an armed escort, due diligence on the company providing this service must be conducted to ensure strict adherence to the MOU issued by the Nigerian Navy and Nigerian Maritime Administration & Safety Agency (NIMASA).
 - 9 Shipowners and managers must have a means of verification that hardening measures are available and in place on vessels prior to entering the GoG area.
 - 10 Spot checks for verification at ports within the GoG area are an additional option to consider.
 - 11 Nigerian naval armed guards can protect merchant ships utilising patrol boats to escort ships in the region.
 - 12 Maintain all-round visual lookouts and good radar watch.
 - 13 Report to MDAT-GoG (the Maritime Domain Awareness for Trade – Gulf of Guinea, operated jointly by French and UK Navies): watchkeepers@mdat-gog.org/emergency
tel: +33(0) 298 22 88 88.
 - 14 The MDAT-GoG will liaise directly with the navies in the region in the event of an attack. If a ship does not report to the centre, then there is likely to be a delay in the response from the regional navy. Alerts and warnings will be issued by MDAT-GoG and they will also contact vessels in the immediate vicinity of an incident.

Glossary of common industry abbreviations

Term	Meaning
AB	Able seaman
AIS.....	Automatic identification system
ARPA	Automatic radar plotting aid
COLREGS	International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea
COSWP	Code of Safe Working Practices for Merchant Seafarers
CPA	Closest point of approach
CSM.....	Cargo securing manual
ECDIS	Electronic chart display information system
ETA	Estimated time of arrival
GM.....	Metacentric height
GPS	Global positioning system
IHO	International Hydrographic Organization
IMDG Code	International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IMSBC Code	International Maritime Solid Bulk Cargoes Code
ISM	International Safety Management Code
JRCC	Joint rescue coordination centre
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
NM.....	Nautical miles
OOW	Officer on watch
PA	Public address system
PMS.....	Planned maintenance system
SMS.....	Safety management system
SSAS	Ship security alert system
SSP	Ship security plan
STS	Ship-to-ship (transfer)
TML.....	Transportable moisture limit
UHF	Ultra high frequency (radio)
VDR	Voyage data recorder
VHF	Very high frequency (radio)
VTS	Vessel traffic service



Head Office Gothenburg

Visiting address:

Gullbergs Strandgata 6, 411 04 Gothenburg

Postal address:

P.O. Box 171, 401 22 Gothenburg, Sweden

Tel: +46 31 638 400 | E-mail: swedish.club@swedishclub.com

Emergency: +46 31 151 328

For more information about The Swedish Club Casebook
please contact Loss Prevention Team at
lossprevention@swedishclub.com