

Case study for onboard safety meeting

Case study no. 8: Piracy attack

Please read the below story of an incident. Keep our procedures in mind while reading to compare with the actions of the crew below as we will discuss the factors which led to the incident occurring.

A general cargo vessel shall transit from Asia to Europe via the Gulf of Aden (GoA). Before departure, the Master receives a note from the shipowners regarding the transit through the GoA. The note states that a peak in piracy attacks could be expected in the coming weeks and that any attack which damages the toxic cargo could be fatal to the crew and damaging to the environment. In addition, an updated seven-day weather forecast for the GoA indicates that a moderate breeze, and 1 m waves can be expected.

An ISPS (International Ship and Port Facility Security) audit before departure reveals that no security exercise has been carried out on the ship for the last year. The audit also indicates that a number of crewmembers have insufficient knowledge of the Ship Security Plan and their respective tasks and duties contained therein. Nevertheless, the Master accepts the outcome of the audit. However, he reports back to head office that, due to the crew's limited capacity to handle an incident, additional security measures such as barbed wire along the railings should be considered. In their reply, the shipowners advise that they will not provide additional guards for the ship. The Master understands this message to mean that the shipowners are satisfied with the current situation and that no further measures need to be taken.

The crew consists of both experienced and inexperienced seamen. However, two crewmembers have previously encountered armed robbers in the Malacca Straits. Although no crewmembers have expressed any concerns about the coming passage, the Master is aware that members of the crew have concerns about the potential consequences of an attack. He calls a meeting to inform the crew that a piracy attack should not be repelled in a way that could escalate the situation and jeopardise the cargo. After the meeting he is not completely satisfied that all crewmembers understood his message due to their different cultural backgrounds and languages. Some crewmembers also have their doubts as to what to do, but feel reluctant to inform the Master.

The ship communicates with naval forces before entering the Gulf of Aden. A rota for watchkeeping is implemented and, during the first 24 hour of transit, everything is calm and no suspicious vessels are observed. The Master has not slept for 24 hours and decides to get a few hours sleep. Early the following morning the Master is called to the bridge when a suspicious vessel rapidly closes in astern.

The Master considers the boat approaching suspicious and decides to raise the alarm with the naval forces and the shipowners. He also gives the order for evasive manoeuvring. Nothing has been heard from the lookout posted astern when shoots are fired against the ship. Shortly thereafter the lookout informs the bridge via radio that the pirates have twice tried to fix a grappling hook onto the railing without success. On their third attempt he tried to release the hook when shoots were fired against him. The Master assesses the situation as highly critical, especially since the crew has no secure area they could withdraw to should the pirates enter the ship. However, by now a passing navy helicopter is rapidly approaching and the pirates abort the boarding.

After the attack, the crew gathered for a short debrief where they conclude that they should have been better prepared and trained.



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Risk assessment form

Based on the case, we will now perform an onboard risk assessment of the incident and the factors which led to it. Bearing in mind our own procedures, please consider the following:

Hazard Identification

Based on the case description, what are the potential hazards involved, i.e. the hazards present prior to the incident occurring?

Risk Assessment

Could these hazards be present onboard our ships?

Frequency: How often (daily, monthly or annually) are these hazards present?

Severity: How bad are the worst possible outcomes of these hazards?

Risk Acceptance

Are the risks identified above acceptable in our company or should any of the identified risks be reduced?

Risk Treatment

How can the identified risks be reduced?

