

Combating Piracy

Further to the joint meeting and presentation, "Pirates' Playground", held with the Nautical Institute, Solent Branch, in the clubroom on 18th May, another joint discussion meeting on the subject is to be held there at 1900 on the evening of 8th December.

A DVD on the piracy issue was commissioned by Steamship Mutual P&I Club and approved by a number of bodies including UKNAVFOR, IMO and the MCA. The meeting will consist of viewing the DVD followed by a discussion on the issues arising from it. http://http://www.nisolent.org.uk/?page_id=70



In March 2011 a group of 30 maritime organisations joined together to start the Save Our Seafarers campaign which is calling for unified action to raise awareness of the human and economic cost of piracy. Visit <http://www.saveourseafarers.com/>

At a Luncheon held by The Merchant Mariners Of Wight in September, which several Cachalots attended, piracy was also on the menu, but this time the focus was on the humanitarian response. The Speaker, Dr Peter Swift, is the Steering Group Chairman of a pan-industry alliance of ship owners, unions, managers, manning agents, insurers and welfare associations (maritime, labour, faith or secular) which has come together to establish the "Maritime Piracy: a Humanitarian Response Programme" (MPHRP). <http://www.mphrp.org/>

Locally, together with the Solent Branch of the N.I., Captain Reg Kelso has been at the forefront in trying to bring the subject to the attention of the public and to keep it in the spotlight. Copied in the box below is his latest letter to be published, this time in

In 'Piracy Solutions' (Seaways, October 2011), Steven Jones hits the nail very firmly on the head when he writes 'The time for saying that piracy is too difficult to stop is over' and it is heartening to read that, at long last, several countries are making strides against piracy. Most welcome is the involvement of the United States focussing on security, prevention and deterrence.

Undoubtedly, years of procrastination have allowed piracy to develop into the highly profitable global industry that it is today and what started as an ad hoc disorganised criminal endeavour has become a major threat to the trade routes of the world with pirate 'mother ships' operating thousands of miles from their bases - and insufficient naval power to deal with them.

Undoubtedly, the use of mother ships is the key factor in the expansion of piracy and without them the area under threat would be massively reduced and, probably, manageable.

In February 2011, Richard Meade and Gavin van Marie gave the names and type of some 17 hijacked vessels now acting in this capacity in *Lloyds List*, quoting NATO as their source of information.

The ship types ranged from fishing vessels (7) to chemical tankers (2), general cargo (2), an asphalt tanker, a product carrier, a ro-ro, an LPG carrier and two containerships and the name of each was given. Almost unbelievably, their report states that the pirates are 'operating the fleet in the full knowledge of anti-piracy naval forces which routinely track the vessels but are prevented from mounting rescue attempts due to strict Rules of Engagement'.

It is said that the Rules imposed on ships of the Royal Navy preclude the detention aboard of captured pirates and

that this is a source of considerable embarrassment to their crew members in their dealing with other seafarers working with EU NAVFOR.

If these absurd operational restrictions still apply the instructions giving rise to them should be rescinded forthwith to enable the anti-piracy forces to deal with the roaming mother ships, thereby curtailing their operational area. The belief that the pirates will use the hostage crew members of the mother ships as human shields is almost certainly accurate but, as has been said before, these young Somalis are not suicide bombers and when presented by overwhelming force it is unlikely that they will harm their captives or resist too strenuously.

Somalia has been ungoverned for some twenty years and until such time as the present system of tribal control is replaced by a more democratic one (and gainful employment found for many thousands of young Somalis) there will be no end to the criminal activities. If, as reported, the coastal waters of that country are being used as a dumping ground for toxic waste (thus decimating the fishing industry) steps should be taken to ensure that those responsible cease their activities and lodge adequate compensation for payment at a later date.

None of this should be seen as in any way justifying the criminal actions of the pirates and the eradication of their criminal activities must take priority over every other consideration. Already there are fears that Kenya is being destabilised by the influx of cash-rich Somalis buying properties with the proceeds of ransom payments. If the scourge of Indian Ocean piracy is not to spiral out of all control, the time for positive action is now.

Captain C R Kelso FNI, Bursledon, UK

And here, out of the box, as it were, is the latest offering on the subject from that independent thinker Allan McDowall who, over the years has enthralled us with lurid tales of his piratical encounters. This is proffered solely to provoke discussion at our forthcoming in-house seminar on Piracy and the SMMC neither endorses nor promotes the views expressed ; they are solely those of Captain McDowall who will, no doubt, expand upon them during our discussions.

Allan McDowall's remembrances:

I myself was attacked by pirates 5 times, numerous attempts also, which adjusts one's view somewhat.

The advice to masters at the time, January 1992, could only be described as fatuous. After the first attack on my ship - we had repulsed them by having made the ship impregnate by a bit of simple but cunning engineering (*the main point is that we engineered the controls so that they*

could be switched to the engine-room and the steering flat from the engine-room; and we isolated the bridge from the rest of the ship, and used the safety locker in the wheelhouse as a refuge - it had a door which opened outwards and was lockable from inside. We steered by communication with the engine room by radio from remote spots, depending on reception on each ship. Cabins which were accessible from outside were abandoned and secured from inside) - I was summoned to DoT Marsham Street and bawled out for not welcoming them and giving them a cup of tea and a scone.

I replied by politely telling the assembled room-full of civil servants exactly why the advice to masters should be changed - which, after the Navy had had a word in their ear, they did. (The change was in effect to keep a layer of steel between you and them at all times.) My attitude was, and remains, just that; to treat armed robbers like very strong quick cunning baboons, and not allow them to get anywhere near anyone on board. Also to prevent them boarding if possible - which is where the arms would come in, were the ship to be armed. Much best to get them to go away; and better to disable their boats and mother ship, without equivocation. Tut, not allowed.

Recently the advice was changed back again, but I understand that very recently again it has been put back to what I and others who have had the same experience pointed out.

Now the advice is rich in vague terms, but very thin on what one can do about it in detail. I will go through the rules, but they are made by people who have not had a 'nasty' attack themselves - or no attack at all. This because now, if you give specific advice, you could be held responsible. Sure, you could. So make the advice good, workable and carefully thought out, based on the experience of yourself backed up by the experience of others. Good designers are very cautious people. I once asked Dr. Stan Butler, who designed the Concorde and did the stress calculations - on a slide-rule, as calculations were done in those days, in the tradition of R.J. Mitchell - "Do you have a Pilot's licence, Stan?"

Long pause - "No - but I do have a glider silver C"

"Why?"

"Engines fail, you know." Which was exactly what my father said to me when invited for a flight in a little aeroplane.

I would say:

a) You are on your own for sure unless you are in a convoy - policing the ocean is impossible, except in convoy - hugely expensive. That has always been my experience.

b) Arming merchant vessels in principle and theory would seem to be 'good', but the practice raises some hideous problems, all of which have been experienced before. Which is why ships are not armed at all nowadays - (except those who disobey and somehow cache their arms). One can have a faultless AK47, but one cannot design the hands that hold it. It works if the arms are right for the situation, the crew trained and brave, and not asleep - unlike one master who was awakened with a cup of tea by a strange man who said: "Captin, my Captin - I am the Captin now!" Not edifying.

A fairly heavy gun works well (the more the better) for keeping aggressive craft away in my experience in the South Atlantic, but they need to KNOW you are armed or the psychology does not work too well until they find out the hard way. Not all aggressors run away, but I have never seen one who has not yet. It takes such a lot of fuel to catch them too. So the trick is to be between them and their home port if one needs to board them.

Therefore being armed needs to be effective, in every way, with the appropriate weapon / s. Properly chosen persons, properly trained in their weapons; calm, determined attitude, and training to give awareness of the ways the robbers use; and the right mind-set. A general solution sounds fine, but it only takes one crewman/woman to destroy the safety of all. It is normal to be afraid, but one has to learn to control that, and that takes mind-set and some help from ones senior officers, and training. Which is what the Navy is about. Merchant seamen do not get that, we have to draw on our own character resources.

I did ask the RN C/O at the time whether he locked all the arms up when a warship engaged pirates, and he replied "Of course not!" So I said; "But that is what you ask of merchant seamen - where is the difference?". He said, "There isn't one, really. I had not thought of it quite like that". No, there is not.

Being unarmed in the face of a heavy gun is quite intense for the concentration - I once had an Iranian Corvette fire his fore-deck gun 5 shots 1 foot over my head at range of 50 metres because he, the Commander, wanted me to move a gassed-up, dead-ship 275,000 tonner from her location near Sirri Island, and I had not done so within the 24 hours he had demanded the previous day - we were just making fast the 1 hour late tug when the Corvette arrived (we had 5 men on board, including myself) - the tug slipped his line to us and scuttled off, keeping the VLCC between tug and warship. That was a bad idea - the ship was not moved, and the Captain (me) had to change his shorts. Not too often have I had to do that.

I asked the office to send another tug, but that we would have to slip the anchor because the compressed air would not lift the anchor. (I had heaved the cable out of the locker and parted the Kenter shackle, all ready, with the cable on the guillotine arranged to slip remotely: No, No, they said, anchors and cables are expensive - we will take you off and send some-one who can lift the anchor instead, you incompetent fooollll!!).

So at 0200 a little pinnace came and took us 5 craven people off, and they later sent another 5 someone elses who tried to lift the anchor, but could not. So divers were sent, where it was found that the ship had swung round and round and the coral had grown into the cable knot, so that there was a ball of steel and coral of 100 tonnes on the bottom. - so they had to operate my slip and drop anchor and cable after all, which enabled them to tow the ship towards Taiwan to the breakers yard. They managed to get as far as the Western Anchorage at Singapore for a rest - and left her there 'for a while'..... only the ship being dead-ship and 5 men lacking in imagination, there were no lights on board A visiting Korean master thought - "Chosi-middah ! (*jolly good*) - that big, black space is a nice open bit of channel for me to anchor in," - so, without looking at his radar, he proceeded into the black hole; there was a bump, closely followed by a bang, and then another, very big bang. No more VLCC.

Korean ship ? I have not found out what happened to her. Annio-middah !!(*really quite bad*). VLCC did not get any further. (That is it, roughly - the exact details need filling in, to find out.)

c) The alternative is to engineer the ships to be impregnable. Not too difficult for some, impossible for others.

The fort option I called it - the Navy changed it to Fortress Option (has more ring to it, said Deputy Director Naval Defence Captain Toby Elliott, OBE. RN.)

I was exceedingly lucky because 4 years before I was attacked for the first time, another master had his ship's money and the radio officer's wife stolen south of Singapore, near Putau Sambu. All this on the VHF. We could not help, shallow water in between, so had to listen to the screams. She was never heard of again.

4 years tater, I had a letter from Captain Tom Houlder, Chief Pilot of Umm Said, from the intelligence authorities, saying that my ship's name had been mentioned on an un-authorized communication between Singapore and Djakarta, we were apparently the planned target for a pirate attack, and should take extra precautions, and they wished us good fortune. We already took precautions, but tightened up and drilled. They came, -armed with AK47s and dressed in balaclavas - could not get in, so went away again. 3/O on watch had a heart attack from fear, had to go home, never to sail again. But we were all ok. 4 more attacks, none quite as bad as that one; two were quite bad, though, and illustrated the need that in a siege situation, it only takes one person to let the whole side down.

There was a post-script. Some years tater, I met the Malaysian admiral who had been in charge of the Malacca Straits at the time on an un-related but interesting matter. He knew of this episode, which was why he had asked me to do the task he needed doing.

The cure for terrorism is to terrorise the terrorist absolutely. You want to win, to expunge the activity? Then " Never mind hearts and minds, Grab 'em by the Balls." (Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz)

Allan McDowall (retired Master)

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