

Part 1: Frontline tales from the high-seas: An Advanfort security team under suspicious approach

By Kuido Ever

Our team, two men and a woman, all with previous combat experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, had embarked on the MV Spar Gemini in Port of Salalah in Oman. The vessel's destination was Port Maputo in Mozambique; however, our security team's disembarkation point was Port Nacala in the same country, a 12-day journey.

At the beginning everything seemed nice and peaceful. The sun was shining every day and the sea was very calm. However, a seemingly peaceful sea also means greater threat of pirate attack, especially because the monsoon season had just ended. Before then, seasonal winds that bring torrential rainfall result in the sea becoming very rough. The physical risks involved meant that pirates were reluctant to embark on their sinister adventures.

Two days before the security team's disembarkation point, near Comoros Islands, AdvanFort's watch officer spotted two approaching skiffs. Immediately all other team members and the MV Spar Gemini's duty officer were notified.

With all of our security team on the bridge, we maintained a full-court look-out on both the skiffs and MV Spar Gemini's surroundings, At the same time, the Master and duty officer stood on the bridge ready to take evasive maneuvers.

Using the ship's internal communication system, the Master also informed the crew about a possible pirate attack, making sure that they would be ready to enter the citadel—a secure room that is almost impossible to break in to (complete with a communication system to contact warships and the United Kingdom Marine Trade Operations / UKMTO) center), and at least three days of food and water.

Meanwhile, the two skiffs that were approaching us directly at high speed suddenly stopped about half a mile from our vessel, perhaps unconsciously imitating the sharks their evil work imitates, and started circling around.

At first we thought probably they saw us on the bridge wing bearing arms and aborted the attack. However, suddenly one of our guards saw one more skiff approaching, also at high speed, from the other side of the vessel. Now we had skiffs taking positions on both sides of the vessel--two circled around on one side, the other approaching directly on the other.

The AdvanFort security team leader and one of our other security guards quickly made their way to the side of bridge wing where the new skiff was approaching, while myself and the duty officer were maintaining watch on other two skiffs. At the same time, the Master was quickly beginning to steer in sharp maneuvers to keep these “sharks” at bay.

The one skiff still approaching showed no signs of stopping. When it was about 500-400 meters from the vessel, our security team made its first warning shot, but to little or no effect, as the skiff only reduced speed slightly.

The tension and excitement in the bridge was already very high and the Master thought it necessary to raise the pirate alarm, so that the crew would go to the citadel. AdvanFort's team leader let the Master know that we would make one more warning shot. If the skiff still maintained its approach, he then would then raise the alarm and start with evasive maneuvers.

Our security team got off another warning shot, this time closer to skiff (basically in front of it). This shot had its effect and the skiff turned around, made a few still-menacing circles and went away. After that the two skiffs which were in other side the vessel also began to put distance between us and them.

Before these two skiffs moved away the duty officer took some pictures with a photo camera that had a very good, powerful lens. The skiffs had moved away, and now the tension and excitement on the vessel quickly evaporated. The Master thanked us for what he called good professional work in response to the threat.

Our security team maintained a higher look-out for a while, but after that we were able to go back to our routine. After two again nice and calm days we reached our security team disembarkation point and started to pack to leave the vessel.

Before disembarking the Master thanked us one more time for our professional work in the face of the suspicious approach and said that he would like to see us, or other of AdvanFort's professional guards, once again on his ship. We disembarked and MV Spar Gemini continued its voyage, safely, to Port Maputo.

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in the high-risk sea off Somalia.*