

Part II: Frontline tales from high-risk seas: AdvanFort secures a client's voyage on the Bab-el-Mandeb channel

By ErmoKruus and Viktor Sarap

The MV Glory Mercy, on its way from the Red Sea to China, was embarked last August 17th, at 17 N, before sunrise (1-2 a.m. local time) by an AdvanFort armed security team to provide safe voyage through a high-risk area. The highest risk area is, of course, right along the shores of Somalia. In recent years, the attacks have been occurring in the vicinity of the narrow Bab-el-Mandeb channel, where Red Sea meets Gulf of Aden and whose shallowest point is located at the northern end of the strait. Because the attacks are occurring more in the Red Sea, the vessels are picking security teams up in this area and not from Djibouti, as they were just a year ago.

The AdvanFort guards settled in, held a meeting with the ship's master and a conducted a mandatory walk around the vessel to make notes of possible improvements needed to further secure it and began their duty. Around noon the same day, the team and the crew were given the reality check all too common in that part of the maritime world.

Masters are required and advised to have additional look out on a vessel's bridge wings. This is to provide a constant lookout, even as the guard on duty is either monitoring the radar or having a walk-around on one or the other side. On this particular day, the chief officer had the crew working outside, as some improvements were necessary.

Around 1 p.m. a speedboat was observed coming straight at the ship, at high speed. Usually the fishermen in that area are easily identified by fishing rods standing tall on their boats, but this was no fishing boat. A general alarm was sounded to summon the crew from the deck.

A second security guard responded to the alarm and immediately got to the bridge, where he took the lookout on the other side of the vessel to make sure no other suspicious skiffs were approaching in tandem. On further observation it was determined that the course of the skiff was not going to bypass the vessel. Therefore a visual warning, by showing one of our weapons, was initiated.

Because the skiff showed no reaction to that first step, a warning shot was fired in to the air. At this time the skiff changed its course, more towards the side of vessel, and a possible weapon was visible on the skiff.

A tarp was covering the white speedboat, from under which two more would-be pirates came out.

A warning shot rang out from the skiff, which luckily did not go very near the bridge but, by being heard, was meant to scare the crew and stop the vessel. In response, a security team member fired a shot in to the water just in front of the skiff.

The splash was noted by the men aboard the boat, who made a second change of course. This time the skiff was going parallel to the vessel. To minimize the risk to the crew, which was still moving on the deck in order to get inside, a second shot was fired into the water.

Seeing that our fire from around 300 yards was both close and accurate, the men on the skiff killed their engine, got under the tarp, and waited until it was safe to get out of the area.

What may to be a long development of an event in written text was actually a just a five-minute incident that ended as quickly as it had started.

The rest of the voyage was safe and quiet.

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