



## WORLD NEWS

# Piracy - Fact or Fiction?

Piracy is on the upswing. More incidents are reported every year. The misadventure involving the 90 foot sloop Longobarda which was fired upon by pirates off the Somalian coast in April 1995 has fuelled passionate discussions regarding the best methods to meet this challenge. As a result, with some owners already changing their cruise plans, the yachting industry may be facing a crisis.

Piracy is certainly not a new phenomenon. It is as old as seafaring. However nowadays pirates are better armed and, some say, crueler. If the perceived difference between "them" and "us" has grown over the centuries, this is largely because of we have grown up in more sheltered environments than our ancestors, leaving us far less well prepared to confront predators.

There have never been so many vessels on the world's oceans. This has created an ever increasing number of victims upon which pirates now prey. This expansion closely parallels the world's demographic explosion, which has produced more frustration, more crime and more pirates.

The increase in the number of piracy related incidents, however, is arithmetical and not geometrical as certain media would attempt to portray. The probability for any given vessel to be attacked remains essentially the same as it has always been.

The proper attitude regarding yachting security is the same as that of maritime safety: no one would put to sea without life-rafts, although no one really expects to have to abandon ship when boarding a mega-yacht. By the same token, no one should put to sea without



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security means and procedures, even if an occasion for their use appears remote. Yachting security should not be addressed simply by buying weapons or equipment. Training and experience are as important for security as they are for safety.

The issue of piracy is a complex one.

For one thing, governments have different priorities to sailors. Most governments are reluctant to play tough with piracy complacent nations and any solution should not be expected to arrive from governments. Yachtsmen will be lucky if these bodies do not seek to impose oddball security regulations as some have already done in the name of maritime safety. The latest New Zealand safety regulations are a good example of what can happen in the name of maritime security.

Certain local governments regard piracy as a way to keep their sailors and, in some instances their officials, away from domestic crime. Far from curing the problem they simply try to limit such activities. Guilty or not, no government will guarantee security. Many will not allow targeted vessels the means for their defense. Worse, the sinking of the Rainbow Warrior, in 1985, proved that even democratic

governments will not hesitate to use violence on private vessels to achieve dubious goals.

Instead of taking all the necessary steps for their security, pleasure vessels sailors are engaged in the never ending discussion regarding the issue of firearms on board. Then they seek to avoid troubled areas, missing the point that trouble is eminently unpredictable.

A recent example; who could have predicted the Barbuda killings?

Although the first step toward security on Superyachts is often taken in the form of warning systems like cameras, infrared barriers and other movement detectors, the second step, appropriate and timely reaction, is seldom considered. Relying on the crew's common sense is a good prevention method, assuming the crew is security aware. However, an appropriate and timely reaction can come only from a trained crew who has rehearsed its security procedures.

Although any vessel may be the targeted by pirates, different boats have different security concerns.

Vessels under 60 feet are extremely vulnerable because of minimal crew and weak physical



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defenses. They provide the bulk of the horror stories because they are, by far, the most numerous and tend to find themselves in the most remote places. When a crisis occurs, these crews must react appropriately at a split seconds notice. The late Peter Tangwald's unfortunate misadventures with pirates in Asia and with thieves in Tunisia should provide reference material for crews.

Vessels between 60 and 110 feet are the most at risk and face all kinds of threats. They are large enough to be worth a theft or kidnap attempt and small enough to have a limited crew. They attract pirates and assailing thieves like honey attracts bears, and their physical defenses are not that much greater than their smaller counterparts. Surprisingly, whilst the owner's mansion and business may be electronically secured, his boat, which cannot count on police patrols or neighborhood watches, will have little or no security. The Longobarda demonstrate the unpreparedness of most yachts. Fortunately a Canadian Frigate was traversing the area. However luck is elusive and the effectiveness of the maneuvers by the yacht skipper may not otherwise have sufficed.

Yachts over 110 feet definitely have more defensive means

with a larger crew, higher freeboard and stronger hull. The crew typically possess greater security awareness due to the profile of their owners and/or guests. Marauders will be warier of vessels of this size.

However thieves, kidnappers, pirates, terrorists and other extortionists will definitely consider their options and look for opportunities.

The assassination of Lord Mountbatten, aboard the Shadow V on August 27, 1979, in Mullaghmore, is sad proof of the vulnerability of persons of stature, regardless of the vessels size.

Firearms are the best cockpit conversation. Although far from being a panacea, firearms provide more options. "A nice word with a gun is always better understood than simply a nice word." However, without the proper procedures and training firearms are as useless as a computer to an illiterate. Untrained or unprepared people should not consider firearms an option.

For every problem firearms solve, another is raised. Problems can be solved, human lives cannot be replaced. In any case, crews whose vessels policies preclude firearms, can still be reasonably trained and prepared for most situations.



The International Maritime Bureau (IMB), which carries out excellent analysis of piracy activity, recommends not having arms on board since they might escalate a situation. This is an understandable position for this international body. However, when they recommend repelling armed pirates with fire-hoses, I wonder from what experiences they have formed these opinions. Fighting back armed and frantic attackers by drenching them is not an option that I recommend, nor would anyone who has experienced an attack by gunfire. No firearms may be a viable and reasonable option, but if the yacht is boarded by armed pirates, surrendering becomes the only option. I prefer to have more than one option.

The reason I remain in favor of firearms aboard is that in most cases it is far easier to be firm and non-confrontational when you have the means to terminate a confrontation to your advantage, *ci vis pacem parabellum*.

Many authors on maritime security preach the same basics; be a hard target and avoid troubled areas. As most Captains are well aware, it is quite a challenge to harden a vessel whose primary function is

relaxation and fun, and the troubled areas are the ones primarily associated with relaxation and fun. Cruising Antarctica in a Man of War may not be what most owners had in mind when their Yacht was delivered.

Technology and engineered solutions have helped the development of the Super yacht industry. However, technology has never brought solid solutions to security issues because of the intrinsic human factors involved. Yachting security will always be more operational than physical.

In a time when most wheelhouses look like aircraft cockpits, it is surprising to see how few vessels are operated in reference to an operational manual, as aircrafts are.

Yachting security relies on two intangible precepts: mind set, which can only be acquired through training and procedures, which must be carefully established and rehearsed.

By preparing for security issues in advance, the yachting industry may be able to safeguard the freedom it has always enjoyed.