

Dutch Special Forces

AS LONG AS THE WORLD LASTS

On 5 April 2010, Dutch Navy frigate Hr Ms Tromp was patrolling an area 500 nautical miles from the Somali coast as part of the EU's anti-piracy operation Atalanta, with a primary task of protecting shipping in the area.



1

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Tromp had a Maritieme Special Operations Forces (MARSOF) team, which included Unit Interventie Mariniers (UIM) operators.

On the second day of Easter, a German cargo ship called Taipan had sent out a distress call saying pirates were attacking it and the 15 crew were trapped in a saferoom.

Tromp was closest, and soon had the vessel within range. Its captain attempted to make contact with the pirates by using a mariphone to tell the pirates to hand the ship over.

When they received no reaction, the captain gave the green light to send in the UIM operators.

A small boarding team of six men was assembled and lifted off in a Lynx helicopter, piloted by a female member of the Dutch Royal Navy.

The pirates opened fire and the Dutch returned fire from the Tromp and the door gun of the helicopter. The pilot positioned the helicopter near the bow of the Taipan, where a stack of containers provided cover for the team to use a fast rope. The door gunner gave constant covering fire in the direction of the ship's bridge as the team deployed.

Minutes later, 10 pirates were in custody.

The interior of the bridge indicated how accurate the covering fire had been as all of the windows were riddled with bullet holes.

During the following search, doors riddled with bullet holes were found kicked in, and weapons including RPG 7 rocket-propelled-grenade launchers, AK47 assault rifles and Tokarov pistols were found.

When the crew emerged from hiding, they sang to the marines. The operation had been a complete success, with only one UIM operator slightly injured.

Taipan's crew had followed Atalanta's protocols for a ship under attack from pirates, immobilising the vessel by turning off all engines and machinery, radioed the warships patrolling the Gulf of Aden for help, and then locked themselves away in a secure part of the ship to await rescue.

After some minor repairs to the bridge, the crew of the Taipan were able to continue their voyage. The captured pirates were transported to Djibouti by the Dutch and sent to Germany to face trial.

The MARSOF force operating off Somalia has ward off many attempts by pirates to hijack other vessels. The Dutch also operate an amphibious operation, which raids coastal pirate camps and confiscates their skiffs.