



EARLY WARNING: THE ESSENTIAL ANTI-PIRACY SYSTEM

BY DEAN LA VEY

PIRACY IS DESCRIBED AS AN ACT OF VIOLENCE OR robbery at sea and all piracy depends on two important variables – superior firepower, but more importantly, the act of surprise attack. If no-one knows you're there, there'll always be the advantage. Piracy through the ages and up to modern times has always employed surprise attack.

Not so long ago between France and Corsica, a 60 m+ motor yacht was anchored with some 70 guests aboard enjoying what people do on large yachts during an evening function. The yacht had a four man (supposed ex-special forces) security team and a decent CCTV system and was clearly visible two kilometres away with lights ablaze. Unfortunately, the security team could realistically see only fifty feet around the yacht and the navigational radar was not being monitored. At around 11 pm seven armed men carrying both GSM and GPS jamming equipment boarded the yacht from a rigid inflatable and robbed every guest getting away with over \$200,000 in cash and valuables. They also took away with them the hard disk from the

CCTV system processor. It took less than 20 minutes and no-one has been apprehended. Sure, everyone saw them speed off from the aft deck end, but where they went at 30 knots after that is not known. This was a well prepared and well executed operation by persons knowing exactly how the security layout of the yacht worked. In addition, nobody knew they were coming and no-one was prepared for this kind of event. Remember also that this was the Med and not the coast of East Africa!

CONTINGENCIES

Not all large yachts have security teams with many relying on crew, with the ship's security officer more often than not being the First Officer. The crew may have undergone a 'security awareness course', however this author's experience is that it all goes out of the window under duress. The key issue here is contingencies against attacks on the vessel and its guests and crew. Whether during the day or more critically at night, crew should be able to detect and react to possible breaches of



security. All too often a yacht security system is geared to on-board protection in port, with little regard for detection of threats while at sea. There are a number of factors governing this. Firstly, there is pure complacency. Most attacks on yachts are not publicised and many feel the threat does not exist. Secondly, there is the equipment cost. Security equipment is not high on the agenda when it comes to on-board equipment and comes way down the list after flat screen TVs and Jet Skis. Some public schools have better systems! Also high specification security equipment isn't cheap; however it's not as expensive as some of the other equipment bolted to the masthead. Thirdly, there is security awareness and crew training. Having the best equipment but not knowing what to do or react does not make the yacht secure. Crew need to be security aware and be able to react to all possible situations where the yacht and its occupants may come into harm's way.

EARLY WARNING

In general terms, marine radar is a navigational aid and needs some considerable experience to decipher all the responses shown on the screen. In addition, thermal imaging equipment relies on manual operation to efficiently view targets. Sure, you can hook certain thermal imagers to follow a radar vector, but they are often lost when the radar image is crowded. There is however new technology early warning systems that utilise dedicated radar and advanced infra-red sensors to detect and track possible threat targets. An example of this is the LSN (Life Safety Now) system which provides a 360° perimeter around the vessel using high speed radar at 60 rpm. Once a target is detected,



LEFT:
AN LSN THERMAL IMAGE

the system's thermal imager will track the target giving course and speed and giving real time images at user selected resolutions. The advantage of this type of system is that once the software enabled perimeter is determined around the vessel, the system is completely automatic. Numerous alarm options are available. Other defensive systems can be brought automatically on-line without alarming the guests on-board; and practised security procedures can be engaged by either the security team or crew. The system continually tracks until the intruder has left the perimeter area. As with most systems of this type, it has a proven military history and will track multiple targets. The LSN system can also be remotely monitored. In terms of efficiency and cost, it is categorically one of the best defensive systems you could install on a large yacht – in fact any vessel!

A WORD ABOUT PIRATES

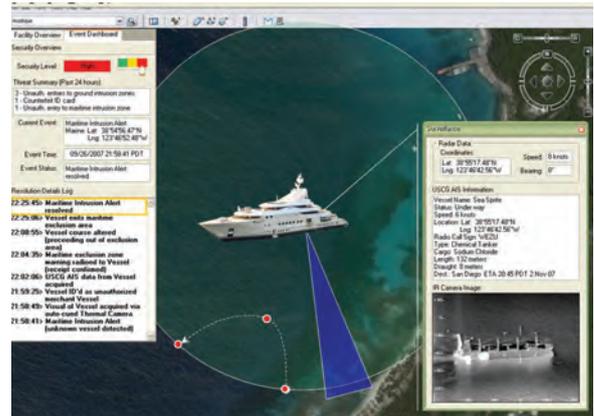
There is a misconception that pirates are opportunists who attack vessels they 'think' may have something of value on board they want. This is not the case. People who pirate vessels are well

RIGHT:
A SCREENGRAB OF A
TYPICAL LSN IMAGE

disciplined and intelligent. They will study the vessel and the security measures employed well before they attack it. They'll study the calibre of the crew and security staff at distance and over time. They'll know in advance of the vessel's movements and what functions are planned on route. They'll know who the owner is, who their friends and business associates are and based on that and other information gauge what possible booty there is on board for the taking. It's not the yacht itself! What is a pirate going to do with a slow moving 60 m yacht in the Med with a contingent of guests and crew? In many instances it is easy to research valuables and artwork contained within a superyacht. The press and not just yachting press regularly outline it. One owner of a recently launched high profile yacht had the entire inventory of famous paintings aboard outlined in the national press with even pictures and the individual painting values listed. There is another threat from pirates and that is to individuals themselves and kidnap and ransom is a very real issue. It's all down to surprise and advantage.

OUTCOME

If you are aware that persons with ill intent are approaching your vessel whilst at sea and you know the speed and vector and you can clearly view the approaching threat at distance, you take away the advantage and element of surprise the intruder assumes they have. Once detected and alerted to their detection, the



threat is more likely to change course and seek easier pickings rather than be intercepted by the navy, police or coastguard. LSN even makes this task easier by logging speed and direction of a vessel speeding away from the yacht. This information can be immediately relayed to the relevant authorities. The fundamental task of the equipment itself is to prevent unauthorised persons getting close to the yacht undetected in order to commit acts of piracy. The reality is that it does happen and as yachts get larger and more opulent this type of attack will happen more often if the yacht is not prepared and equipped with the right equipment to deal with early warning.

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to convince an owner or project manager that certain types of security equipment and contingencies are necessary. The frequent response is 'the boat is going nowhere dangerous', 'the owner's not that high profile' and 'we've got ex-special forces on our boat!' So did the yacht in the first part of this article. If you do get past the initial response, the cost of the equipment proves the next hurdle. You do in essence get what you pay for, however let's be realistic – we're dealing with yachts costing upwards of 60 million dollars with some with more than that in artwork on board! The truth is that as with having the yacht swept for illicit listening devices, countermeasures for piracy are only employed after something has occurred. Take a note from the banking industry. Traditional robbing of bank branches has almost disappeared because of extremely efficient robbery countermeasures technology. If major yachts are protected efficiently, then occurrences publicised or not will inevitably decrease. >||

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