

News Release



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PIRATES FIRE ON NATO SHIP

This morning while conducting routine surveillance off the Somali coast, HNMLS ROTTERDAM the flagship for the NATO 'OCEAN SHIELD' counter piracy mission, came under sustained fire from groups of suspected pirates.

A boarding team from Rotterdam was making an approach on a suspect dhow near the coast when they came under fire from ashore and from the dhow itself. Rotterdam returned fire in accordance with Rules of Engagement, during which the dhow was seen to ignite and crew members were observed leaping into the water. One crew member of the dhow was killed in this action and 25 people were subsequently rescued from the water by Rotterdam. Commodore Ben Bekkering, the commander of the NATO Task Force, said that the Rotterdam and her boats remained under sustained fire from the shore throughout, even while attempting to rescue the crew of the stricken dhow and one of Rotterdam's rigid inflatable boats was damaged.

Those rescued were subsequently transferred to the NATO flagship where those who required it were given prompt medical attention. None of the crew from the ROTTERDAM were injured during this action.

"We know that pirates are increasingly using larger dhows as mother ships. Therefore we routinely inspect them" says Commodore Ben Bekkering, commander of the NATO Task Force. "In this instance the pirates openly choose confrontation. This does not happen often and it indicates that we are indeed impeding their operations and in doing so, pushing them to take more extreme options."

Commodore Bekkering praised the calm professionalism of the ROTTERDAM crew and stated that this incident together with ROTTERDAM's successful interdiction of seven pirates on 11 October made two things very clear. "Firstly, it is obvious that the scourge of piracy has not gone away and we need to maintain our vigilance. Secondly, the risks to the pirates themselves are becoming much greater and while we regret any loss of life we will deal with any threat we encounter in a firm, robust but always proportionate manner."

Background Information:

HNLMS Rotterdam will continue her patrol as part of Operation Ocean Shield, NATO's contribution to the international anti-piracy effort in the waters around the Horn of Africa. On board there are about 350 crewmembers from three Services and an international staff consisting of seven different nationalities.

NATO has contributed to the international counter piracy effort off the Horn of Africa since December 2008. The mission has expanded from escorting UN and World Food Programme Shipping under Operation Allied Provider and protecting merchant traffic in the Gulf of Aden under Operation Allied Protector. In addition to these activities and as part of the latest mission, Operation Ocean Shield, NATO is working with other international bodies to help develop capacity of countries in the region to tackle piracy on their own.

NATO Allies agreed on 19 March 2012 to extend Operation Ocean Shield for a further two years until the end of 2014.

NATO Forces currently in Operation Ocean Shield:
HNLMS Rotterdam (flagship) The Netherlands
USS Halyburton (United States of America)

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