

July 2022

SUEZMAX CEDAR TO THE RESCUE

During the night of 18 June 2022, our Suezmax vessel Cedar participated in a Search and Rescue (SAR) operation on her way to France. While she was sailing from Lome, Togo in West Africa to Fos, France, 53nm South off Cap Blanc, our vessel received a MAYDAY call on VHF ch.16 from sailing boat "PANDA II", an 11m sailing boat, that requested assistance. The vessel was manned by two people, Igor and Martine. Both are German citizens and they were solo travelling with their sailing boat from Brazil to Spain (Canary Islands).



The Master immediately informed Captain Panagiotis Dimitropoulos regarding the situation. Shortly after, the Cedar made its first visual contact with the sailing boat. The skipper of the sailing boat reported that it was not under command, and that it was flooding. The water intake was so bad, that there was grave and imminent danger to their boat (in process of sinking), and they were ready to abandon the vessel.

When the Master arrived on the bridge, he contacted the sailing boat and raised the alarm for the rescue operation, after which the entire crew proceeded to their position.

At the same time nearby vessels were informed about the rescue operations and were requested to keep clear from the Cedar during the rescue operation. Las Palmas MRCC was contacted via sat telecom. The Cedar was ordered by MRCC to safely proceed to rescue the survivors and to leave the sailing boat in drift condition. The situation at that moment was shared, and the Cedar was placed as on-scene coordinator. "MV Island Victory", a vessel that was next to our position was requested to be on stand-by in case further assistance was required.

The rescue operation started, aiming to bring the survivors aboard. The Cedar approached the sailing boat and positioned to wind wards of the sailboat to prevent wind and waves in order to facilitate the rescue operation. Our crew threw two heaving lines (one forward and one aft) to secure the sailing boat alongside the vessel's starboard side lifeboat. The crew deployed the lifeboat's embarkation/disembarkation ladder, so the two people on board, Igor and Martin, could embark our vessel. After that the sailing boat was released and remained adrift. MRCC was informed regarding the successful rescue operation.





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When both the rescued persons were safely on board, they were first taken to the vessel's hospital for a preventive medical examination by Chief Officer Spoutis Marios. Both were found in good health without any injuries. Afterwards the crew made sure they could inform their relatives, and had a place to sleep and food until they could disembark.

Although challenging - with adverse weather conditions, fresh breeze northerly winds with speed of approximately 20 knots and moderate sea state with wave height about 2.5 mtrs - the whole rescue only took 48 minutes.

Our admiration and gratitude go out to the crew of the Cedar for their assistance to the distressed vessel 'Panda'. Both of the rescued persons also expressed their gratitude towards the Master and our crew. You can read their thank you letter below.

#everyseafarercounts

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Dear Cedar Crew,

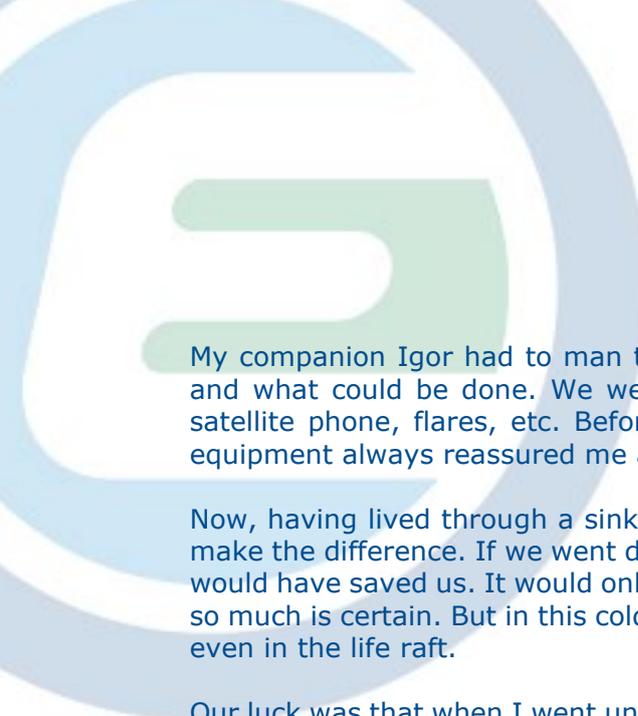
I've been thinking about how to express my gratitude for rescuing us from our sinking sailing boat Panda II. In fact I've written various long emails already just to discard them again because they just didn't sound right. How do you say thank you to a crew that effectively saved your life?

Honestly I don't know how to express my deeply felt gratitude for the swift and professional action you took that saved us from going down with our boat.

So in the end I decided to keep it simple and just say: "Thank you very much for your help and your kindness!"

I want to go into a little more detail though. When we noticed that our boat was filling with water we also had a lot of technical issues to deal with at the same time. Some of them were related to the saltwater coming in and shorting out electrical connections, some defects had appeared over the last few days previous to the incident that lead to us sending the request for help.

We had no autopilot, no Radar, no instrumentation for wind or current. We were low on drinking water because our water maker had stopped working and we had heard a loud bang as if from a collision the night before. This was even before we started taking on seawater. We were confident however that we'd still make it to the Canary Islands. In the old days the seafarers had none of these conveniences we were so accustomed to but they still sailed across oceans. Admittedly many of them in very precarious conditions and the number of ships never actually getting to their intended destination was also fairly high. So when the water started coming in, probably through a defective keel, we were in a shorthanded situation in rough weather and couldn't even begin to start thinking about repairs because we actually hardly managed to sail the boat in those conditions even without lots of water in the bilge.



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My companion Igor had to man the helm while I tried to figure out what was happening and what could be done. We were well equipped for emergencies with EPIRB, life raft, satellite phone, flares, etc. Before I now actually lived through such a situation all this equipment always reassured me and gave me a sense of safety at sea.

Now, having lived through a sinking situation I realize that all of these things don't really make the difference. If we went down without your vessel close by none of that equipment would have saved us. It would only have served to let people know that we were in trouble, so much is certain. But in this cold and harsh weather we wouldn't have survived very long even in the life raft.

Our luck was that when I went under deck to check which of our systems were still working I had a quick glance at the AIS screen which for some inexplicable reason was still doing it's duties and I saw a little green triangle that turned out to be your ship. I selected it and saw that it was about 3 miles away, very big and Greek. My first thought was about delicious Greek food believe it or not. A side effect of 7 months in Brasil and 38 days at sea I'm sure. Then my mind turned quickly back to the possibility of getting rescued.

So instead of getting the flares and activating the EPIRB I simply snatched the little handheld radio and started calling "CEDAR, CEDAR, CEDAR, this is s/y Panda II requesting urgent assistance."

I will never forget the voice that answered with a very slight Filipino accent informing me that our call had been received and the master of the vessel informed. That was definitely one of the best moments of my whole life.

The calm and matter of fact manner of the man on the radio gave me reassurance that we'd be alright after all.

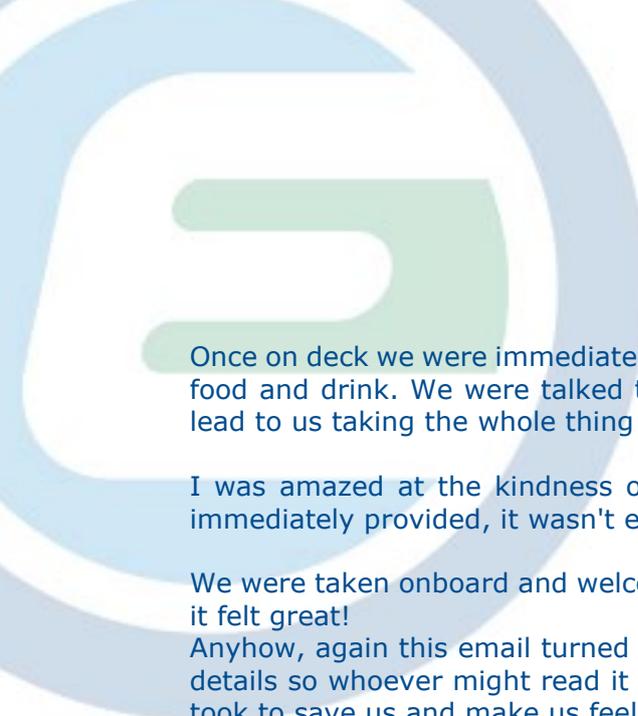
He told me not to worry and, seriously, I didn't anymore.

At least not until we got close to that huge ship and I was wondering if we might just get crushed by it.

I don't know who was at the helm at that point but I noticed, from my perspective, which must have been similar to that of an ant looking up at an elephant, that this huge behemoth of a ship was being driven with utmost care and incredibly smoothly. It was turned so it would give us some protection from swell and wind and when we got to it's starboard side I saw a great number of people on deck standing by to assist us.

First it wasn't clear to me how we would actually get up on that ship. For a while I feared we might have to jump into the cold sea after all so the tanker crew could lower a line with a rescue sling.

Far from it. They actually allowed us to go alongside, tied us onto the big vessel and with incredible patience coaxed us up a rope ladder. We were scared and tired and in the beginning couldn't even climb it. But with their help we managed. All the time on my way up I heard them cheer me on saying things like: "Come on, you can do it" and similar phrases to motivate me. And as funny as that sounds that really made a difference. I guess it had been some years and a few pounds less on the hips since I climbed a rope ladder and honestly I didn't remember that to be as hard as it was in the end.



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Once on deck we were immediately given care and taken inside to warm up. We were given food and drink. We were talked to and kept distracted. All very important elements that lead to us taking the whole thing as calm as we could.

I was amazed at the kindness of the crew and their captain. Anything we needed was immediately provided, it wasn't even necessary to ask for anything.

We were taken onboard and welcomed into this family of men voyaging on the oceans and it felt great!

Anyhow, again this email turned out rather long but I feel it's important to talk about the details so whoever might read it can actually appreciate the scope of the action this crew took to save us and make us feel better thereafter.

Again I can only say thank you for everything and I hope that one day we'll meet again under different circumstances. Maybe sailing the Greek islands on my next boat in fair weather with a beer and some BBQ.

We will never forget Cedar and her crew.

Thank you so much,
Igor and Martin of s/y Panda II, out of service