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Russian Frigate Fired ‘Warning Shots’ at British Yacht in English Channel

By AFP

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The Russian frigate Admiral Grigorovich, which reportedly fired warning shots at a yacht in the Channel
Ibrahim Ishaq / AFP

Russia's Defense Ministry said one of its warships fired warning shots on Tuesday near a yacht making a "dangerous approach" in the English Channel.

The incident involved the Russian frigate Admiral Grigorovich and a U.K.-registered yacht around 20 nautical miles south of the Isle of Wight, just outside British waters, a U.K. defense source told AFP.

"Following attempts to contact a British vessel in the channel, the Grigorovich fired warning shots. These were not aimed at the vessel and were an attempt to prevent a possible collision," the British Defense Ministry said in an update.

The ministry insisted it was an "isolated" event.

According to the U.K. defense source, the Russian frigate appeared to have been "drifting rather than being maneuvered under power, which may have made her feel more vulnerable."

Russia's Defense Ministry said that "signal flares were fired and audible signals were sounded" to get the yacht's attention.

"Despite these measures, the vessel continued its dangerous approach," it said in a statement, adding that "the frigate's commander decided to fire warning shots in the vessel's direction using the ship's small arms."

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A British retired couple aboard the yacht, Jane and Alan Kelvey, described the experience as "surreal" in an interview with the BBC.

Jane Kelvey said the warship blasted its horn five times, prompting the couple to "immediately turn two degrees to port so they could see we had made a deliberate change of course."

A minute later, the warship gave another five blasts, immediately followed by four to five rounds of small-arms fire.

"That wasn't aimed at us — it was warning fire that went up in the air, we believe," she said, disputing the Russian allegation by adding that their vessel was not on a collision course.

Alan Kelvey called the gunfire "unnecessary."

The yacht crew alleged that the Russian warship fired the warning shots from a distance of around 500 yards (450 meters). No injuries or damage were reported, and the yacht continued its journey after a welfare visit from a seaboat dispatched by the British naval vessel HMS Tyne.

Another British naval vessel, HMS Mersey, was reportedly monitoring the Russian ship at the time.

The U.K.'s Royal Navy said it had deployed multiple patrol ships in April to monitor the Grigorovich, which reportedly escorted tankers belonging to Russia's "shadow fleet" through the Channel.

The navy added that the frigate has escorted Russian-flagged ships "heading to and from the Atlantic, Mediterranean and Baltic."

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