

# Kidnapped By Pirates

Rachel March

When two humanitarians volunteered to teach impoverished children in the conflict-ridden African country of Somalia, they knew it involved risk. Yet, they felt it was worth it. Then, their worst nightmare materialized. They were kidnapped!

Held for an astronomical ransom by a drug-crazed, heavily armed pirate brigade, they remained trapped in the African desert for days... then weeks... then months....

They never imagined that the legendary SEAL Team Six was preparing a daring rescue mission. Nevertheless, one hostage was dying from an untreated infection. Would the SEAL team carry out the mission before time ran out?





It was a scorching hot day—an ordinary summer day in Somalia, a country on the eastern coast of Africa, when two idealistic aid workers prepared to set out on a humanitarian mission into the lawless regions of this arid land.

Born in Portland, Oregon, Jessica Buchanan had always wanted to help the disadvantaged. Even before her first job she spent summers teaching and volunteering in Honduras, South Sudan and Rwanda. In 2006, when she was offered a teaching position at an international school based in Nairobi, Kenya, she happily accepted. In 2009, she moved from Nairobi to Somalia to join a Danish humanitarian organization dedicated to raising awareness about how to avoid land mines in war-ravaged Somalia, mines that had already killed and maimed hundreds of civilians.

On October 25, 2011, Jessica and her Danish colleague, Poul Thisted, 60, left the relatively safe section of Somalia in the north to the more dangerous southern region for a short training seminar. Their destination was 480 miles away in a village called Galkayo, which was not far from the territory controlled by the Islamic terrorist group Al-Shabaab, who ruled large swaths of southern Somalia, enforcing their gruesome version of Sharia laws and sowing fear and terror into the hearts of the populace.



Somalia on the map.



Radical Islamic insurgents in Somalia.



Various tribes and warlords struggle for control.



Years of civil war has brought havoc and destruction to Somalia.

## Risky Business

Although Galkayo was not technically in terrorist-controlled territory, there was inherent peril in every journey there due to a range of factors.

First, there was the risk from the terrorists themselves. All foreigners were potential targets, including Western do-gooders.

Second, there was a very real threat of getting caught in the crossfire between the numerous tribes, warlords and violent gangs that roamed the country and were in a constant state of war with each other.

Last but not least was the threat of an old-fashioned kidnap-for-ransom scheme. In a country where the average salary was equivalent to \$248 annually, with many earning far less than that, any European or American citizen was viewed as a potential gold-mine in ransom money and considered fair game. Hence, Western volunteers usually did their best to avoid this region altogether, and when absolutely necessary entered only under heavy guard.

## The Calm before the Storm

The Danish volunteer organization had arranged for a helicopter to fly the pair to Galkayo, and the trip there passed without incident.

When their training seminar was complete, a convoy of three cars was arranged to escort the volunteers back

to the more secure northern part of the country. However, the Danish organization had neglected to tell them that there was a high-level kidnapping alert for Westerners in the area, and the village they had visited was a mere 500 meters from a well-known den of pirates and bandits.

Unaware of just how much danger they were in, Jessica Buchanan and Poul Thisted settled into a land cruiser, the middle car of the convoy. Abdirizak, the local security officer hired by the organization, sat down in the passenger seat next to the driver.

Jessica noted with some misgiving that the driver seemed nervous. His explanation that it was his first day on the job did little to settle her concerns. She wanted to protest, but turned instead to Thisted, who promptly waved away her concerns and assured her that the organization surely knew what it was doing.

She had no choice but to squelch her anxiety about the new driver.

## Attack!

The journey, which was supposed to take 20 minutes, passed uneventfully—for the first 10 minutes. Then, without warning, a car suddenly roared out from behind a large boulder and blocked their path. Several men dressed in army fatigues sprinted out of the vehicle and surrounded the Land Rover, menacingly waving rifles in the air and shouting in Somali.

Two men standing in the lead were



The city of Galkayo rests between the terror-plagued south and the somewhat more stable north.

wearing the uniform of the Special Protection Unit (SPU), a British trained police force whose purpose was to offer protection to government officials and VIP's from abroad. The terrified volunteers had no idea whether they were indeed from SPU or impostors.

The attackers were shouting at each other in a babble of Somali dialects. The words were incomprehensible to Buchanan and Thisted, but the menacing gestures spoke volumes. Thisted tried to keep his calm, but Buchanan turned to Abdirizak, beseeching him with her eyes to do something. However, the "security officer" appeared to be even more shaken than she was.

Then attackers leaped into the passenger compartment. One of them, who would later identify himself as Ali, pulled open the rear door and grabbed Abdirizak from behind the driver's seat. The attacker's face displayed