INTERNATIONAL SUBMARINE RESCUE EXERCISE LAUNCHED

EXERCISE BOLD MONARCH 2011

From all corners of the globe, submarine rescue specialists, parachuting diving teams, engineers and military doctors gathered in Spain to prove rescue systems and procedures that have been developed to rescue submariners from the worst case scenarios at the end of May. Over the period from 27th May to 10th June the world’s experts in sub sunk operations were concentrated off the Spanish port of Murcia in the Mediterranean to improve their response capability. ESPS Galicia, the Spanish Navy’s command ship, steamed from Cartagena to take part.

Four diesel-powered submarines simulated the unthinkable and disappeared from their last known reported positions and went missing. Fortunately for the submarine crews, this carefully planned event was choreographed as part of the ambitious NATO-led Exercise Bold Monarch, the largest multi-national exercise in this field to co-ordinate and demonstrate the operational, diving, medical and engineering expertise involved in saving lives in one of the most challenging environments on the planet, the ocean depths.

Bold Monarch featured a bustling Spanish harbour, a warship with a floodable dock, massive support vessels with cantilevered ‘A’ frames supporting mini-submersible rescue vehicles cradled within. The plethora of high tech gadgetry was complemented by international teams of naval officers, M.A.S.H style doctors in combat fatigues and submariners trained to parachute from aircraft. Here the team created a floating hospital. What made Bold Monarch unique was the truly remarkable level of co-operation and the mutual understanding of the military capability amongst the submarine operating nations taking part.

Opening days saw the multi-national naval representatives warmly welcomed by the Spanish host nation and NATO exercise controllers, COMSUBNORTH’s Captain David Dittmer USN and Commander Charlie Neve, Royal Navy. At the pre-sail conference the unprecedented level of co-operation became clear as meticulous planning and rehearsal of procedures continued throughout the day to overcome the challenges of operating in many languages. The safe conduct of the exercise has been of paramount importance to all participants and a crystal clear
understanding of the schedule of events became apparent as the rescue scenarios got under way.

The opening days saw the historic first mating of a Russian Navy submarine, *Alrosa*, with NATO’s Submarine Rescue System (NSRS) evacuating sailors from the submarine to the surface. The exercise was due to demonstrate the rescue system from the Russian Federation Navy’s Black Sea Fleet, the Italian Navy, and the United States Rescue Diving and Recompression System (SRDRS) with each of the submarines taking part.

The exercise was due to call upon deep specialist medical teams trained in hyperbaric medicine. Rescuing injured crews from the sea bed presents a unique set of challenges especially if the atmosphere has become toxic and pressures rise. Here personnel may have been severely injured by physical impact so bringing these casualties to the surface presents a complex and specific medical challenge. In Bold Monarch, doctors worked closely with the Parachute Assistance Groups who can descend from military aircraft to the surface with liferafts, first aid and communications equipment to establish contact with the distressed submarine, extending the survival time until the main recovery assets arrive on the scene. Divers can also support the operations, particularly in shallower areas, inspecting the hull, conducting underwater engineering tasks, delivering urgent supplies and supporting the integrated rescue effort. Self-contained atmospheric diving suits allow these divers to work at considerable depth.