

Undersea Rescue in a Cement Mixer

By JO1 Kristina Brockman

It looks like an oversized cement mixer. However, if a submarine anywhere in the world is disabled, it won't be the outside, but the life-saving capabilities it carries inside that will be what people remember.

Sailors of San Diego-based Deep Submergence Unit (DSU) maintain and operate Submarine Rescue Chamber Eight (SRC 8) and SRC 21. DSU is the U.S. Navy's only dedicated submarine rescue team and the SRCs are just one of the means they have at their disposal to help assist a disabled submarine from anywhere in the world. The large can-shaped piece of equipment is built to hold eight adults, which includes two crewmembers who operate it from the inside. Rescuing six submariners at a time may not seem very efficient, but once the SRC has performed its first mate it is not limited by things like battery life and can perform continuous transfer cycles until everyone has been rescued.

DSU Sailors recently embarked on USS Grasp (ARS 51), along with Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit (MDSU) Two, Detachment 20, to take part in NATO submarine rescue exercise Sorbet Royal 2005 (SORO 05). Three Grasp crewmembers traveled in SRC 8, as part of a training evolution Jun. 20, which was the final "practice" for the next day's live submarine evolution.

"I didn't know what to expect and I was anxious to see what it was like," said SN John Pullen. "I'm going to tell my family about (the experience)...and how important this chamber is."

Exercise Sorbet Royal is held every three years, with SORO 05 being the largest and most challenging live submarine escape and rescue exercise ever conducted. It is designed to test international submarine escape and rescue personnel, equipment and procedures to cope with the most extreme submarine rescue missions. More than 25 NATO and non-NATO nations are participating with a combination of submarines, ships, rescue equipment and personnel. DSU participated with SRC 8 in the last SORO, but the importance of this training mandates repetition. In fact, because multinational interoperability is so important for an asset like SRC 8 to be branded useful, an exercise like SORO 05 is a must.

"Even within our own dive community, we have different equipment," said Grasp Supply Officer and Navy diver LT j.g. Leslie Esher. "DSU has their own, MDSU has their own and the ship has its own, so even within our own community we have different equipment we have to learn to work with."

These differences within the Navy clarify the need for training at an international level. Through SORO 05, the big "cement mixer" will again prove its value not only to the observers, but, more importantly, to the international community of submariners who will hopefully never have to make the 9-

1-1 call to the International Submarine Escape and Rescue Liaison Office (ISMERLO). ISMERLO is the central coordinator for worldwide submarine rescue and works to facilitate getting units like DSU in contact with the nation requiring assistance.