

## THE REMARKABLE RESCUE FROM A NORTHERN THAILAND CAVE

*LE SAUVETAGE REMARQUABLE D'UNE GROTTES DU NORD DE LA THAÏLANDE*

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**Introduction:** The rescue effort expanded into a massive operation, with worldwide public interest, to save the 12 young footballers and their coach trapped in the flooded Tham Luang Nang Non cave in Chiang Rai Province, Thailand. It has been described as one of the world's most dangerous and challenging rescue missions. Even the experienced cave divers involved in the operation admitted that the nature of the rescue plan was unprecedented and that they were taking extreme risks that could put the boys' lives in jeopardy. Despite the risks, the looming monsoon rains and the dwindling oxygen level in the cave required immediate decision-making.

**Background:** As the Chief Medical Commander of the field hospital and operation that consisted of medical personnel from the Royal Thai Army, Royal Thai Navy, and Ministry of Public Health, we conducted the field hospital, personnel, equipment and logistics, medical operations and the evacuation plan. My team and I have acquired the knowledge and skills to conduct medical operations under limited data and improper environment and together, the guidelines in conducting similar future field operations.

Due to the long, muddy, cold and dark complex water passage, it took the rescue divers 3 to 4 hours to bring each boy out of the cave. All of the boys including the coach were sedated by medication requested by the cave diving expert and approved by the Royal Medical College of Thailand. The medication chosen was firstly intended for the sedation to prevent panic and reduction of secretion while being brought out of the cave, but it also proved useful in a different way. The medication caused tachycardia which counteracted the effect of bradycardia, caused by hypothermia from staying under cold water. It also caused the children to have no memory of what happened, preventing them from psychological trauma from any attempts to rekindle the traumatic experience.

**Summary:** At the hospital, we reminded the boys that with all that has happened, this would be one of their most valuable experience and additionally, the operation has also offered a valuable lesson for Thailand and for the world on how to deal with the situation. Finally, we would like to thank you each and every one of you who participated in the rescue procedures. My team and I will always be grateful for your contribution.