

015

THE ROLE OF A ROYAL THAI NAVY DOCTOR IN THE THAI CAVE RESCUE

LE RÔLE D'UN MÉDECIN DE LA MARINE ROYALE THAÏLANDAISE DANS LE SAUVETAGE GROTTES THAÏLANDAISE

K Tangchai

Arbhakornkiatiwong Hospital, Sattahip Naval Base, Royal Thai Navy, Thailand
kamonsak@gmail.com

Introduction: On 23 June 2018, twelve members of a football team and their coach were reported missing after becoming trapped when Tham Luang cave system in Chiang Rai was flooded. A lot of expertise from around the country and the world had poured in for the support on the search and rescue operation, including international cave-diving specialists, navy SEALs, medical experts, scientists, geologists and many more government units who shared their expertise to find ways and means to reach them. Medical professionals are considered one of the key supporting teams. Military doctors, especially navy and army doctors, worked side-by-side for many aspects of the operation from the beginning of the SAR (search and rescue) phase to the last phases of the successful evacuation operation.

Background: Navy doctors were involved in 4 main key operations: search operation, dive planning, in-cave support for victim evacuation, and clinical monitoring and management. From the search operation, the navy medical team supported the medical and diving team in planning the safest and most effective way to conduct the search. Some of the diving medical officers also dived with the team to reach the deepest possible distance to offer best support. During the dive planning phase, diving medical officers brainstormed the potential risks, mitigating measures, and the practical actions for the diving teams. The navy medical team also played as a key medical support during the in-cave evacuation phase to access, stabilize and support the victims for the long journey out from kilometers deep inside the cave, with hypothermic, dehydrated, and lethargic conditions. Finally, the monitoring and management for the victims to be safely stabilized onsite and evacuated to the tertiary care, treated, and then released from the hospital safely back to their beloved families.

Summary: The full rescue mission of the 12 boys and their coach, including four navy SEALs who went deep inside the cave to support those who were trapped, was announced as having been miraculously successful on 11 July 2018. The rescue operation was considered a world's agenda. Despite the loss of an ex-navy SEAL, Saman Kunan, the operation was considered a robust success. With the same determination to save the victims and the support from all specialists and everyone around the globe, the world helped it from an almost impossible operation to become a possible one. As Nelson Mandela said, "It always seems impossible until it is done."