



*The Russian Victor III submarine photographed from 819 Squadron's Sea King and (above) PO Copley on the vessel's bridge during the delicate operation to transfer a 20-year-old crewman suspected to be suffering from acute appendicitis.*

# RUSSIA'S THANKS FOR SAILOR'S LIFE

THE RUSSIAN government has thanked the Royal Navy for its "resolute and prompt actions" in saving the life of a sailor taken critically ill on board a Victor III submarine off the Scottish coast.

In a letter to Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind, his counterpart in Russia, Mr Primakov, said Russia was impressed by Britain's instant response to the request for help, and the care shown to the crewman, Alexander Erokhin.

It was the first time the Royal Navy had been called in by the Russians to lift a sick sailor from one of their submarines.

The destroyer HMS Glasgow and a Sea King helicopter of 819 Naval Air Squadron based at HMS Gannet took part in the casualty evacuation operation after a telephone call from the Russian Embassy on the morning of February 29.

HMS Glasgow, which had been involved in a Joint Maritime Course off Scotland, rendezvoused with the nuclear powered subma-

rine about 90 miles north-west of Cape Wrath.

Using her Lynx helicopter she transferred POMA Tony Stowell to the surfaced submarine to make an initial examination of the 20-year-old sailor who was reported to be suffering from acute appendicitis.

Meanwhile, as an RAF Nimrod maritime patrol aircraft circled overhead, a Sea King was on its way from Gannet with a civilian medic, Dr Jimmy Begg, and MA Robert Smith embarked.

Heavily sedated, the Russian sailor was winched from the submarine with POACMN Ian Copley. Closely monitored by Dr Begg and MA Smith, the patient was flown to the Western Isles Hospital, Stornoway, where he underwent emergency treatment.

Mr Erokhin made a full recovery and was discharged from hospital two weeks after admission.

"This is a fine example of mutual understanding, partnership and good-neighbourly relations bet-

ween our countries," wrote Mr Primakov.

"On behalf of the relatives and friends of Mr Erokhin, Russian naval seamen, and myself, I ask you to convey our profound gratitude to the British authorities and express sincere appreciation to all those who participated in saving his life."

Crew of the Sea King included pilots Lts Tim Eldridge and Al Falconer and observer Lt Cdr Gordon Wright.

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