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Sub survival chances depend on damage

The chance of survival for more than 100 crew members on board the sunken Russian nuclear submarine depends largely on how badly their vessel is damaged and how quickly rescuers can react, naval experts say.

The submarine the Kursk, which has plummeted to the bottom of the Barents Sea, is resting some 450 feet below the surface.

It is not inconceivable that the sailors could rocket out of the vessel on their own and float safely to the surface, experts say, noting that British submariners have escaped in 600 feet of water during training exercises.

"But it hasn't been tried for real," British Navy spokesman Jim Jenkin said. "And their escape facility may be nothing like ours."

Jenkin says any predictions about the crew members' survival will be mere speculation because so little is known about the submarine's condition.

But Paul Beaver of Jane's Information Group, suspects the worst.

"I think this submarine has a lot more damage than we think, and I think there are probably already people dead from the impact of the collision," he said. "It seems to be more of a calamity than the Russians are letting on."

Beaver said that if the submarine is fitted similarly to British



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vessels, the crew would be able to make oxygen for themselves for about a month, which means they probably would have enough to last until a rescue could be mounted.

Jenkin says the ideal scenario would be to use a rescue vehicle - a kind of mini-sub - to dock on the submarine and transfer people out, without them even getting wet.

Last updated: 09:47 Tuesday 15th August 2000.

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