

Sunday Herald 20/8/2000

After the lies, they dive for the dead

From Page One

Finney said that while it was still very much a rescue operation, they would need to have further discussions with the Russian authorities if they decided they wanted help to bring up the bodies.

"We will follow the Russians' lead and we will need to consider our further part in any operation if it became clear there were no survivors," he added. Former submarine commander Jeff Tall, director of the Royal Navy Submarine Museum in Hampshire, said around 15-20 people in the back of the submarine would have survived the initial explosion. These would have been people in the engine room and on the watch, he said.

He now believed there would be tremendous pressure on the Russian authorities to retrieve the bodies, despite the fact most militaries leave vessels which sink in either war or peace as "war graves".

"It depends on the national psyche whether they will leave the bodies or retrieve them. I think because this is so close to Russian shores they will like to get the bodies back if they can," he said.

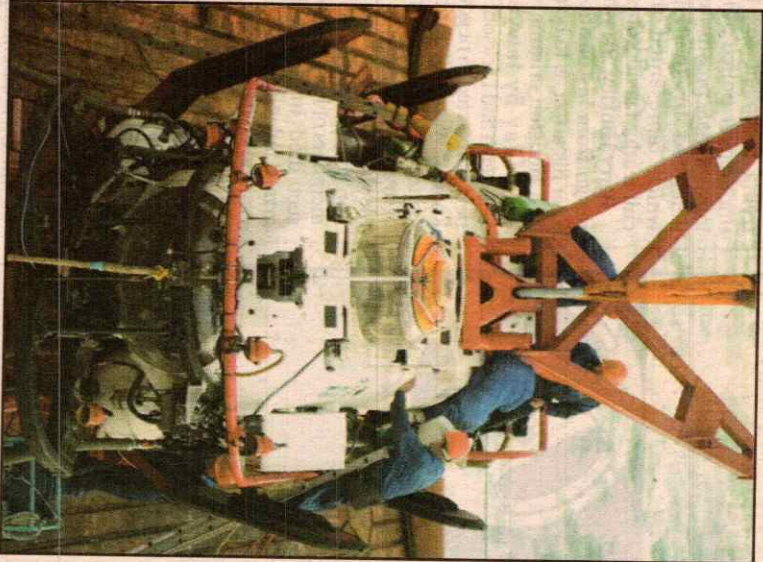
As final rescue attempts got underway last night, nuclear experts warned not only of a humanitarian disaster but also of an ecological and economic one.

William Peden, nuclear industry spokesman for Greenpeace, said the fact the Kursk was lying in shallow water, that a hole exposed the nuclear reactors directly to marine life and that it was at an angle causing possible damage to the reactors' coolants, presented particular difficulties in terms of reducing its risks to the environment.

"If they leave it there over the years the best case scenario is there will be gradual seepage of nuclear material into the marine environment, making the fish radioactive," he said.

"The worst case scenario is that because we believe the coolants are not working properly, the reactors dry out, the fuel rods break down and melt and a large scale escape of radioactive material could wipe out the cod industry in the Barents Sea."

He added that the priority after the rescue operation was to try and recover the submarine and dispose of it on land. However, if that was impossible the Russians would either have to try and remove the



The Royal Navy's LRS will investigate the Kursk

reactor or encase it in concrete. "It is a very very serious situation and the international community must come together to find some solution."

Peden said the release of slow and inaccurate release of information reflected Russian military embarrassment about the disaster. "The Russian Navy is a very proud force and they are clearly embarrassed," he said. "The Americans have been trying to get hold of this submarine and find out more about it. The worst thing the Russians wanted was that their navy was shown to be incompetent. It is a real shame they didn't immediately go to Nato."

Peden's criticisms of the Russian Navy were reflected by British defence experts. One serving officer said: "I think they are highly embarrassed. This is a very embarrassing accident and they are finding it difficult to deal with."

A former Naval commander said: "The way they have been presenting information has been very confusing. I can't see how they can go from a position of where there was knocking and signs of life to making statements now that everybody was killed."