

'13? Brilliant'

The words that fired hopes of a miracle in Thai cave rescue



This handout video grab taken from footage released by The Royal Thai Navy shows missing children inside the Tham Luang cave of Khun Nam Nang Non Forest Park



Thai soldiers carrying cables inside Tham Luang cave



A telephone line will be installed tonight... they (the boys) will be able to talk with their families via military phone

PASSAKORN BOON-YARAT, DEPUTY GOVERNOR OF CHIANG RAI PROVINCE

What now for the boys?

Could they dive out?

In theory yes; but it is an extremely difficult task. Cave diving is already very risky, especially for young boys in a weakened state who have no diving experience.

Tham Luang cave where the boys have been trapped is one of Thailand's longest at 10 kilometres (six miles) and one of the hardest to navigate with its winding and at times narrow corridors.

If they dive, they have no choice but to follow the steps that rescuers took though tiny

passageways clogged with mud and silt. That journey takes a healthy -- and skilled -- Navy SEAL diver about six hours.

Officials said they would attempt to train the boys to use crucial diving gear after they are rehabilitated with food, water and medical support.

Could they be dug out?

Explorers have spent days scouring the mountain top for possible alternative openings. They have found a few "promising" leads and have tried to drill deeper.

But there is no indication

that any of those chimneys connect to the chamber where the boys have been stranded.

What about walking out?

This would be the safest option, but at the moment it is impossible because parts of the route remain flooded.

So in theory they could wait, but that means hoping that flood waters subside.

Water pumps are working around the clock to drain the floods though it has been an uphill battle for much of the week as heavy rains refused to let up.

If the current break in bad weather sticks, this option could be more promising.

How long could it take?

Hard to say for sure. It depends how long it takes for them to regain strength.

Experts say they could remain inside for weeks -- or even months -- as rescuers work out the safest option for their extraction.

The military said Tuesday it was preparing enough food for four months but did not speculate they could be in there that long.

Bangkok, Thailand | AFP

"How many of you?" asks the British voice loudly, a torchlight scanning the gaunt, hungry boys crowded on a muddy bank.

"Thirteen?... Brilliant" -- a remarkable short exchange captured on video has electrified Thailand and paved the way for an astonishing rescue.

The video, which captures the twelve dishevelled and emaciated boys and their football coach sheltering on a slope in the pitch-black belly of a flooded Thai cave, was posted on the official Facebook page of the Thai Navy SEAL early on Tuesday.

Hours later it has been viewed 16 million times.

The footage starts with a touching chorus of "thank you" from the boys, as the rescuers wade through the mucky water towards them.

The figures of the 13 loom eerily in and out of the torchlight, framed by the darkened walls of the cave.

Some have their red football shirts pulled low over bare knees to keep out the cold -- a sign of their unreadiness for nine days in the Tham Luang cave complex.

They look dazed but those who speak appear lucid, despite the long stretch without food.

The conversation continues



The boys were discovered at about 10:00pm (1500 GMT) Monday by British divers some 400 metres (1,300 feet) from where they were believed to be stranded several kilometres inside the cave

with murmurs of Thai as the group confers, punctuated by reassurances from the diver.

- 'You're very strong' -

One boy asks in halting English if they will "go outside".

"No, no, not today... there's two of us, you have to dive... we are coming, it's ok. Many people are coming, many, many people, we are the first... many people come."

The diver raises his fingers to show the group has been underground for ten days, adding "you're very strong".

The diver gives the boys an extra light as the camera jags around and the audio fails, but steadies as one of the boys says "I am very happy."

"We are happy too," the diver adds.

"Thank you so much," say the boys, unfailingly polite despite the urgency of their situation.

They are from the "Wild Boar" football team and the first visual evidence of their survival lit up a country that has followed every permutation of a painstaking rescue that at times looked forlorn with floods rushing through the winding tunnels.

A three-member British team -- Robert Harper, Richard Stanton and John Volanthen -- arrived in Thailand last Wednesday to aid the search.

Two of the Brits reached the boys late Monday, sparking joy in a country that has held its breath throughout the agonising rescue efforts.

It was not immediately clear which diver speaks on camera. The team has avoided media all week, with Volanthen telling reporters only: "We've got a job to do" when he arrived at the site.

Social media in Thailand erupted following the news the boys were alive and safe and "13 lives survive" was the top Thai Twitter hashtag on Tuesday.

"I am almost in tears, you're so brave and tough," Facebook user Pharyanya Suntaranusorn wrote under the video.

Elation at the survival of the group was tempered by the reality of a difficult extraction ahead and the possibility of psychological damage from the trauma of being trapped in the dark bowels of a mountain for a prolonged period.

"It's hard to tell (the state of their mental health) from the clip," said Wimonrat Wanpen, spokesperson for the Mental Health Department of the Public Health Ministry.

"Their lives are getting much better after several days of crisis... but whether they will develop trauma depends on many factors."

British divers no stranger to rescues



British diver Richard William Stanton is seen at the Tham Luang cave area

London | United Kingdom

Two British volunteer divers who helped find a youth football team trapped in a cave complex in Thailand have a history of difficult rescues around the world.

Richard Stanton and John Volanthen, who have day jobs as a fireman and internet engineer respectively, negotiated a long and winding path through flooded caverns to find the 12 young boys and their coach nine days after they went missing. "The British divers Rick and John were at the spearhead" of the forward search party, said Bill Whitehouse of the British Cave Rescue Council, an informal grouping of rescue teams around Britain.

Whitehouse described the difficulties of the search.

"They were diving upstream in the system, so they were having to swim against the current or pull themselves along the walls," he told the BBC.

"I gather the actual diving section was about 1.5km, about half of which was completely flooded," he said, adding that total dive was about 3 hours.