

Project Name: SEALAB III

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Organizations/People Involved:

Deep Submergence Systems Project Office (DSSP)

LCDR. Jim Osborn, CEC, USN

Date: 1969

Project Summary:

Beginning in 1959, the U.S. Navy decided it needed information on the ability of man to survive and work for long periods of time in an undersea environment. In 1964, the Navy began the SEALAB experiments in the deep ocean to place divers in a saturation environment for weeks at a time to learn about the effects of living and working in a high-pressure mixed gas environment. After the loss of the submarine Thresher in 1963, the Navy formed the Deep Submergence Systems Project Office to manage all new programs for developing the Navy's capability for work, search and rescue operations in the deep ocean. The SEALAB program was placed under the DSSP office and CDR Walt Eager, CEC, USN was put in charge of it.

SEALAB I was done off of Bermuda in 192 feet of water in 1964. SEALAB II was placed off of the Scripps Institute in CA in 1965 in 205 feet of water. SEALAB III was put on hold for several years due to the Vietnam War. In the meantime, two Civil Engineer Corps officers were selected to go to post graduate school to be trained in a new engineering discipline Ocean Engineering. Lt Jim Osborn and Lt Bob Smart were the first two officers selected for this training. Upon graduation, both officers were assigned to the Deep Submergence Systems Project Technical Office in San Diego CA and then sent to Navy Diving School for diving training. After completing diving training with a designation as a HEO2 diver, they were sent to the Navy Experimental Diving Unit in Washington DC for saturation diving training. LCDR Smart was disqualified for the training when it was discovered he had some medical issues that precluded him from going through saturation training. LCDR Osborn completed the training and was assigned as the Team Engineer for Team III, SEALAB III.

SEALAB III was placed in 610 feet of water off of St. Clemente Island in 1969. During the first team preparing the habitat for use, a diver opening the habitat was killed in a diving accident. As a result of the accident an investigation was made to determine whether to continue the program. The decision was made to terminate the SEALAB program and LCDR Osborn was reassigned to a normal CEC assignment.

Project Report Link: None