

SUPSALV Recovers Air Force Miniature Air Launched Decoy (MALD) in Gulf of Mexico

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An Air Force test of a Miniature Air Launched Decoy (MALD) ended abruptly on 8 February 2011 when the decoy engine failed to start after it was launched from an aircraft and the flight was terminated about 100 miles south of Fort Walton Beach, FL. The decoy landed in approximately 1000 feet of seawater. The next day USAF 46th Test Squadron contacted SUPSALV and asked for assistance in recovering the decoy as quickly as possible. SUPSALV tasked its Search and Recovery contract holder, Phoenix International, to prepare a team and equipment to support the recovery task. The SUPSALV team, deployed on M/V Marie Elise, departed Port Fourchon, LA on 17 February loaded with OOC's Shallow Water Intermediate Search System (SWISS) and a commercially-leased remotely operated vehicle (ROV). To simplify the search, the Air Force provided a highly-accurate splash box, measuring just 0.5 miles square, predicting the location of the target. Upon arrival, the team deployed the SWISS side scan sonar and conducted a series of North – South search lines. On the ninth pass, a potentially significant target was identified. Further searching quickly confirmed the validity and location of the target and the decision was made on 19 February to retrieve the side scan sonar and deploy the ROV.



Pictured left, SUPSALV's side scan sonar – SWISS on deck of the M/V Marie Elise. On the right is a side scan image of the MALD vehicle on the ocean floor.

On the first dive the ROV found the target, confirmed it was the MALD, and surveyed the configuration and condition in order to plan the lift. The MALD was recovered one day later on 20 February and the M/V Marie Elise began its transit to Port Fourchon that evening.



On the left is the ROV used to recover the MALD. At right, the MALD on deck after recovery.

This is the fourth search and recovery operation which the SEA 00C Salvage Division has conducted this winter. It was unique because of the timeliness in recovering the target and the resulting use of a commercial vessel and a commercial ROV. From request for assistance to recovery was only 11 days. The excellent target location information provided by the Air Force greatly assisted the successful operation.