

American Studies Department  
Maritime Culture

Study Guide #1: "Coast Guard Rescue Swimmers"

1. On January 23, 1995, the S/V *Mirage*, 300 miles east of Savannah, Georgia, encountered heavy weather with 40 mph winds and 25-foot seas. The *Mirage* sent out a distress signal. Describe the Coast Guard rescue attempt with reference to the actions of Aviation Survivalman First Class Michael G. Odum
2. Prior to 1983, the U.S. Coast Guard often employed helicopters for rescue missions by means of water landings. Who was often assigned to enter the water to rescue survivors? What were some of the shortcomings of this method?
3. On Saturday, February 12, 1983, the M/V *Marine Electric* encountered heavy seas and winds blowing at 60 knots. A distress call was sent and acknowledged by the Coast Guard. Describe the rescue attempt that resulted in 31 deaths and only 3 crewmembers rescued. What Congressional action was taken following this maritime disaster?
4. What motivates men to compete for positions as rescue swimmers? Why do they call it "the best job"? What is learned in the 18-week course? Why are victims often combative? How do military and civilian rescues differ?
5. Rescue swimmers are a small group within the U.S. Coast Guard. How many of them are found service wide? What is the typical class size? What is the dropout rate?
6. Compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of "free fall" versus "direct deployment".
7. On December 30, 1997, the M/V *Merchant Patriot*, a 493-foot freighter with a crew of 28, encountered a sea state of 30 to 35 feet with winds between 40 and 50 knots. The ship was sinking and a distress call was sent. Describe the rescue effort.
8. How does helicopter rotor wash, or down wash, add to a rescue swimmer's difficulty? Why is a rescue swimmer typically unable to rest on the return trip?
9. How do rescue swimmers train for being deployed to rocky surf, caves and steep cliffs, on the winter ice of the Great Lakes and other hazardous situations?
10. What is the safety record of the U.S. Coast Guard rescue swimmers? What is the common denominator in fatal accidents? How many lives have they saved overall?