

O'Doherty recalled. "Dana countered by saying that he had a congressional mandate, money, and bodies. Only ASMs would be rescue swimmers/EMTs and that he was going to build up the rate [rating or job classification] so that there would be a swimmer in every duty section, Coast Guard-wide."

O'Doherty replied, "We'll see."

SIX MONTHS PRIOR TO THE SS *MARINE ELECTRIC* accident, the Coast Guard's rescue swimmer program had been under development. Lieutenant Goward spearheaded a planning proposal, and Commander Al Steinman, a flight surgeon responsible for survival equipment and a proponent of the EMT program, agreed to help. The two officers would split the workload to further develop the proposal. They would also address associated issues, which had stalled the plan's advancement, or added "friction."

"We were unable to get a lot of budgetary interest until the *Marine Electric*. Even then, the Coast Guard was slow to adopt the idea, as it was seen as hazarding our own folks," according to Goward. "However, the HH-52A was in the early stages of being replaced by a nonamphibious helicopter, the HH-65 Dolphin, and that helped sell the program internally."

Following the SS *Marine Electric* investigation and based on conclusions developed from the congressional Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee hearings regarding the Coast Guard's existing techniques and equipment, Congress mandated the swimmer program as a part of the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 1984. This act required the commandant of the Coast Guard to establish a helicopter rescue swimmer program to train selected Coast Guard personnel in rescue swimming skills.

GOWARD'S PROPOSAL HAD A GREEN LIGHT, and the Coast Guard had funding and authority to establish its own helicopter rescue swimmer program.

A larger team was assembled to turn the dream into reality. Lieutenant Commander Ken Coffland, chief of aviation life support and charged with supervision of the EMT program for the Coast Guard, was assigned the additional duty of Helicopter Rescue Swimmer Program manager.

One of the first phone calls to solicit enlisted leadership was to a senior aviation survivalman, Master Chief Petty Officer ASMCM Larry Farmer. Farmer graduated from a Navy Class "A" school, a job training