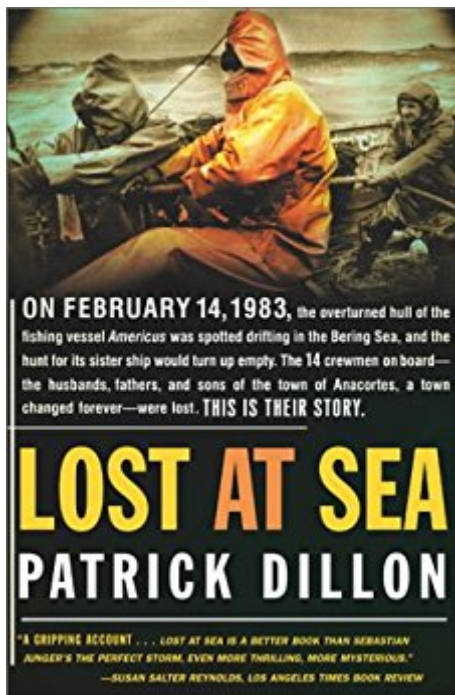


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# Lost At Sea



## Synopsis

On the morning of February 3, 1983, the *Americus* and *Altair*, two state-of-the-art crabbing vessels, idled at the dock in their home port of Anacortes, Washington. On deck, the fourteen crewmen--fathers, sons, brothers and friends who'd known one another all their lives--prepared for the ten-day trip to Dutch Harbor, Alaska. From this rough-and-tumble seaport the men would begin a grueling three-month season in one of the nation's most profitable and deadliest occupations--fishing for crab in the notorious Bering Sea. Standing on the Anacortes dock that morning, the families and friends of the crew knew that in the wake of the previous year's multimillion-dollar losses, the pressure for this voyage was unusually intense. Eleven days later, on Valentine's Day, the overturned hull of the *Americus* was found drifting in calm seas only twenty-five miles from Dutch Harbor, without a single distress call or trace of its seven-man crew. The *Altair*, its sister ship, had disappeared altogether; in the desperate search that followed, no evidence of the vessel or its crew would ever be found. The nature of the disaster--fourteen men and two vessels, apparently lost within hours of each other--made it the worst on record in the history of U.S. commercial fishing. Delving into the mysterious tragedy of the *Americus* and *Altair*, acclaimed journalist Patrick Dillon vivifies the eighty-knot winds, subzero temperatures, and mountainous waves commercial fishermen fight daily to make their living, and illustrates the incredible rise of the Pacific Northwest's ocean frontier: from a father-and-son business to a dangerously competitive multibillion-dollar high-tech industry with one of the highest death rates in the nation. Here Dillon explores the lives the disaster left behind in Anacortes: the ambitious young entrepreneur who raised the top-notch fleet in a few short years, the guilt-ridden captains of the surviving sister boats, and the grief-numbed families of the crew. Tracing the two-year investigation launched by the Coast Guard and National Transportation Safety Board, he brings to life a heated cast of opponents: ingenious scientists, defensive marine architects, blue-chip lawyers and wrangling politicians, all struggling to come to terms with the puzzling death of fourteen men at sea. And finally, in his evocation of one mother's crusade to pass the safety legislation that might save lives, Dillon creates a moving portrait of courage and love.

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## Customer Reviews

Dillon's narrative is very personal for me. I was raised in Ketchikan, Alaska and like many of my friends, crewed on trollers and seiners during the summer salmon seasons. In 1958, the day after I graduated from high school, I headed north to the Fairweather grounds off Lituya Bay on the 55ft. Cygnet II., Erick Lindeman, owner and skipper. A month later we were in a terrific Southeaster. We deployed the sea anchor and let wind and waves drive us north for two days. We had solid water rolling over the work deck. Finally, running out of sea room we managed to anchor in the lee of Cape Fairweather. Our hold was knee deep in sea water, even though we were constantly pumping the bilge. This was during the summer I can hardly imagine what it would have been like in the winter farther north east.

This historic tome describes the extreme danger/s of fishing in the seas off of Alaska and the tragedies surrounding the fishing fleet from Anacortes Washington. The author does an excellent job of explaining in lay terms the "science" of commercial fishing - the equipment - ships - etc. He takes the reader inside the minds of the fishermen (the owners of the ships - the crew) - as well as their families. And, he also gives a birds-eye view into the interworkings of the government agencies who sanction & regulate commercial fishing. I highly recommend this book to any / all who are interested in fishing in Alaska (commercial or sport)...and/or people living in the Pacific Northwest / Alaska.

We live in Anacortes with the legacy of this tragedy. Lost at Sea was this month's book club topic and we attended last night. As a young man I remember seeing these boats and had relatives who fished for king crab in the Bering Sea. As a blue water sailor I know something of the sea, her calm and dangerous terror. Numerous book members compared this in quality and intensity to The Perfect Storm. I found it a riveting and believable telling of our small town's loss. The parents and siblings of two families attended and added their insights, pain, and continuing search for answers thirty years out. Patrick Dillon, they say, got it right. Skippers, owners, and crew literally threw caution to the wind for the almighty dollar. The industry, lobbyists, and fishermen fought regulation to improve safety and that portion of the story is well told. For those not familiar with the sea, my wife suggests reading the epilogue first. It won't be a spoiler and will inform the reader as the story unfolds.

A brilliantly told story of the crab fisherman operating in the Bering Sea, the tragic losses they incur, and the political battle to get safety regulations implemented. High risk, high profit, tradition, and resistance to change and what amounts to war at many levels. War against the sea for survival. War against greed and resistance to change in attempting to implement safer operations in an industry. This book resonated with me reawakening the feelings of awe and fear at the power of the sea. As a former Chief Engineer on a small ship I identified with the discussions about compromised stability on these boats due to unregulated modifications and the battles with authority for safe operations. I highly recommend this book and if you read it you will never view your crab dinner the same way again.

Honestly I thought the world had forgotten about the Americus and Altair. I have very vivid memories of the day the entire town of Anacortes found out about the loss of the two ships and their crews, including some of my classmates and friends. This book tells their stories well. The aftermath and changes made within the industry precipitated by this disaster are well described. Rest well Jeff, Vic and Rich. You are not forgotten.

The author wove a compelling true story, beginning with the lives of those involved and detailed background of the fishing industry in Anacortes. The story evolved into the aftermath of the tragedy, the investigation and finally into the lives of those who bravely tried to make changes to prevent more tragedy from occurring.

My brother has been a Bering Sea fisherman and crabber since the late 70's. This book gets you close to what that is really like. Forget that nonsense on TV (Dangerous Catch), read this and Working on the Edge if you want a taste of what that life is really about.

I had a copy that I had got out in Anacordas Washington. when it first came out. My brother lives out there and his daughter wen to school with most of the boys that went down with the boats.I just wanted to read it again and had loaned it to a buddy of mine to read and never got it back. So that is why I bought another.. GREAT book

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