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In the winter of 1952, New England was battered by the most brutal nor'easter in years. As the weather wreaked havoc on land, the freezing Atlantic became a wind-whipped zone of peril.

In the early hours of Monday, February 18, while the storm raged, two oil tankers, the *Pendleton* and the *Fort Mercer*, found themselves in the same horrifying predicament. Built with "dirty steel," and not prepared to withstand such ferocious seas, both tankers split in two, leaving the dozens of men on board utterly at the Atlantic's mercy.

The Finest Hours is the gripping, true story of the valiant attempt to rescue the souls huddling inside the broken halves of the two ships. Coast Guard cutters raced to the aid of those on the *Fort Mercer*, and when it became apparent that the halves of the *Pendleton* were in danger of capsizing, the

Guard sent out two thirty-six-foot lifeboats as well. These wooden boats, manned by only four seamen, were dwarfed by the enormous seventy-foot seas. As the tiny rescue vessels set out from the coast of Cape Cod, the men aboard were all fully aware that they were embarking on what could easily become a suicide mission.

The spellbinding tale is overflowing with breathtaking scenes that sear themselves into the mind's eye, as boats capsize, bows and sterns crash into one another, and men hurl themselves into the raging sea in their terrifying battle for survival.

Not all of the eighty-four men caught at sea in the midst of that brutal storm survived, but considering the odds, it's a miracle—and a testament to their bravery—that any came home to tell their tales at all.

Michael J. Tougias and Casey Sherman have seamlessly woven together their extensive research and firsthand interviews to create an unforgettable tale of heroism, triumph, and tragedy, one that truly tells of the Coast Guard's finest hours.

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