A BUSY CAPTAIN AT WORK

Dots of light flickered on the ocean surface as the *Hannah Boden* cut through the dark water. Linda Greenlaw, captain of this swordfishing boat, was busy at work in the wheelhouse. Thoughts about the difficult and dangerous fishing trip ahead raced in her mind. She was heading toward the Grand Banks off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada. Already the wind had picked up a few knots. Suddenly, a high wave splashed over the side. Was a storm approaching? If so, it was her responsibility to deal with it. Linda gripped the wheel tighter. Whatever happened, she was ready for it. The only female swordfish captain working the waters east of the Grand Banks, Linda was doing what she loved.

Meet Linda Greenlaw

Linda Greenlaw was born in Connecticut in 1960 and raised in Topsham, Maine. As a child, she spent summers with her family on Isle au Haut, a small island off the coast of Maine. There she fell in love with the sea and with fishing.

Linda Greenlaw is the only female ever to captain a swordfishing boat near the Grand Banks.
Linda spent her summers on Isle au Haut, an island off the coast of Maine. Here is where she developed a love for the sea and fishing.

When she was 12, Linda observed a young boy helping his father, a lobster fisherman, in a nearby cove. She watched as the boy took the lobsters out of the trap, throwing the small ones back into the water. He then put some bait into the trap and pushed it back into the water. After a while, the lobster boat headed off to the next trap. Linda’s gaze moved beyond the lobster boat. She found herself daydreaming of boats, fish, and sailing clear across the Atlantic. At that moment, Linda knew there was something out at sea just for her.
From Deckhand to Captain

To help pay her way through Colby College, Linda worked as a cook and deckhand aboard a swordfishing boat during her summers. When she graduated in 1983, she decided to postpone law school for a year because she had fallen in love with fishing. Linda became a full-time fisherman. She worked as a mate on the Walter Leeman. As a first-time crew member, Linda got all the dirty jobs. She had to mop the deck as well as handle the galley (kitchen) chores. She also got teased quite a bit, but that’s typical for all first-timers. By 1986, Linda had become the captain of the Gloria Dawn. She was just 26 years old.

SWORDFISH: A DANGEROUS CATCH

Swordfish is a popular fish that can be both difficult and dangerous to catch because of its speed and strong “sword,” or bill. The most productive season for catching swordfish is August through October. As captain, Linda navigates her swordfishing boat many miles out at sea. She searches for an area of the Atlantic Ocean where the warm Gulf Stream meets the cold water of the Labrador current.

A longline has shorter lines with hooks attached to both sides of it.
The *Hannah Boden* crew carefully hauls in a huge swordfish. Once the fish is on deck, the sword is removed for safety.

Because swordfish usually bite best when the night sky is bright, Linda and her crew follow the lunar cycle. They begin fishing the night of the first quarter and end in the last quarter of the lunar cycle. Her crew lays down about 40 miles of fishing line, with 1,000 hooks. This is called longlining. Red beeper buoys are attached about every three and one half miles to the fishing line. Each buoy has a different frequency. Linda checks the buoys to monitor the direction of the fishing line from the boat.

Fishing lines are set in the evening. Two members of Linda’s crew bait each hook with a whole squid. Then they attach a lightstick to every hook to attract the swordfish. The hooks are tossed overboard and float underwater to depths of 70 feet. The crew begins hauling at 3:30 the next morning. At this time, Linda pilots the swordfishing boat along the line of orange floats. She feels the line as she steers. If there is any tension on the line, Linda stops the boat and the crew hauls in the swordfish. Swordfish can weigh about 100 to 500 pounds.
Linda and her crew are always amazed by the sight of a swordfish. Its electric blue and purple back seems to light up the ocean. They always handle a live swordfish carefully because it can put up quite a fight. On one fishing trip, Linda recalls watching a dead swordfish with its sword intact slide across the deck during a storm. The razor sharp sword cut through a crewman's boot and pierced his ankle. Despite the dangers, Linda has an impressive success rate. Her biggest catch netted 62,000 pounds of swordfish. At $4.00 a pound, that's a good catch!
The *Hannah Boden* takes month-long swordfishing trips more than 1,000 miles out to sea.

**On Board the *Hannah Boden***

The *Hannah Boden* is one of many boats that fish in the Grand Banks. At the crack of dawn, Linda and her crew load the boat with gear and supplies for a 30-day swordfishing voyage. This includes six tons of squid for bait. It takes 5 days to reach the fishing grounds. As her crew completes a long list of jobs, Linda checks the water temperature on and below the surface of the ocean. She also uses Doppler radar to find the best place to fish. The radar finds layers of water, some of which have more fish than others. Once Linda selects a place to fish, the crew works hard. They sleep only 3 hours each night. The crew’s hard work pays off because they work for a share of the profits. The more fish they catch, the bigger their paychecks will be.
On the trip back to port, the crew cleans every inch of the 100-foot steel boat. They also organize and store the fishing gear. When Linda and her crew dock, they unload their catch.

OUT AT SEA: LONG DAYS AND NIGHTS

A Dangerous Occupation

Commercial fishing is a very dangerous occupation. A sharp fishhook can become a lethal weapon. A fall on a slippery deck near equipment can cause serious injury. Severe weather and long hours of hard work also take their toll on the crew. The gale of March 1993 was one of the worst storms Linda has encountered in her career. Wind gusts reached 120 miles per hour. Huge waves more than six stories high pounded the Hannah Boden. By nightfall, the storm got worse. Still, Linda had to keep the bow, or front of the boat, into the wind. The waves became so high that other ships couldn’t see her boat on radar. At last, the storm passed and the sea began to mellow. “Bad weather is more of an inconvenience than a problem,” she relates. “It takes time away from fishing.”

Out at sea, the safety of the crew is just as important as bringing in a big catch. If a crew member becomes sick, Linda must decide whether to keep fishing or get medical help. Once a man had to pull his own tooth with a pair of pliers because the nearest dentist was 600 miles away!

Teamwork Is Key

Linda believes that the key to success is hard work and loving what you do. As captain, she navigates the boat, repairs equipment, and hires the crew. She also studies the weather, finds the fish, and decides when to return home. It takes strong leadership skills to work with a five-member crew and turn them into a hardworking team.
Linda looks for perseverance, determination, and resourcefulness when she hires her crew. Problems always arise when six people live in 100 feet of space and work with little sleep. It's her job to make sure that the crew can work together to get their jobs done. Above all, she must make sure her crew is able to handle any emergency.

Linda and her crew show off a great catch. Swordfish can weigh 100 to 500 pounds and grow to a length of 5 feet or more.
Today Linda Greenlaw spends most of her time lobstering the waters around her home on Isle au Haut and promoting her book about her adventures at sea.

A DRAMATIC CHANGE

In 1996, after 17 years, Linda Greenlaw left deep-sea fishing, and she decided to start lobstering near her island home on Isle au Haut. She also wrote a book called The Hungry Ocean. It describes a month-long fishing trip on board the Hannah Boden. Linda’s second book is about lobstering and living on a small island. However, she often finds herself gazing out at the Atlantic Ocean. Her passion for bluer waters and bigger fish still tugs at her heart.