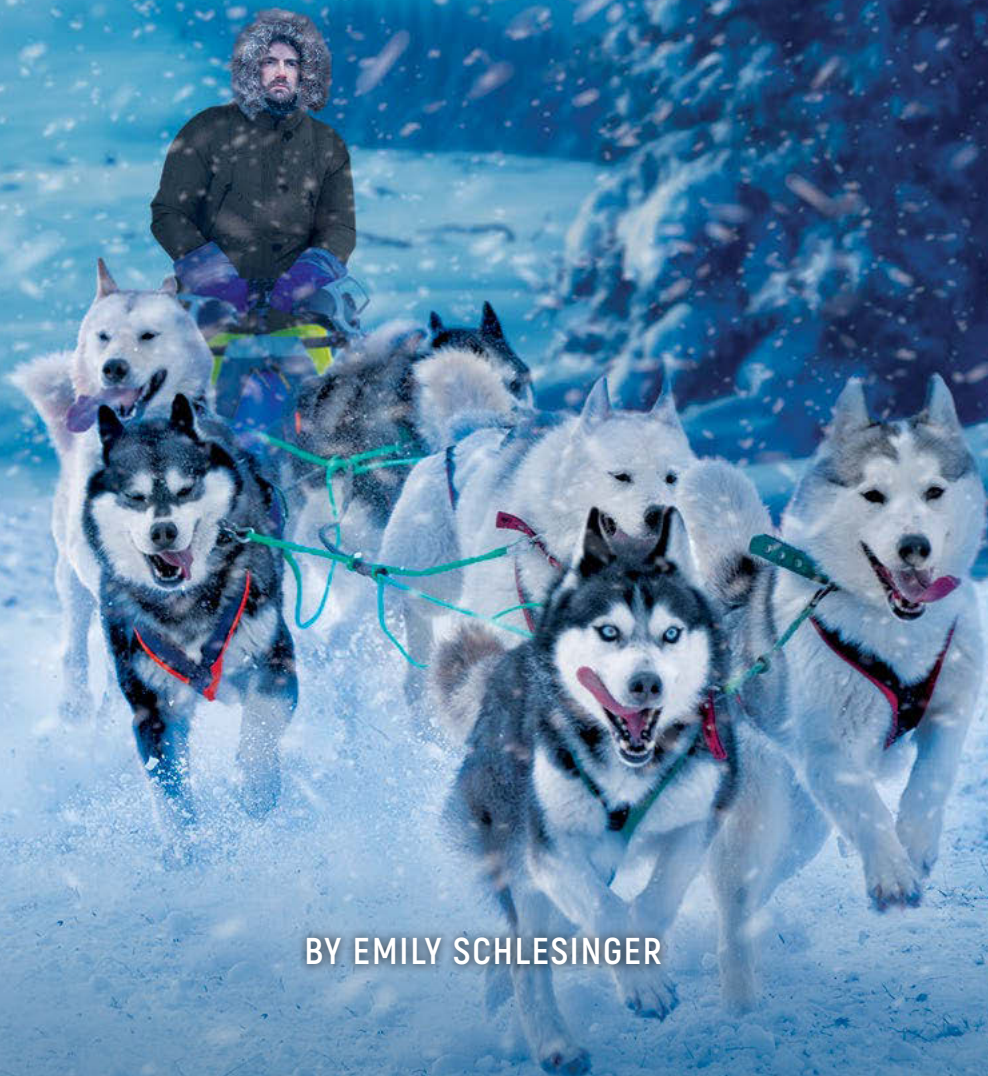


# ALASKA'S IDITAROD



BY EMILY SCHLESINGER

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# Nome Calling

It was January 1925. A **telegram** arrived at the governor's office in Juneau, Alaska. He picked it up. The words jumped off the page.



*Nome calling . . .*

*Nome calling . . .*

*We have an outbreak of **diphtheria** . . .*

*No **serum** . . .*

*Urgently need help . . .*

The governor slammed down the note. Nome was in trouble. Many in the city could die without medicine. There was not a minute to lose.



A topographic map of a mountainous region, rendered in shades of teal and blue. The map shows contour lines, peaks, and valleys, with some small black squares and crosses indicating specific locations or points of interest.

## Disaster in Nome

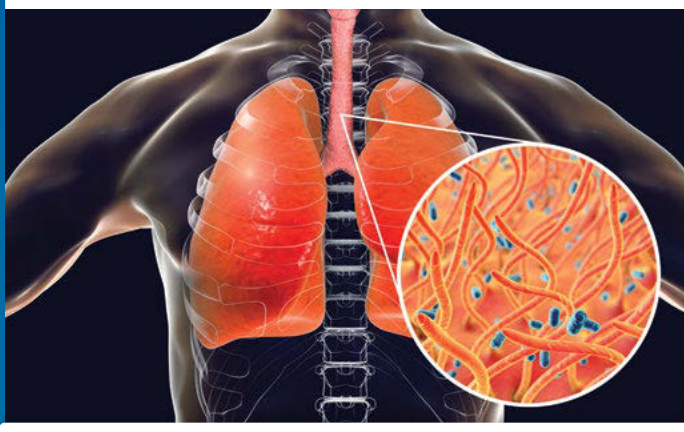
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Winter was harsh that year. Nome was completely cut off by ice and snow. The city lies in a remote corner of Alaska. Cars could not reach it. Trains and boats couldn't either.

Sick people there went to a doctor. They began to die one by one. The cause was diphtheria. It spread fast. There was a serum that could cure it. But the nearest supply was in Anchorage. This was 1,000 miles away.

## DIPHTHERIA

Diphtheria is a respiratory disease caused by a bacteria that releases a poison into the body. It is especially deadly for children. The serum contained an antitoxin that could fight this poison.



A team gathered in Juneau. They **brainstormed** what to do. How could they get the medicine across 1,000 miles of ice, snow, and mountains?

One possibility was to fly it. However, planes then were not made to fly in winter. Their cockpits were open. The air was too cold. A pilot would not survive.

There was another possibility. Sled dog teams traveled to Nome each month. They delivered mail. The route was called the Iditarod Trail. Sled drivers were called **mushers**. A musher might be able to deliver the medicine.



**FAST FACT:** Nome is a remote community on the western coast of Alaska. There are no roads that connect the town with the rest of the state. The only ways in and out of Nome are by airplane, dogsled, or boat.



This plan could work. But there was one problem. It took almost a month to make the trip using one sled team. The people of Nome did not have that long.







Then someone had a different idea. What if they created a relay race? Dog teams could wait in villages along the way. One team would hand off the serum to the next. That way each team would only have to run a short distance. The dogs would always be fresh. Little time would be lost to sleep.

This seemed like the best plan. Twenty dog teams were put into action. The first musher left on January 27, 1925.



# ALASKA'S IDITAROD

The Iditarod is a challenging dogsled race held in the frigid Alaskan wilderness each year. Sled dogs and mushers must work as a team to battle the elements and become champions. While the race has become a popular sporting event, it began as a life-or-death sprint to save a remote village. Learn about the race's history, its dangers, and some of the daring dogs and mushers who have won Alaska's Iditarod.



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