
Todd Lewan

The Last Run
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In the acknowledgments for *The Last Run*, you mention that it was Larry Mussara who first told you about the *La Conte* case. What about this case piqued your interest to the extent that it did? There are so many untold stories out there, what made you want to write about this one?

Several reasons. To start, the conditions under which this rescue mission was carried out were unlike any in recent memory. Ask the Coasties; they'll tell you that. Second, and perhaps more important, I was immediately drawn to the rich characters in this story. They are wounded souls with dreams, people with great tenderness masked under rough exteriors, and I found them compellingly human on so many levels. Third, I liked the idea of writing about the so-called "last" American frontier, Alaska: American history is populated by larger-than-life characters who sought to remake themselves in the spirit of the frontier; I thought this story was another fine example of that.

You wrote the *La Conte* story as a five-part serial for the Associated Press. What motivated you to write an entire book about it?

In the newspaper serial, I didn't have the opportunity to dig deeply into the motivations, the backgrounds of the main characters in the story, Bob Doyle and Ted LeFeuvre, and to a lesser extent, Mike DeCapua: Why had they chosen to live in Alaska, to be out on the ocean in the dead of winter, to fly a helicopter in such conditions? Their back stories, their paths in life, their unflinching humanity was, in my view, were the things that set this story apart from others in the genre.

Many of the thoughts and feelings expressed by both the fishermen and the Coast Guardsmen were extremely personal; was it difficult getting the survivors of the *La Conte* incident to open up and speak to you about it?

Very. I was greatly impressed by their willingness to do so, and am grateful for their candor and honesty. To speak about such personal things, in my view, proves the high caliber of these men, and demonstrates how much stronger they are today as a result of their harrowing experience. I mean, once you've lived through such a storm, you've got to figure, "What could be worse?"

You tell the story of the *La Conte* without conveying your personal feelings or judgments; was this difficult to do?

It was not my place to make any personal judgments about anything that transpired in **The Last Run**. To do so, in my view, would have weakened the narrative, even killed it.

Why did you choose to include so much background information about each of the members of the *La Conte* crew?

Again, because they were outstanding, compelling characters, each with his own flaws and exploits, each with his own dreams and demons. I like stories about complex people, ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances, people who are at a crossroads in their lives. These men were, all of them — not just the fishermen.

Are you still in touch with members of *La Conte* crew? How has writing *The Last Run* changed your life, personally?

I've been in loose touch with a number of the characters in the book, and I hope to stay in contact for years to come. This book has changed my life in so many ways — in particular, it has underscored how important it is to see and feel the world through another person's heart and mind.