LOUIE GOES TO WAR

This photo of a B-24 “Liberator” is from the U.S. Air Force Museum collection. It depicts a B24 from the 464th Bomb Group after it took a flak hit.

When Louie completed his early military training, he was assigned to a bomb unit in 1942. He would fight in the Pacific (not the European) theater.

Arriving in Hawaii, he first reported to Hickam Field (which had been damaged in the Pearl Harbor attack) on the island of Oahu. Then he worked at Kahuku Air Base (where he practiced more extensive bomb-dropping missions).

When Zamp and his B-24 crew mates had enough training to actually run a real - not a practice - mission, they were surprised by how much distance they had to cover. Sometimes they flew 5,000 miles round trip:

> *...we were the first to bomb Wake Island after the Japanese took it. So we had to fly from Hawaii to Midway, load UP with bombs, and fly to Wake Island round trip, which was unheard of. But we did it by taking out half the bombs and putting in bomb bay tanks, and we still were able to carry, with a half a bomb load, as much as a B-17 carried with a full bomb load.*
>
> *So that's a mission for you...round trip from Midway to Wake is about 2,400 miles. So you figure a mission is 5,000 miles.* (Zamperini, Oral History, *Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles*, page 50.)

Not only were the bombing missions long and dangerous, the planes the Allies used were far from perfect. The same could be said of the men who flew them.

Huge numbers of men and equipment were lost in training missions. Often, pilot and navigator errors contributed to - or caused - fatal crashes. So did mechanical failures and general bad luck.

Statistics of men and planes, lost in training, are stunning:

> *In the Army Air Force, or AAF, there were 52,651 stateside aircraft accidents over the course of the war, killing 14,903 personnel...In the three months in which* [Zamperini and his colleagues] *trained as a crew, 3,041 AAF planes - more than 33 per day - met with accidents stateside, killing nine men per day.*
>
> *In subsequent months, death tallies exceeding 500 were common. In August 1943, 590 airmen would did stateside, 19 per day.* (*Unbroken*, by Laura Hillenbrand, page 61.)

The above losses occurred during training exercises, not actual combat missions. Flying in WWII-era planes - on an actual bomb run - was a death sentence for many young men.

What about Louie Zamperini? Who were his crew mates and what plane did they fly?

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/LOUIE-GOES-TO-WAR-Unbroken-Louis-Zamperini-Stor

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See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/LOUIE-GOES-TO-WAR-Unbroken-Louis-Zamperini-Story

Questions 2 Ponder

How Do We Handle Disruption of Plans?

Louis Zamperini planned to be on the U.S. Olympic Team during 1940, in Tokyo, but those games were cancelled due to another world war.

Instead of being an Olympic runner, Zamperini became one of many men who fought for their country. He, like those other individuals, faced a major detour in his life.

Although he hated to fly, Zamp was assigned to a B-24 “Liberator.” His job, aboard the bomber, was to serve as the plane’s bombardier.

Even though he was now serving his country, during the war, Zamp continued to run. Just because he was a B-24 bombardier, he wasn’t always in the air.

Zamperini, like so many people for so many different reasons, had a complete disruption of his plans. If events disrupt our plans, what is the best way to move forward?

Do you think Zamperini abandoned his love of athletics, even though he was serving in the war? Explain your answer.

Would you consider Louis Zamperini as a role model for people whose plans get disrupted by events outside their control? Why, or why not?

How Does Proper Training Help to Avoid a Bad Outcome?

During WWII, a bomber known as the B-24, which had a reputation as difficult-to-fly, was involved in many accidents. Hundreds of men died during training missions.

Often, pilot and navigator errors contributed to - or caused - fatal crashes. So did mechanical failures and, sometimes, bad luck.

Do you think the need to quickly train pilots and navigators, on the B-24s, may have contributed to the high number of crashes? Why, or why not?

Given the reputation of B24s, do you think it would have been psychologically difficult for men who were assigned to those bombers? Explain your answer.

Have you ever experienced a situation where proper training would have been helpful for you? What happened?

How does proper training help to avoid a bad outcome if an emergency develops?

Media Stream

Hawaiian Islands - A Satellite View
Image by Jacques Descloitres, MODIS Land Rapid Response Team at NASA GSFC - online, courtesy NASA.
View this asset at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Hawaiian-Islands-A-Satellite-View

Hickam Field - Oahu, Hawaii - in 1942

Photo of Hickam Field, August of 1942, from Hawaii Aviation, online courtesy the State of Hawaii, Department of Transportation, Airports Division.
View this asset at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Hickam-Field-Oahu-Hawaii-in-1942

Aerial View of Oahu

September, 2004, aerial photo of southeastern Oahu by Mila Zinkova, online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

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Kahuku Army Airfield - Base of Louis Zamperini

USN photo, of Kahuku runway, online courtesy U.S. National Archives. Information about Kahuku Army Air Force Base from David Trojan at the Hawaii Aviation Preservation Society.
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