AWESOME stories

NAOETSU and CAMP B-4

0. NAOETSU and CAMP B-4 - Story Preface

1. ZAMPERINI and the 1936 OLYMPICS

2. LOUIE GOES TO WAR

3. ZAMP and HIS SUPER MAN B-24

4. B-24s IN COMBAT

5. SUPER MAN ATTACKS - FUNAFUTI and NAURU

6. A GREEN HORNET and GREY SHARKS

7. KWAJALEIN - EXECUTION ISLAND

8. PRISON CAMPS - OFUNA and OMORI

9. NAOETSU and CAMP B-4

10. THE BIRD - THEN AND LATER

11. WHEN LOUIE MET BILLY

12. FORGIVENESS

Prisoners of War at Naoetsu wore identification badges with numbers. This image depicts one such badge. According to the Australian War Memorial: "It was Issued to, and worn as an identity number by, NX56689 Mervyn Thomas Gronow of 2/18 Battalion while he was a prisoner of war at Naoetsu in Japan."

Louis Zamperini gave a radio broadcast on the 18th of November, 1944. He didn't know whether his family would ever hear the "Japanese Postman" program, but it was better than his continued silence.

Until that moment, no one in the outside world knew that Zamp was alive. He had never been registered as a POW. Because he was missing for more than a-year-and-a-day, his family had received an official "presumed-dead" message. What would be wrong with making a broadcast, as long as it wasn't propaganda-driven?

Except ... it wasn't the *first* broadcast which the Japanese authorities wanted from him. They knew about the Zamperini "presumed-dead" notice, since it followed standard U.S. protocol - letters were always sent to families after their loved one was missing for a year-and-a-day. Japanese propaganda makers wanted Zamperini - world-famous Olympian - to *keep* making broadcasts.

Future broadcasts wouldn't be authored by Louie. They'd be written for him. They'd contain fault-finding phrases, like:

> *...I hope the folks back home are properly notified of the fact that I am still alive and intend to stay alive ... It's certainly a sad world when a fellow can't even be allowed to live, I mean when a fellow is killed off by a so-called official report ... How about that?* (Zamperini, *Devil at My Heels*, page 170.)

When Louie refused to exchange his rat-and-bedbug-infested dwelling for a slot on the propaganda-broadcast team, he was ordered to another POW camp. Naoetsu, on the western side of Honshu, was no better than any other slave-labor camp, but at least (Louie thought) he would finally get away from the Bird and his endless array of Zamp-directed punishment.

Making his way west, during March of 1945, Zamp saw the impact of Allied firebombing on Tokyo. He was stunned at the extent - and intensity - of the damage.

After a twelve-hour train ride to Naoetsu - a city just north of Nagano (scene of the 1998 Winter Olympics) - Louie was assigned to Camp 4-B. There to greet him was ... the Bird.

The much-despised "commandant," who thoroughly earned the hatred of POWs under his control, had been transferred to Naoetsu. Louie had not escaped his tormentor after all.

During the summer of 1945 - after the war in Europe was over - the Naoetsu prisoners - identified by numbers - slogged on as local vermin descended on them:

> *Summer finally arrived, bringing with it oppressive heat and legions of vermin. They dripped from the rafters and ceiling and crept through the floorboards of the old bunkhouse at night, leaving our bodies covered with welts. The sand fleas were so thick that the earth itself seemed to be crawling, undulating like waves. I tried to sleep outside but gave up, exhausted and, frankly, indifferent. Bugs were the least of our torments.* (Zamperini, *The Devil at My Heels*, page 183.)

During that summer, POWs at Naoetsu also saw something else: A new kind of Allied plane in the Japanese sky - B29s - which gave them hope that the war might soon end. They'd heard rumors that all prisoners of war would be annihilated sometime in August - consistent with Japan's "Kill-All Policy" - and could only hope the war would be over before the target date.

Then ... another rumor started to make its way through Naoetsu. Hiroshima, apparently, had a cholera epidemic, closing it to all outsiders. No one, apparently, could even call there. It was only later - after a Navy torpedo bomber flew over Naoetsu - that the men learned what had really happened at Hiroshima.

Blinking its red lights to communicate in Morse code - "The war is over" - the plane returned a few hours later. Its crew dropped a package including cigarettes, chocolate candy and a magazine with an exploding atomic bomb on its cover. It wasn't cholera which had crippled Hiroshima. It was a new weapon which had been delivered by the *Enola Gay*.

When that new weapon ended the war, the Bird knew he had to fly away to a safe place. He was sure he'd be listed on a war-crimes list.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/NAOETSU-and-CAMP-B-4-Unbroken-Louis-Zamperini-Story

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:
http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/NAOETSU-and-CAMP-B-4-Unbroken-Louis-Zamperini-Story

Questions 2 Ponder

How Hard Is It to Resist Temptation?

Japanese propaganda masters tempted POW Louis Zamperini with an easier life if he would use their words in his radio broadcasts.

Knowing that Louis Zamperini was an Olympic athlete, Japanese propaganda masters allowed Zamp to make a radio broadcast during November of 1944.

It was the first time his family had news that their loved one was not dead.

Tempting Zamp with far-better conditions than he was used to, and that his fellow POWs were enduring, the Japanese had only one request. Zamp had to read their words, not his, when he made his broadcasts.

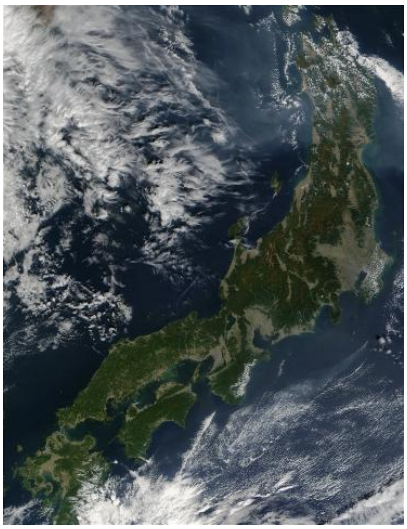
Louie refused to exchange his rat-and-bedbug-infested dwelling for a position on the propaganda-broadcast team. The price he paid, to turn-down temptation, was life in the Naoetsu POW camp.

How hard to you think it was for Zamperini to resist the temptation of better living conditions during the rest of the war?

Can we fault individuals, who are not as strong as Zamperini, if they are unable to resist temptation under the same, or similar, circumstances? Explain your answer.

We are often tempted by lots of things in our own lives. Is it easy or hard to resist such temptations? Explain your answer.

Media Stream

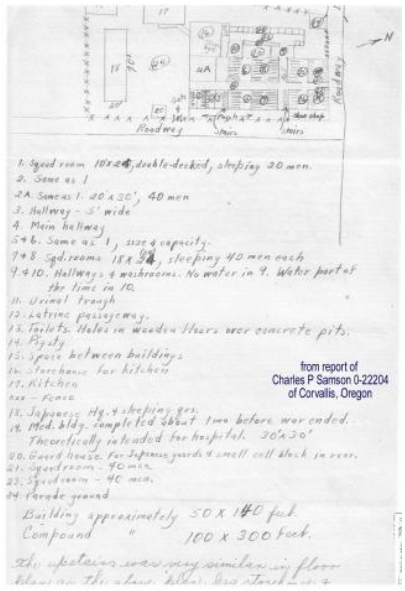


Honshu - Satellite View

Image by Jacques Descloitres (MODIS Land Rapid Response Team, NASA/Goodard Space Flight Center), taken on 15 October 2001. Photo online, courtesy NASA Visible Earth.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Honshu-Satellite-View



Naoetsu - Drawing by POW

Drawing of Naoetsu POW camp, by Charles P. Samson. Online, courtesy U.S. National Archives.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Naoetsu-Drawing-by-POW

Naoetsu - Prisoner Identity Badge

Image of Naoetsu prisoner identity badge - ID number REL23451 - online, courtesy Australian War Memorial.

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Naoetsu-Prisoner-Identity-Badge

NAOETSU and CAMP B-4

View this asset at:

http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/NAOETSU-and-CAMP-B-4