



Unbroken (2010)

Book by Laura Hillenbrand

This book review is about the novel Unbroken – 'A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience and Redemption.'

The book begins with Louis Zamparini growing up in Torrance California; an Italian kid who runs amok stealing, fighting, breaking, entering and really being a ripe nuisance to his family, neighbours, friends and the constabulary.

His brother helps funnel that nefarious energy into track; where Louis becomes one of the fastest runners in the state and then country. He represents at the 1936 Olympics in the 5,000m and the story by Hillenbrand of that period paints a great picture of the epic build up occurring both in world politics and also to Zamparini himself against a backdrop of his peers and his own challenges.

The historical information about the Airmen and their aircraft is sensational reading; the aircraft include the B24 and the B17 in most parts; 'Superman' was the B24 that Louie flew and was shot up by Zeros and flak so much that on return to Nauru on one sortie the ground crew counted 594 holes. It's amazing the aircraft flew and was testament to the experience and determination of the pilot (Phil) and crew of which one man died and many of the crew badly injured.

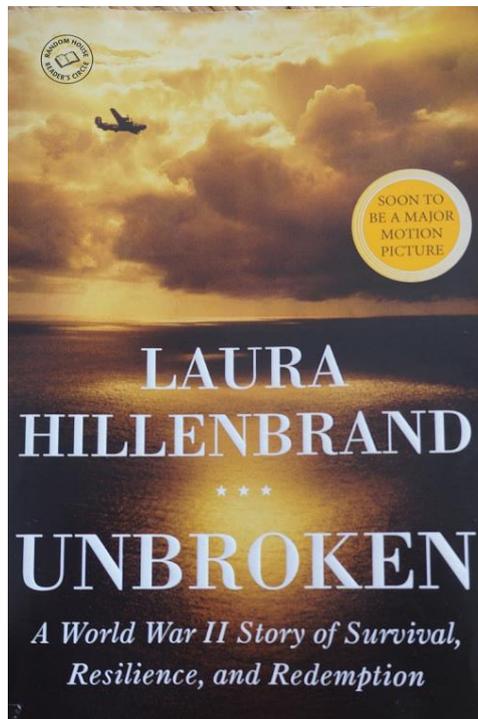
They went down on the troubled 'Green Hornet' B24 where four men surfaced after Phil ditched the aircraft sometime later. One drowned near the others but could not be saved. The next few chapters of survival in the life raft is captivating reading, with the ever-present thirst, hunger and menacing sharks always present.

Louis fighting and punching sharks is incredible as they are staffed by a Japanese Bomber – what a complete cowardly act to strafe men in the water, it certainly goes against the grain of the purported 'Bushido' Code of honour. Just reading about the fishing they did and 'catching' their bait is a page turner as the troublesome sharks continue to try and jump in the boat and eat Louis and his mates as they drift for 40 days plus.

At Kwajalein in the Gilbert & Marshall Islands along with Ofuna POW Camp on mainland Japan both Louis and Phil are subject to degrading acts of barbarism and humiliation by their captors. Japanese Submariners visit their cells and throw rocks at them, poke both with sticks and spit at them as they lay battered in pools of filthy saliva.

Death Railway

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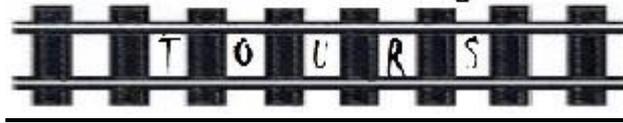
The Book Cover

At Ofuna Louis races one Japanese runner and deliberately loses; in another he leaves the runner for dead even with his weight reduced to around 50kgs on spindly legs. He crosses the finish line and is knocked unconscious; not the blue ribbon he normally receives; on another occasion he is paid (one riceball) to come second. A face-saving exercise for the Japanese runner in front of his girlfriend. Through these two POW Camps we meet several of the antagonists including, 'The Quack', 'Shithead' and others.

Louis has met some crazy guards in his time but none compared with the Omori Beast – Corporal Watanabe known as 'The Bird'. This guard wanted to be an Officer like other well-to-do members of his family however was knocked back – this snowballed with a posting to a POW Camp; a very lowly posting for someone with high ego and military ambitions. He therefore targeted Officers and POWs with leadership qualities or those Officers who were important, celebrities or high achievers in civilian and military life. Louis was an Officer, a leader and Olympian – he was also a target of The Bird.

The Bird leaves Omori after bashing and tormenting Louis and the men for months; he was posted to another POW Camp leaving the men (including Louis) overjoyed with the news. The Bird bashes men with his fists, clubs, a belt buckle and Kendo sticks; and finds it soothing to bash men unconscious and those who can barely stand. Months later Louis would be posted to another POW Camp – called Naoetsu in the snowy part of Japan – and right back into the

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The logo for Death Railway TOURS features the title 'Death Railway' in a stylized, hand-drawn font at the top. Below it, the word 'TOURS' is written in a bold, blocky font, with each letter contained within a rectangular frame. These frames are arranged in a row, resembling a set of railway tracks or a bridge structure, with vertical posts on either side.

nasty hands of the Bird. One of my dad's mates (Laurie) survived Naoetsu POW Camp; it was said that this camp was one of the worst in Japan due to the many work camps (Coal and saltworks for example) with back breaking work, bone crunching guards on a starvation diet.

This is a fantastic read and a real page turner. I highly recommend this book as one of the best of the WW2 POW genre pieces published. A book that pulls no punches and describes each of the segment of Louis' life with great detail.

What a remarkable story of the Olympic runner – a roller coaster life in a crazy world turned upside down by war and imperialism – a real 'east meets west' head on collision.

I can see why Hollywood made the motion picture.