

Thirty-two
Cascades of Pink Peaches

ON AUGUST 22, PHIL AND FRED GARRETT SAT IN THE Rokuroshi POW camp, wondering what was happening. Isolated on their chilly mountain, the POWs had been told nothing of the momentous events of recent days. All they knew was that the camp commander had been gone for five days, and in his absence, the guards had been leading the POWs on ominous walks through the forest.

That afternoon, the Japanese commander slogged back up the mountain, looking wilted. He walked into the barracks and approached the ranking American, Lieutenant Colonel Marion Unruh.

“The emperor has brought peace to the world,” he said.

The commander surrendered his sword to Unruh, who gathered his men and told them that the war was over. The POWs immediately gathered for a thanksgiving service. They were told that they must not seek revenge; they were officers and gentlemen, and they were to behave that way.

The POWs promptly threw a party to end all parties. They demolished the camp fence and built a gigantic pile of wood, described by one POW as fifty feet tall. They asked the Japanese interpreter if he could get them sake, and a barrel full of it soon arrived. The men jacked the lid off the barrel, imbibing began, the pile of wood was set on fire, an Alabaman transformed a huge can into a drum, and inebriated men began dancing. A conga line of crazy drunk POWs wrapped around camp and through the barracks, and one partier did a striptease, flinging off his clothes to reveal an emphatically unattractive body. The revelry, which went on all night, was so riotous that one man marveled at the fact that all the POWs were still alive when the sun came up. POWs celebrate the war's end. Naval History and Heritage Command

The following day, the hungover POWs walked down the mountain to the nearest villages. They found mostly ghost towns. The civilians had seen the bonfire, abandoned their homes, and fled. The POWs hiked back up and waited for help to come. —

At Naoetsu, most of the guards stayed in camp, their haughtiness replaced by gushing obsequiousness. There was almost no food and no tobacco. Fitzgerald went to the Japanese commander three times a day to demand more food, and was rejected each time. POWs left camp in search of something to eat. Someone came back with a cow. Someone else herded in pigs. It wasn't enough. Fitzgerald wrote a dispatch to the Swiss consul in Tokyo, telling of the terrible conditions in camp and asking for immediate help, but the Japanese commander refused to send it. Livid, Fitzgerald threatened to inform the American forces about the commander's behavior, but the commander still refused.

At about ten in the morning on August 26, six days after the war's end was announced in Naoetsu, Fitzgerald was just stepping out of the commander's office when a crowd of American fighter planes, sent from the carrier Lexington, shot overhead and began circling. The POWs charged outside, yelling. They hastily cleared an area, fetched some white lime, and painted two

giant words on the ground: FOOD SMOKES. Messages dropped from the cockpits. The planes had been hauling emergency supplies to POW camps but had exhausted their loads. The pilots promised that food would soon come.

Unable to feed the POWs, the pilots did the next best thing, putting on a thirty-minute air show while the prisoners shouted their approval. Fitzgerald stood among his men, moved by their joyful upturned faces. “Wonderful?” wrote J. O. Young in his diary. “To stand cheering, crying, waving your hat and acting like a damn fool in general. No one who has not spent all but 16 days of this war as a Nip prisoner can really know what it means to see ‘Old Sammy’ buzzing around over the camp.”

The fighters had a persuasive effect on the Japanese commander. He called for Fitzgerald, complained that Fitzgerald had not behaved “like a gentleman,” and accused him of bluffing when he had threatened to tell the American forces about him. “I meant every word I said,” Fitzgerald replied.

Ninety minutes later, Japanese trucks drove into camp, and out came rations, biscuits, and canned fruit. That afternoon, more planes from the Lexington flew over, and sea bags began thumping down all over camp. The POWs ran for their lives. One man, leaping from a fence to avoid getting clobbered, broke his ankle. One bag missed the camp altogether, splashing down in the river. The POWs ventured out, tore into the bags, and split up the loot. Each man received half a tin of tangerines, one pack of hardtack, two cigarettes, and a bit of candy. Someone waded into the river to grab the errant bag, and in it found magazines and a newspaper. Concerned that the food dropped wasn’t nearly adequate, Fitzgerald told someone to write 700 PWS HERE on the ground.

As the men ate, they passed around the magazines and peeled through the soaked pages. The fighting, they learned, had ended on August 15; the small voice that Wade had heard on the radio in the guardroom that day had been that of Emperor Hirohito, announcing the cessation of hostilities. This meant that for five days—seven in the case of Rokuroshi—the Japanese had deceived the POWs to hide the fact that the war was over. Given all the signs that a massacre had been imminent, it seems likely that the commanders had been awaiting instruction on whether or not to carry it out, and had wanted to keep the men docile in case the answer was affirmative.

Three days after the fighters flew over, the Americans sent in the big boys: six B-29s, the words Food for POWs scrawled down the wing of one of them. The bomb bay doors parted and pallets poured out, swinging under red, white, and blue parachutes. The first load hit the compound. Others fell over the rice paddies, pursued by hundreds of gleeful living skeletons. One canister bore a message written in chalk: BOMBED HERE IN MAY 45—SORRY I MISSED. BILLY THE KID. RHODE ISLAND NEW YORK. Boxes fell all over the landscape. Some civilians pulled them into their homes and hid them. Others, though in great hardship themselves, dragged them into camp.

The cargo banged down and boxes broke open. Cascades of pink peaches spilled over the countryside. A vegetable crate exploded, and the sky rained peas. A box dragged down the power lines in Naoetsu. Another harpooned the guardhouse. Louie and Tinker just missed being totaled by a giant drum full of shoes that they never saw coming. It shot through the benjo roof, landing on an unfortunate Australian, whose leg was broken, and a Yank from Idaho, whose skull was fractured, fortunately not fatally. The Idahoan had been fasting all day in hopes that

care packages would begin falling and he could gorge himself on American food instead of seaweed. To prevent further disaster, someone ran onto the road and wrote DROP HERE.

An orgy of eating and smoking commenced. Men crammed their stomachs full, then had seconds and thirds. Louie opened a can of condensed split pea soup and shoveled it into his mouth, too hungry to add water. J. O. Young and two friends drank two gallons of cocoa. The food kept falling. So much of it showered down that Fitzgerald asked a man to go out on the road and make sure that whoever had written 700 PWS HERE hadn't accidentally added a zero.

At nightfall, the eating stopped. Men opened by swollen stomachs drifted off to sleep with no air raids, no tenkos, no Bird. Louie lay among them, swaddled in an American parachute that he had dragged in from the rice paddy.

" 'Tis about 6 p.m., and I'm lying here in blissful misery just as all POWs have sat around and dreamed about throughout this internment, in short so full of chow that it's hard to even breath [sic]," J. O. Young wrote in his diary. "As four years prisoners ... there is no such thing as being satisfied after eating. You either don't have enough, or as we are all now so darn full you're in misery." "There's just one thing left to say as we bunk down for the night," he continued, "an [sic] that it's wonderful to be Americans and free men, and it's a might [sic] hard job even now to realize we're free men." —

On the morning of September 2, a B-29 known as Ghost Ship traced the long thread of beach marking the coast of western Japan. The plane had earned its moniker when an air traffic controller, unable to see five-foot, seven-inch pilot Byron Kinney in the cockpit, had exclaimed, "There's nobody in that plane! It must be a ghost ship!" In a briefing on Guam the afternoon before, Kinney had been told that he'd be carrying supplies to a remote POW camp called Naoetsu.

Louie was in the compound alone when Ghost Ship dipped under the clouds, skimmed the rice paddy, dropped its first load, and began a long circle for a second drop. Hearing the bomber, sleepy men shuffled out of the barracks and began running into the drop zone. Louie saw the plane coming back and began trying to alert the men. As he descended, Kinney saw POWs scattered over the paddy, looking "dirty, ragged and haggard," and a lone man trying to pull them back. He aborted the drop and circled again. By the time he returned, Louie had cleared the paddy. The second drop rolled out. Kinney turned the plane again, descended very low over camp, and dipped his wings. Louie stood under him in a crowd of POWs, waving his shirt. Kinney was so low that he and Louie saw each other's smiling faces. "We could almost hear their cheers as we passed over the last time,"

Kinney wrote. "They looked so happy. It touched my heart. I felt perhaps we were the hand of Providence reaching out to those men. I was very thankful I had gone."

B-29 pilot Byron Kinney shot this photograph on his final pass over Naoetsu on September 2, 1945. The Naoetsu POW camp is straight ahead, on the far side of the bridge. The large barracks from which Louie and other officers planned to throw the Bird to his death is faintly visible, at the confluence of the two rivers. Byron Kinney

As Ghost Ship sailed off, one of Kinney's crewmen piped the radio over the interphone. On came General Douglas MacArthur's voice, broadcasting from the deck of the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay. Standing with MacArthur was Bill Harris. He'd been rescued from Omori and

brought to the ship to occupy a place of honor. Alongside the Americans stood Japanese officials, there to sign surrender documents.

In its rampage over the east, Japan had brought atrocity and death on a scale that staggers the imagination. In the midst of it were the prisoners of war. Japan held some 132,000 POWs from America, Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Holland, and Australia. Of those, nearly 36,000 died, more than one in every four.* Americans fared particularly badly; of the 34,648 Americans held by Japan, 12,935—more than 37 percent—died.* By comparison, only 1 percent of Americans held by the Nazis and Italians died. Japan murdered thousands of POWs on death marches, and worked thousands of others to death in slavery, including some 16,000 POWs who died alongside as many as 100,000 Asian laborers forced to build the Burma-Siam Railway. Thousands of other POWs were beaten, burned, stabbed, or clubbed to death, shot, beheaded, killed during medical experiments, or eaten alive in ritual acts of cannibalism. And as a result of being fed grossly inadequate and befouled food and water, thousands more died of starvation and easily preventable diseases. Of the 2,500 POWs at Borneo's Sandakan camp, only 6, all escapees, made it to September 1945 alive. Left out of the numbing statistics are untold numbers of men who were captured and killed on the spot or dragged to places like Kwajalein, to be murdered without the world ever learning their fate.

In accordance with the kill-all order, the Japanese massacred all 5,000 Korean captives on Tinian, all of the POWs on Ballale, Wake, and Tarawa, and all but 11 POWs at Palawan. They were evidently about to murder all the other POWs and civilian internees in their custody when the atomic bomb brought their empire crashing down.

On the morning of September 2, 1945, Japan signed its formal surrender. The Second World War was over. —

For Louie, these were days of bliss. Though he was still sick, wasted, and weak, he glowed with euphoria such as he had never experienced. His rage against his captors was gone. Like all the men around him, he felt flush with love for everyone and everything.

Only the thought of the Bird gave him pause. A few days earlier, Louie would have bound and killed him without remorse. Now the vengeful urge no longer had sure footing. The Bird was gone, his ability to reach Louie—physically, at least—extinguished. At that moment, all Louie felt was rapture.

Forgiveness coursed through all of the men at Naoetsu. POWs doled out supplies to civilians and stood in circles of children, handing out chocolate. Louie and other POWs brought food and clothing to the guards and asked them to take it home to their families. Even Kono was spared. Ordered to stay in camp, he holed up in his office for eleven days, so afraid of retribution that he never once came out. When a POW opened the door, Kono gasped and ran to a corner. A few days before, he might have met with reprisal, but today, there was no such spirit. The POWs left him alone.*

There was only one act of vengeance in the camp. When a particularly hated guard appeared in the galley, a POW grabbed him by the collar and the seat of the pants and threw him out the door with such force that he sailed over the riverside drop-off and into the Hokura River. The POWs never saw him again.

The pallets didn't stop falling. After a few days of B-29 visits, food, medicine, and clothing were piling up everywhere. The officers distributed the food as soon as it landed, and

every man was entombed in goodies. Eventually someone climbed on the roofs and wrote: NO MORE—THANKS. ANYNEWS?

Gorging brought consequences. Digestive systems that had spent years scraping by on two or three cups of seaweed per day were overwhelmed. Naoetsu became a festival of rapid-fire diarrhea. The benjo lines wound everywhere, and men unable to wait began dropping their pants and fertilizing Japan wherever the spirit moved them. Then they went right back to happy feasting.

All over Japan, B-29s continued pouring food down on POWs. More than one thousand planes saturated the landscape with nearly forty-five hundred tons of Spam and fruit cocktail, soup, chocolate, medicine, clothing, and countless other treasures. At Omori, Bob Martindale had taken over the hateful little office where the Bird had sat before his picture window, hunting men. He was there when an enormous box sailed out of the sun, hit the ground just outside the window, and exploded, obliterating the Bird's office in a cataclysm of American cocoa powder. Martindale stumbled out, caked head to toe in cocoa, but otherwise uninjured. —

Everyone in camp was eager to get home, but radio messages sent out by the occupying forces stated that POWs should remain in camps for the time being. Fitzgerald was told that an evacuation team would come to Naoetsu on September 4 to oversee the POWs' transport to Yokohama, and then home. So the POWs settled in to wait, eating, smoking, resting, eating, celebrating, swimming, and eating more. Louie ate voraciously, got stronger, and expanded exponentially, his face and body bloating from water retention.

Louie did his best to clean himself up, starting with his muslin shirt, which he'd worn every day since the morning he had climbed into Green Hornet. A beloved brother to him, it was torn, faded, and stained with coal dust, and Louie's handwritten name was now nearly invisible on its breast pocket. Louie boiled it in a pot to kill the lice and fleas, then scrubbed it to get the coal out.

POWs fanned out over the countryside. Men carried air-dropped items into town, where they met cautiously friendly civilians and traded their goods for shaves, haircuts, and souvenirs. They knocked on doors, offering to trade air-dropped food and tobacco for fresher fare. Inside the houses, they saw large industrial machines, just as Louie had seen in the ruins of Tokyo. Tinker found a Victrola in camp, then went to town and bought a gift for Louie, a recording of Gustave Charpentier's *Impressions d'Italie*. The POWs broke into the storehouse and found some fifteen hundred Red Cross boxes. Several men discovered a brothel and came back to camp with sinners' grins. Ken Marvin and a friend borrowed kids' bikes and pedaled the roads, discovering what a beautiful place they'd been in all this time. Coming upon a public bath full of civilians, Marvin jumped right in with them, scrubbing himself clean for the first time since his last shower on Wake Atoll in December 1941. "My God!" he remembered. "Just like a smorgasbord!"

September 4 arrived. The evacuation team never showed up. More than two weeks had passed since the TBF had flown over the river and blinked out the message that the war was over, and Commander Fitzgerald, like all of the men in camp, was sick of waiting. He asked Marvin and another man to don MP badges and walk with him to the train station. When they got there, Fitzgerald asked a Japanese station official to arrange for a ten-carriage train to be there the next day. The official refused, and was plenty obnoxious about it.

Commander John Fitzgerald had been in Japanese custody since April 1943. For two and a half years, he'd been forced to grovel before sadists and imbeciles as he tried to protect his men. He'd been starved, beaten, and enslaved, given the water cure, had his fingernails torn out. He was done negotiating. He hauled back and punched the station official, to the delight of Ken Marvin. The next morning, the train was there, right on time.

Early on the morning of September 5, Louie packed up his diary, the record from Tinker, and his letters from home, and stepped down the barracks ladder for the last time. In the compound, the POWs were congregating in joyful anticipation. Everyone carried what few possessions they had, and the British Commonwealth soldiers held the white boxes bearing the remains of the sixty Aussies who had died in camp. Determined to leave this indecent place with dignity, the men assembled behind flags of their nations. Then, together, they passed through the camp gate and marched up the road, toward wives and sweethearts and children and Mom and Dad and home.

As he walked over the bridge, Louie glanced back. Some of the guards and camp officials stood in the compound, watching them go. A few of the sickest POWs remained behind, awaiting transport the next day. Fitzgerald stayed with them, unwilling to leave until the last of his men was liberated.* Louie raised his arm and waved the war good-bye. He crossed over the bridge, and the camp passed out of view.

As the train pushed off for Yokohama, the POWs' last sight of Naoetsu was a broken line of Japanese, the few civilian guards and camp staffers who had been kind to them, standing along the side of the track. Their hands were raised in salute.

* Japan also held more than 215,000 POWs from other countries and untold thousands of forced laborers. Their death rates are unknown. * There has been some confusion concerning American POW statistics. The figures above, compiled by Charles Stenger, PhD, in a comprehensive study of POW statistics for the Veterans Administration, appear to be definitive.

* Kono put on civilian clothes, fled camp, wrote his mother to say he was killing himself, then took a false name and moved to Niigata. A year later, he was recognized on a wanted poster and arrested. Convicted of abusing POWs, he was sentenced to life at hard labor. * When Fitzgerald got home, he would be honored with the Navy Cross and the Silver Star for his heroism in combat and in the POW camp.

Thirty-three Mother's Day

THE NAOETSU POWS HAD CONTROL OF THE TRAIN. AT EVERY town on the line, the train squealed to a stop and the men piled off, then piled back on, laden with liberated sake and whatever else they could steal. The journey went on, sake coursed through skinny bodies, and the men grew rowdier. A lieutenant stood up and, with solemn officiousness, warned the men to behave themselves. He didn't want anyone falling off the train, he said.

At about three in the afternoon, the train stopped and began backing up. Just as the lieutenant had feared, a man had gone overboard. As the train rolled backward, the errant POW came into view. It was the lieutenant himself, at least three sheets to the wind. He was lucky. All afternoon, drunken POWs staggered off the train, but the train didn't stop for them. They had to find their own way.

From the top of Japan to the bottom, trains packed with POWs snaked toward Yokohama. Men pressed their faces to the windows to catch their first glimpse of what all of those B-29s had done. Once-grand cities were now flat, black stains, their only recognizable feature a gridwork of burned roads, passing nothing, leading nowhere.

At the first sight of the destruction of their enemy, the POWs cheered. But after the first city there was another, then another, city after city razed, the survivors drifting about like specters, picking through the rubble. The cheering died away. On Louie's train, the silence came as they passed through Tokyo. A week after Louie had left Omori, sixteen square miles of Tokyo, and tens of thousands of souls, had been immolated by B-29s.

A few of the trains slipped past Hiroshima. Virtually every POW believed that the destruction of this city had saved them from execution. John Falconer, a survivor of the Bataan Death March, looked out as Hiroshima neared. "First there were trees," he told historian Donald Knox. "Then the leaves were missing. As you got closer, branches were missing. Closer still, the trunks were gone and then, as you got in the middle, there was nothing. Nothing! It was beautiful. I realized this was what had ended the war. It meant we didn't have to go hungry any longer, or go without medical treatment. I was so insensitive to anyone else's human needs and suffering. I know it's not right to say it was beautiful, because it really wasn't. But I believed the end probably justified the means." —

At seven that evening, the Naoetsu train entered bombed-out Yokohama and stopped at the station.

"Welcome back, boys."

"Before me in immaculate khaki uniform and cap stood an American girl with a magazine-cover smile, faultless makeup and peroxide blonde hair," wrote Tom Wade. "After three and a half years in prison camp, I had been liberated by the great American blonde!" The POWs were soon blissfully enveloped in Red Cross nurses, some of whom cried at the sight of them. Perhaps the women weren't all beautiful, but to Ken Marvin, they looked like goddesses. Someone spotted a mess hall, and a charge ensued. In the midst of it stood a journalist, Robert Trumbull. He called out, asking if anyone had a story to tell. As he hurried past, Frank Tinker told

him to talk to Louie Zamperini, gesturing toward his friend.

"Zamperini's dead," said Trumbull, who thought that the man in question didn't even look like the famous runner. He asked Louie if he could prove his identity. Louie pulled out his wallet. The Japanese had cleaned out the main folds, but in a hidden pocket he'd tucked eight dollars, the cartoon that had gotten him and Phil beaten up, and a USC football admission pass inscribed with his name.

Trumbull was astonished. He took Louie aside and began asking questions, and Louie recounted his entire saga. He omitted one detail: For the sake of Mac and his family, he said nothing of how the chocolate had been lost. Phil would do the same, saying that the chocolate

had gone overboard. When Louie finished, Trumbull asked him to summarize what he had endured. Louie stood silently.

“If I knew I had to go through those experiences again,” he finally said, “I’d kill myself.”

The next morning, Louie was taken to an airfield to be flown to Okinawa, where many POWs were being collected before being sent home. Seeing a table stacked with K rations, he began cramming the boxes under his shirt, brushing off an attendant who tried to assure him that he didn’t have to hoard them, as no one was going to starve him anymore. Looking extremely pregnant, Louie boarded his plane.

Somewhere in the bustle, he’d been separated from his friends. There had been no good-byes. By seven that morning, he was airborne—leaving Japan, he hoped, forever.

At Okinawa, a staff sergeant named Frank Rosynek stood by the airfield, watching transport planes come in. He was with Louie’s old outfit, the 11th Bomb Group, which was now stationed on Okinawa, and he had come to the airfield to welcome the POWs. “They were a pathetic looking bunch: mostly skin and bones, clad in rags with makeshift footwear, and nervous,” he wrote. He walked among them, listening to their stories, marveling at how they savored the mess hall grub, watching them tear up over photographs of wives and steady girls who, they hoped, hadn’t given them up for dead.*

Rosynek’s CO asked him to come to the debriefing of a POW from the 11th. When Rosynek arrived, he saw three officers sitting before a drawn, unshaven POW in sun-bleached clothes. The officers were staring at the POW as if in shock. The colonel told Rosynek that the man was Louis Zamperini, and that he had disappeared some two and a half years earlier. Everyone in the bomb group had thought he was dead. Rosynek was incredulous. It had been his job to write next-of-kin letters for lost men, and he had probably written to Zamperini’s mother, but he no longer remembered. There had been so many such letters. Not one of those men had turned up alive, until now.

It was probably sometime later that day when the dead man walked into the 11th Bomb Group’s quarters. Jack Krey, who had packed up Louie’s belongings on Oahu, captured the reaction to news of Louie’s reappearance: “Well, I’ll be damned.”

It wasn’t the reunion that Louie had anticipated. Most of these men were strangers to him. Many of his friends, he learned, were dead. Two hundred and twenty-five men from the 11th had gone missing and were presumed dead, including twenty-six from Louie’s 42nd squadron. Many more had been killed in action. Of the sixteen rowdy young officers who had shared the pornographic palace on Oahu, only four—Louie, Phil, Jesse Stay, and Joe Deasy—were still alive. Louie and Phil had vanished in the Pacific. Deasy had gone home with tuberculosis. Only Stay had completed his forty mission tour of duty. He’d seen five planes on his wing go down, with every man killed, and yet somehow, the sum total of damage to his bombers was one bullet hole. He’d gone home in March.

Someone brought Louie the August 15 issue of the Minneapolis Star-Journal. Near the back was an article entitled “Lest We Forget,” discussing athletes who had died in the war. More than four hundred amateur, professional, and collegiate athletes had been killed, including nineteen pro football players, five American League baseball players, eleven pro golfers, and 1920 Olympic champion sprinter Charlie Paddock, whom Louie had known. There on the page with them, Louie saw his own picture and the words “great miler ... killed in action in the South Pacific.”

The Okinawa mess hall was kept open around the clock for the POWs, who couldn't stop eating. Louie headed straight for it, but was stopped at the door. Because the Japanese had never registered him with the Red Cross, his name wasn't on the roster. As far as the mess was concerned, Louie wasn't a POW. He encountered the same problem when trying to get a new uniform to replace the pants and shirt that he had worn every day since May 27, 1943. Until the snafu was straightened out, he had to subsist on candy bars from Red Cross nurses.

Soon after Louie's arrival, he was sent to a hospital to be examined. Like most POWs, in gorging day and night, he had gained weight extremely rapidly; he now weighed 143 pounds, just seventeen pounds under his weight at the time of the crash. But thanks to dramatic water retention, it was a doughy, moon-faced, muscleless weight. He still had volatile dysentery and was as weak as a blade of grass. He was only twenty-eight, but his body, within and without, was etched with the trauma of twenty-seven months of abuse and deprivation. The physicians, who knew what Louie had once been, sat him down to have a solemn talk. After Louie left the doctors, a reporter asked him about his running career.

Louie in Okinawa.

"It's finished," he said, his voice sharp. "I'll never run again." —

The Zamperinis were on edge. Since Louie's crash, his only message to make it to America had been his radio broadcast ten months earlier. The letters that he had written after the Bird had left Omori had not arrived. Other than the War Department's December confirmation that Louie was a POW, no further word from or about him had come. The papers were full of stories about the murder of POWs, and families couldn't rest easy. The Zamperinis contacted the War Department, but the department had nothing to tell. Sylvia kept writing to Louie, telling him of all they would do when he came home. "Darling, we will take the best of care for you," she wrote. "You shall be 'King Toots,'—anything your heart desires—(yes, even red heads and all)." But she, like the rest of the family, was scared.

Pete, living in his officer's quarters in San Diego, kept calling home to see if news had come. The answer was always no.

On the morning of September 9, Pete was startled awake by a hand on his shoulder, shaking him vigorously. He opened his eyes to see one of his friends bending over him with a huge smile. Trumbull's story had appeared in the Los Angeles Times. The headline said it all: ZAMPERINI COMES BACK FROM DEAD.

In a moment, Pete was on his feet, throwing on his clothes. He bolted for a telephone and dialed his parents' number. Sylvia picked up. Pete asked if she had heard the news. "Did you hear the news?" she repeated back to him. "Did!! Wow!" Pete asked to speak to his mother, but she was too overcome to talk. Louise and Virginia rushed to church to give thanks, then raced home to prepare the house. As she stood in Louie's room, dusting his running trophies, Louise blinked away tears, singing out, "He's on the way home. He's on the way home." "From now on," she said, "September 9 is going to be Mother's Day to me, because that's the day I learned for sure my boy was coming home to stay." "What do you think, Pop?" someone asked Louie's father. "Those Japs couldn't break him," Anthony said. "My boy's pretty tough, you know." —

Liberation was a long time coming for Phil and Fred at Rokuroshi. After the August 22 announcement of the war's end, the POWs sat there, waiting for someone to come get them. They got hold of a radio, and on it they heard chatter from men liberating other camps, but no one came for them. They began to wonder if anyone knew they were there. It wasn't until September 2 that B-29s finally flew over Rokuroshi, their pallets hitting the rice paddies with such force that the men had to dig them out. The POWs ate themselves silly. One man downed twenty pounds of food in a single day, but somehow didn't get sick.

That afternoon, an American navy man dug through his belongings and pulled out his most secret and precious possession. It was an American flag with a remarkable provenance. In 1941, just before Singapore had fallen to the Japanese, an American missionary woman had given it to a British POW. The POW had been loaded aboard a ship, which had sunk. Two days later, another British POW had rescued the flag from where it lay underwater and slipped it to the American navy man, who had carried it through the entire war, somehow hiding it from the Japanese, until this day. The POWs pulled down the Japanese flag and ran the Stars and Stripes up the pole over Rokuroshi. The men stood before it, hands up in salutes, tears running down their faces.

On September 9, Phil, Fred, and the other POWs were finally trucked off the mountain. Arriving in Yokohama, they were greeted with pancakes, a band playing "California, Here I Come," and a general who broke down when he saw them. The men were escorted aboard a ship for hot showers and more food. On September 11, the ship set off for home.

When news of the Trumbull story reached Indiana, Kelsey Phillips's telephone began ringing, and friends and reporters flocked onto her front porch. Remembering the War Department's request that she not speak publicly of her son's survival, Kelsey kept a smiling silence, awaiting official notification that Allen had been released from the POW camp. It wasn't until September 16 that the War Department telegram announcing Allen's liberation reached her. It was followed by a phone call from her sister, who delivered a message from Allen that had passed from person to person from Rokuroshi to Yokohama to San Francisco to New Jersey to Indiana: He was free. Allen's friends went downtown and bought newspapers, spread them out on someone's living room floor, and spent the morning reading and crying.

As she celebrated, Kelsey thought of what Allen had written in a letter to her. "I would give anything to be home with all of you," the letter said, "but I'm looking forward to the day—whenever it comes." "That day," Kelsey rejoiced, "has come." —

On Okinawa, Louie was having a grand time, eating, drinking, and making merry. When he was given orders to fly out, he begged a doctor to arrange for him to stay a little longer, on the grounds that he didn't want his mother to see him so thin. The doctor not only agreed to have Louie "hospitalized," he threw him a welcome-back-to-life bash, complete with a five-gallon barrel of "bourbon"—alcohol mixed with Coke syrup, distilled water, and whatever else was handy.

More than a week passed, bombers left with loads of POWs, and still Louie stayed on Okinawa. The nurses threw him another party, the ersatz bourbon went down easy, and there was a moonlit jeep ride with a pretty girl. Along the way, Louie discovered that a delightful upside to being believed dead was that he could scare the hell out of people. Learning that a former track recruiter from USC was on the island, he asked a friend to tell the recruiter that he

had a college running prospect who could spin a mile in just over four minutes. The recruiter eagerly asked to meet the runner. When Louie appeared, the recruiter fell over backward in his chair.

On September 17, a typhoon hit Okinawa. Louie was in a tent when nature called, sending him into the storm to fight his way to an outhouse. He was on the seat with his pants down when a wind gust shot the outhouse over an embankment, carrying Louie in it. Dumped in the mud under a downpour, Louie stood up, hitched up his pants, got broadsided by another gust, and fell over. He crawled through the mud, "lizarding his way," as he put it, up the hill. He had to bang on the hospital door for a while before someone heard him.

The next morning dawned to find planes flipped over, ships sunk, tents collapsed. Louie, covered in everything that a somersault inside an outhouse will slather on a man, was finally willing to leave Okinawa. He got an enlisted man to pour water over his head while he soaped off, then went to the airfield. When he saw the plane that he was to ride in, he felt a swell of nausea. It was a B-24.

The first leg of the journey, to the Philippine city of Laoag, went without incident. On the second flight, to Manila, the plane was so overloaded with POWs that it nearly crashed just after takeoff, dipping so low that seawater sprayed the POWs' legs through gaps in the bomb bay floor.* But the bomber made it to Manila, where Louie got passage out on a transport plane. He sat in the cockpit, telling the pilot his story, from the crash to Kwajalein to Japan. As Louie spoke, the pilot dropped the plane down over an island and landed. The pilot asked Louie if he'd ever seen this place before. Louie looked around at a charred wasteland, recognizing nothing.

"This is Kwajalein," said the pilot.

This couldn't be Kwajalein, Louie thought. In captivity, glimpsing the island through gaps in his blindfold, or when being hustled to interrogation and medical experimentation, he'd seen a vast swath of intense green. Now, he couldn't find a single tree. The fight for this place had ripped the jungle off the island. Louie would long wonder if kind-hearted Kawamura had died here.

Someone told him that there was, in fact, one tree still standing. They borrowed a jeep and drove over to see it. Staring at Kwajalein's last tree, with food in his belly, no blindfold over his eyes, no one there to beat him, Louie felt as if he were in the sweetest of dreams.

On he went to Hawaii. Seeing the condition of the POWs, American authorities had decided to hospitalize virtually all of them. Louie was checked into a Honolulu hospital, where he found himself rooming with Fred Garrett. It was the first time that Louie had slept on a mattress, with sheets, since the first days after his capture. He was given a new uniform and captain's bars, having been promoted during his imprisonment, as most army POWs were. Trying on his new clothes, he pulled off his beloved muslin shirt, set it aside, and forgot about it. He went downtown, then remembered the shirt and returned to retrieve it. It had been thrown away. He was heartbroken.

Louie and Fred hit the town. Seemingly everyone they met wanted to take them somewhere, feed them, buy them drinks. On a beach, they made a spectacle of themselves when Fred, feeling emasculated by the pity over his missing leg, flung away his crutches, hopped over to Louie, and tackled him. The wrestling match drew a crowd of offended onlookers, who thought that an able-bodied soldier was beating up a helpless amputee. Swinging around Hawaii, getting drunk, knocking heads with Fred, Louie never left himself a

moment to think of the war. "I just thought I was empty and now I'm being filled," he said later, "and I just wanted to keep being filled." —

That October, Tom Wade walked off a transport ship in Victoria, Canada. With a multitude of former POWs, he began a transcontinental rail journey that became a nonstop party, including eight impromptu weddings. "I must have kissed a thousand girls crossing the continent," Wade wrote to Louie, "and when I walked through the train with lipstick all over my face after the first station, I was the most popular officer on the train." In New York, he was taken aboard the Queen Elizabeth to sail for England. He snuck down the gangway, necked with a Red Cross girl, and stole back aboard toting a box of Hershey bars. When he reached England, he discovered that the local women preferred Yank and Canadian soldiers to Brits. "I decided to do something about it," he wrote. "I sewed a couple of extra patches and oddments on to my uniform, nobody was any wiser, and stormed them. I did all right."

On October 16, Russell Allen Phillips, wearing his dress uniform and captain's bars, stepped off a train in Indiana. He'd been gone for four years. His mother, his sister, and a throng of friends were there. A telegram had come from his father, who was soon to return from Europe: THANK THE LORD GREAT DAY HAS ARRIVED. WELCOME HOME MY SON . There, too, was the woman whose image had sustained him. Cecy was in his arms at last.

At Kelsey's house in Princeton, they sat Allen down on the front steps, and he grinned while they snapped his picture. When they got the print back, someone wrote one word on it: Home!

Four weeks later, in a wedding ceremony officiated by Reverend Phillips at Cecy's parents' house, the hero finally got the girl. Allen had no car, so he borrowed one from a friend. Then, as he had promised in a letter so long ago, he ran away with Cecy to a place where no one would find them.

Pete was so anxious to see Louie that he could hardly bear it. The fighting had ended in mid-August, it was now October, and still Louie was hospital-hopping far from home. Then Pete learned that Louie was finally stateside, transferred from Hawaii to San Francisco's Letterman General Hospital. As soon as he got the news, Pete went AWOL. He bummed a ride to San Francisco on a navy plane, hitched his way to Letterman, and walked in. At the front desk, he called Louie's room. A minute later, Louie bounded into the lobby.

Each felt startled by the sight of the other. Pete had expected Louie to be emaciated and was surprised to find him looking almost portly. Louie was disturbed to see how the years of worry had depleted his brother. Pete was gaunt, and he'd gone largely bald. The brothers fell together, eyes shining.

Pete and Louie spent several days together in San Francisco while doctors finally cured Louie of his dysentery. After reading the Trumbull article, Pete had worried that Louie might be severely traumatized, but as the two laughed and kidded each other, his fears faded. Louie was as upbeat and garrulous as ever. Once, when a group of reporters shuffled in to interview Louie, they crowded around Pete, assuming that of the two men, this haggard one had to be the POW.

On a drizzling October day, the army sent a banged-up B-25 to San Francisco to bring Louie home. Pete, still AWOL, went aboard with his brother. The plane lifted off and rose over the clouds into a shining blue morning. Scared to death of flying, Pete tried to distract himself

from the plane's rattles and groans by staring out over a carpet of bright clouds, the upside of the rainstorm. He felt as if he could step from the plane and walk on them.

Over Long Beach, they sank back into the rain and landed. There, bursting from army cars, were their mother and father, and Sylvia and Virginia. The moment the plane stopped, Louie jumped down, ran to his sobbing mother, and folded himself around her.

"Cara mamma mia," he whispered. It was a long time before they let go.



Louie's homecoming, Long Beach Airport. Foreground, left to right: Virginia, Sylvia, Louise, and Louie. Courtesy of Louis Zamperini

Thirty-four The Shimmering Girl

ON AN OCTOBER AFTERNOON, LOUIE STEPPED OUT OF AN army car and stood on the lawn at 2028 Gramercy Avenue, looking at his parents' house for the first time in more than three years. "This, this little home," he said, "was worth all of it."

As his parents and siblings filed into the house, Louie paused, overcome by a strange uneasiness. He had to push himself to walk up the steps.

The house was done up top to bottom for his homecoming. The surface of the dining room table was a traffic jam of heaping dishes. Three years' worth of Christmas and birthday presents sat ready for opening. There was a cake with Welcome Home Louie inscribed in the icing. In the garage sat Louie's beige Plymouth convertible, just as he had left it.

The family ringed around Louie, babbling, eager to look at him and touch him. Anthony and Louise smiled, but there was a cast to their eyes, a tension that had never been there before. What Louie didn't see was the rash on his mother's hands. As soon as Louise had learned that her son was coming home, the rash had vanished. Nothing, not even a scar, remained. She would never tell Louie about it.

After dessert, the family sat and talked. They spoke easily, as they always had. No one asked about prison camp. Louie volunteered a little about it, and to everyone's relief, it seemed to carry little emotion for him. It seemed that he was going to be just fine.

Sylvia had a surprise for Louie. Lynn Moody, the woman who had transcribed Louie's broadcast, had arranged for a recording of it to be sent to the Zamperinis. The family treasured the record, which had given them proof that he was alive. Knowing nothing of the circumstances in which the broadcast had been made, Sylvia was eager to share it with Louie. As he sat nearby, relaxed and cheerful, she dropped the record on the turntable. The broadcast began to play.

Louie was suddenly screaming. Sylvia turned and found him shaking violently, shouting, "Take it off! Take it off! I can't stand it!" As Sylvia jumped up, Louie swore at the voice, yelling something about propaganda prisoners. Sylvia snatched up the record, and Louie yelled at her to break it. She smashed it and threw it away. Louie fell silent, shivering. His family stared at him in horror. Louie walked upstairs and lay down on his old bed. When he finally drifted off, the Bird followed him into his dreams. —

The same man was on many other minds that fall. On ships docked at Yokohama, in tents in Manila, and in stateside hospitals, former POWs were telling their stories. Investigators, gathering affidavits on war criminals, sat by as men told of abuses and atrocities that pushed the bounds of believability. As the stories were corroborated again and again, it became clear that these events had been commonplace in camps throughout Japan's empire. In interview after interview, former POWs mentioned the same name: Mutsuhiro Watanabe. When Wade wrote that name on his statement, his interviewer exclaimed, "Not the same Watanabe! We've got enough to hang him six times already."

"Sit back and take it easy," Wade replied. "There's lots more to come."

On September 11, General MacArthur, now the supreme commander of Allied powers in occupied Japan, ordered the arrest of forty war-crimes suspects. While thousands of men would be sought later, this preliminary list was composed of those accused of the worst crimes, including list-topper Hideki Tojo, mastermind of Pearl Harbor and the man on whose orders POWs had been enslaved and starved, and Masaharu Homma, who was responsible for the Bataan Death March.* On the list with them was Mutsuhiro Watanabe. —

The Bird had left Naoetsu in a panic, and without a plan. According to Watanabe family accounts, he fled to the village of Kusakabe, where his mother and other relatives were living. About a week and a half after Mutsuhiro's arrival, his aunt found him out drinking and told him that she'd just heard a radio broadcast naming him as a war-crimes suspect. Mutsuhiro decided to make a run for it. He apparently told his mother that he was leaving to visit a friend's tomb, then took his little sister aside and told her that he had to escape, but asked her not to tell his mother. As Mutsuhiro was preparing to go, his little sister gave him a deck of playing cards, to be used for fortune-telling.

Wearing his uniform with the insignia torn off, Mutsuhiro packed a trunk with food and clothing and lugged it to a car. He drove to the rail station and walked onto the first train he saw, without checking its destination. He hoped it would take him to someplace distant and obscure, but the train reached its terminus only two towns down the line, at the metropolis of Kofu. He got off, wandered the station, then lay down and slept.

In the morning, he meandered around Kofu. Somewhere in the city, he passed a radio and heard his name listed among those wanted for war crimes. To learn that he was being sought was no surprise, but he was shocked to hear his name listed alongside that of Tojo. If his case was considered comparable to that of Tojo, he thought, arrest would mean execution.

At all costs, he vowed, he wouldn't let himself fall into the hands of the Americans. He resolved to disappear forever. —

As Mutsuhiro fled, the hunt for him began. Though they were now operating under the orders of their former enemies, the Japanese police worked swiftly and energetically to round up war-crimes suspects. The Watanabe case was no exception. After finding nothing at Mutsuhiro's last known address, police appeared at his mother's door in Kusakabe. Shizuka Watanabe told them that her son had been there, but had left. They had missed him by three days. Shizuka suggested that he might seek refuge with his sister Michiko, who lived in Tokyo. She'd soon be visiting Michiko, she said, and if she found Mutsuhiro there, she'd urge him to turn himself in.

The police seized on the lead. Shizuka gave them an address for Michiko, and they converged on it. Not only was there no Michiko there, there was no house. Every home in the neighborhood had burned long ago, in the firebombing.

Shizuka was now the focus of suspicion. On her regular visits to Tokyo, she always stayed with Michiko, and given that she was scheduled to do so that very week, she surely knew that her daughter's home had burned down. Shizuka's misdirection of the detectives may have been an honest mistake—Michiko had moved to a home down the same road, so the only change in the address was the door number—but the police began to suspect that she knew where her son was. On September 24, the police arrested her. If she knew anything, she let nothing slip. She was released.

The police were a long way from giving up. Two detectives began tailing Shizuka and often came into her home to question her. Her monetary transactions were tracked, and her landlord was regularly questioned. Mutsuhiro's other relatives were investigated, questioned, and sometimes searched. Police intercepted all of the family's incoming and outgoing mail. They even had a stranger deliver a fake letter, apparently making it appear to be from Mutsuhiro, in hopes of getting the family to betray his whereabouts.

Widening the hunt, the police investigated Mutsuhiro's former army roommates. The home of his Omori commander was searched and put under surveillance. Mutsuhiro's photograph was distributed throughout police ranks in the Tokyo metropolitan area and four prefectures. Every police station in Nagano Prefecture, where a Watanabe family mine was located, conducted special searches. Detectives went through Mutsuhiro's academic records and searched for his teachers and classmates, going back to his childhood. They even got hold of a love letter from a girl who had asked Mutsuhiro if he'd marry her.

They found only two leads. A former soldier told them that Mutsuhiro had spoken of his intention to flee to Fukuoka Prefecture to be a farmer. The soldier thought that Mutsuhiro would hide with a friend named Yo. Police found Yo, questioned and investigated him, and questioned people in his neighborhood. It was a dead lead. Meanwhile, a detective at Mitsushima found a man who'd seen Mutsuhiro in August. The man said that Mutsuhiro had left, claiming to be headed for Tokyo, at the war's end. But Mutsuhiro had gone to Kusakabe; there was no

evidence that he'd gone to Tokyo. He may have seeded his acquaintances with false information to misdirect his pursuers.

There was one other possible clue. The man at Mitsushima mentioned something he had overheard Mutsuhiro say: He would rather kill himself than be captured. It seemed no idle threat; that fall, during a roundup of suspected war criminals, there was a wave of suicides among those sought. Perhaps the Bird was already dead.

While investigators combed Japan for Mutsuhiro, prosecutors were inundated with some 250 POW affidavits concerning his actions in camps. These would be distilled into an 84-count indictment. Even with each count stated with maximum brevity, in single spacing, the indictment stretched over eight feet of paper. It would reflect only a tiny fraction of the crimes that POWs said Watanabe had committed; Louie's accusations of myriad attacks would make up only one count. Investigators believed that they had far more evidence than they needed to have Watanabe convicted and put to death. But nothing could go forward. The Bird was still at large.

As his tormenter disappeared into darkness, Louie was pulled into blinding light. With his Odyssean saga featured in newspapers, magazines, and radio shows, he was a national sensation. Two thousand people wrote him letters. Press photographers tailed him. His attempts to sleep were invariably interrupted by a ringing phone. Strangers teemed around him, pushing for news on what he'd do next. Everyone wanted him to tell his story. The War Department booked him on a speaking tour, and he was inundated with speaking invitations that usually came with an award, making them impossible to decline. In his first weeks home, staying with his parents, he gave ninety-five speeches and made countless radio appearances. When he went to dinner clubs, the managers begged him to regale the guests. For Louie, all of the attention was drenching, a great noise, overpowering.

When Payton Jordan first saw Louie again, he was reassured by his old friend's familiar impish grin and the springy cadence of his speech. But when Louie spoke of the war, Jordan sensed something rustling just behind his eyes, a clamoring emotion pent up in a small space. He spoke not with anger or anguish but with bewilderment. Sometimes he'd pause and drift off, a troubled expression on his face. "It was like he got hit real hard," Jordan recalled, "and he was trying to shake it off."

Louie was struggling more than Jordan or anyone else knew. He was beginning to suffer bouts of suffocating anxiety. Each time he was asked to stand before a crowd and shape words around his private horror, his gut would wring. Every night, in his dreams, an apparition would form in his head and burn there. It was the face of the Bird, screaming, "Next! Next! Next!"

Very early one morning, Louie tiptoed from his room without telling anyone where he was going, slid into his Plymouth, put his foot on the gas, and didn't stop until he was high in the mountains. He spent the day walking among the trees, thinking of his dead friends and his own survival, drawing from the wilderness the peace that it had given him since his boyhood summer on the Cahuilla reservation. The moment he nosed the car back in the driveway, the whirling began again. Shortly after returning home, Louie found himself sitting in the audience at a gala held by the Los Angeles Times, which was giving him an award. Louie forked through his dinner, waiting for his name to be announced, apprehensive over having to relive his ordeal before all these people. Drinks were set before him, and he sipped them and felt his nerves

unwinding. By the time he rose to speak, he was in a haze, and he rambled on for much too long. When he got back to his seat, he felt relieved. The alcohol had brought him a pleasant numbness.

One day not long after, as he sat at breakfast and fretted over the prospect of another speech, he broke out a bottle of Canadian Club whiskey and poured a shot into his coffee. That gave him a warm feeling, so he had another shot. It couldn't hurt to have a third. The whiskey floated him through that speech, too, and so began a routine. A flask became his constant companion, making furtive appearances in parking lots and corridors outside speaking halls. When the harsh push of memory ran through Louie, reaching for his flask became as easy as slapping a swatter on a fly. —

One afternoon in the middle of March 1946, Louie was at a bar at the Deauville Club in Miami Beach, chatting up a stewardess. He had just completed the latest of many surreal liberation experiences, traveling to New York to fire the starting gun for Madison Square Garden's Zamperini Invitational Mile, the race conceived to honor him when almost everyone thought he was dead. After the race, he'd come to Miami Beach for the two weeks of R&R awarded to returning servicemen. A USC classmate, Harry Read, had accompanied him.

Across the room, a door opened. Louie glanced up. Flitting into the club was an arrestingly beautiful young woman, her hair a tumble of blondness, her body as quick and gracile as a deer's. Those who knew her spoke of a shimmer about her, an incandescence. Louie drank in one long look and, he later told Sylvia, had the astounding thought that he had to marry this girl.

The next day, Louie and Harry returned to the club, vaulted the fence surrounding its private beach, and spread their towels near a pair of sunbathing women. When one of the women turned, Louie saw that it was the beauty from the bar. He was hesitant to speak to her, afraid that he'd come off as a wolf, but Harry charged right in, regaling the women with Louie's history. When Harry mentioned the 1938 NCAA Championships, when rival runners had spiked Louie's legs, the pretty woman stopped him. She said that when she was twelve, her mother had taken her to a theater to see Errol Flynn in Robin Hood, and there she'd watched a newsreel showing the NCAA mile winner and his bandaged legs. The sight had stuck in her mind.

Her name was Cynthia Applewhite, and she was a few weeks past her twentieth birthday. Louie spoke with her for a while, and the two discovered that they had geography in common; as a child, she had lived near Torrance. She seemed to like him, and he thought her bright and lively and so beautiful. When they parted, Louie grumbled something about how she probably wouldn't want to see him again. "Maybe," she said playfully, "I want to see you again."

Louie wasn't the first guy to be felled by Cynthia. Dense forests of men had gone down at the sight of her. She was dating two guys at once, both named Mac, and each Mac was trying to outlast the other. Since the Macs had Cynthia booked for every evening, Louie asked her for a daytime date, to go fishing. Showing up in blue jeans rolled up to the knee, she took up a fishing pole, smiled gaily for photographs, and braved seasickness with cheer. When Louie asked if he could take her out again, she said yes.



Cynthia Applewhite, on the day after Louie met her. Courtesy of Louis Zamperini

They seemed an unlikely pair. Cynthia was wealthy and pedigreed; she'd been educated in private schools, then an elite finishing academy. But for all of her polishing, she was not a buttoned-up girl. A friend would remember her as "different"—passionate and impulsive. At thirteen, when her family lived in New York State, she developed such a fever for Laurence Olivier that, unbeknownst to her parents, she hopped a train to Manhattan to see him in *Wuthering Heights*. At sixteen, she was drinking gin. She dressed in bohemian clothes, penned novels, painted, and yearned to roam forgotten corners of the world. She was habitually defiant and fearless, and when she felt controlled, as she often did, she could be irresistibly willful. Mostly, she was bored silly by the vanilla sort of boys who trailed her around, and by the stodgy set in Miami Beach.

Along came Louie. Here was someone exotic, someone who answered her yearning for adventure, understood her fiercely independent personality, and was from nowhere near Miami Beach. She was impressed with this older man, introducing him with his full name, as if he were a dignitary. On one of their first dates, he raced her through his hotel, snatching up toilet paper rolls and streaming them down the side of the building, earning the hotel manager's wrath and Cynthia's exhilaration. She gave up the Macs, and she and Louie swept around Miami.

At the end of March, just before he was to leave for his speaking tour, Louie led Cynthia onto a beach and confessed that he was in love with her. Cynthia replied that she thought she loved him but wasn't sure. Louie was undiscouraged. Before their walk was done, he had talked her into marrying him. They had known each other for less than two weeks.

After Louie left, Cynthia broke the news to her parents. The Applewhites were alarmed that their daughter was flinging herself into marriage with a twenty-nine-year-old soldier whom she'd known for just days. Cynthia couldn't be swayed, so Mrs. Applewhite refused to give her money to fly to California to get married. Cynthia vowed to get the money somehow, either by borrowing it or, in defiance of her mother, getting a job.

Louie wrote to Cynthia almost every day, and every morning at ten-thirty, he sat waiting for the mailman to bring him a pink envelope from Cynthia. Though the letters were adoring on both sides, they reveal how little the two knew about each other. Cynthia had no idea that Louie

was losing his emotional equilibrium. From Harry, she knew a little about his time as a POW , but Louie had said almost nothing. In his letters, the closest he came to addressing it was to joke that he hoped that she'd go easy on rice and barley in her cooking. On one of their dates, Louie had gotten very drunk, but he had apologized and curbed himself from then on. Louie's drinking may have struck Cynthia as harmless, but it was in fact a growing problem. In critical ways, she was engaged to a stranger. Louie seemed to be aware that in marrying her, he was asking more of her than she knew, and he frequently warned her of how much she was taking on. Still, he wanted a wedding as soon as possible. "We have got to set a date early in June," he wrote in mid-April, "or I'll just go plain crazy." Soon after, he wrote that they had to marry in May. She told him that she'd help him forget his past, and he grasped her promise as a lifeline. "If you love me enough," he wrote back, "I'll have to forget it. How much can you love?" —

As Cynthia worked on her parents, Louie went into wedding overdrive. He tracked down reception sites, invitations, a caterer, and a jeweler. He found the Church of Our Savior, which Cynthia had attended as a child. He bought a used Chevy convertible and overhauled it to impress Cynthia. Trying to make a new man of himself, he quit drinking and smoking. He took terminal leave from the air force, meaning that he formally ended active duty but would still wear his uniform and draw pay until his accumulated leave ran out in August, at which point he'd become a captain in the Air Force Reserve. He began a low-paying job at the Warner Brothers studios, teaching actors how to ride horses.

What he didn't have was a proper place to live. Because Los Angeles was teeming with repatriated soldiers, inexpensive housing was all but impossible to find, so Louie was still living with his parents. Cynthia wrote of how badly she wanted a home of her own, but Louie, in some distress, wrote back to explain that he didn't have the money. The best he could do was to move into the house that Harry Read shared with his mother and promise Cynthia that he'd do whatever he could to earn enough money for a home. He bought an air mattress for Cynthia; he'd sleep on the floor. After POW camp, he said, he didn't mind sleeping on floors.

The Applewhites' opposition to the marriage, the pressure to make a good life for Cynthia, and his black memories left Louie taut with stress. He had little appetite. He was emerging from years in which the only constants were violence and loss, and his letters show how much he feared something terrible befalling Cynthia. He clung to the thought of her as if, at any moment, she might be torn from his hands.

He was especially worried about her parents' views of him. He felt certain that they objected to him personally, finding his Italian ethnicity and middle-class origins repellent. He wrote earnest letters to her father, trying to win him over. When he kept seeing the same car parked by the Reads' house, he became convinced that it was a detective hired by Cynthia's father. According to Cynthia's brother, Ric, his parents had no objection to Louie, only to a hasty marriage. As for the spying, Ric said, such an act would be unlike his easygoing father, and would have made no sense, as Mr. Applewhite liked Louie. Right or wrong, Louie's suspicions illustrated how sensitive he was to the idea that he was unworthy of Cynthia. Perhaps it wasn't the Applewhites he was trying to convince.

Six months after returning from Japan, Louie began to feel a familiar pull. It had just been announced that the summer Olympic Games, which hadn't been held since 1936, were set to return. They'd be held in London in July 1948. Louie's bad leg felt passably sound, and he

finally felt healthy. He began testing himself with long hikes, borrowing a dog for company. The leg felt sturdy, the body strong. July of '48 was more than two years away. Louie began training.

In May, Cynthia and her parents made a deal. Cynthia could visit Louie, on the condition that they not marry until the fall, in a ceremony at the Applewhite mansion. Cynthia threw her clothes into a suitcase and went to the airport. As she left, her brother Ric felt a pang of worry. He was afraid that his young sister, dashing off to be with a man she hardly knew, might be making an enormous mistake.

At Burbank Airport on May 17, a plane stopped on the tarmac, the stairway unfolded, and Louie bounded up the steps to embrace Cynthia, then squirmed her home to meet his family. The Zamperinis fell for her, just as Louie had.

Driving away after the visit, Louie sensed that Cynthia was drawing backward. Maybe during the visit there had been a word or a look that hinted at all she didn't know, or maybe impulsive decisions made in the fog of lovesickness were becoming real. Whatever it was, Louie thought he was losing her. He lost his temper and abruptly said that maybe they should call off the engagement. Cynthia panicked, and they argued, overwrought. When they calmed down, they made a decision.

On Saturday, May 25, the same day that the papers quoted Louie as saying he'd marry Cynthia at the summer's end, Louie and Cynthia drove to the Church of Our Savior, where the Zamperinis were waiting. He wore his dress uniform; she wore a simple off-white suit. One of Louie's college buddies walked Cynthia down the aisle, and Louie and Cynthia said their vows. There had been no time to bake a wedding cake, so Pete's birthday cake, made by Sylvia the day before, did double duty.

Suspecting that Louie's friends would pull wedding night pranks, the newlyweds stole off to an obscure hotel, and Cynthia called home. Her announcement prompted an explosion. Cynthia hung on the phone all evening, crying, while her mother, who'd gone to great effort to plan a fall wedding, bawled her out. Louie sat by, listening as his bride was excoriated for marrying him, trying in vain to get her to hang up. Eventually he picked up a bottle of champagne, popped it open, drank it dry, and went to sleep by himself.

Thirty-five Coming Undone

FROM ACROSS THE ROOM, THEY LOOKED LIKE THREE ordinary men. It was an evening in the latter half of 1946, and Louie sat at a table in the Florentine Gardens, a dinner club in Hollywood, with Cynthia nestled near him. Phil and Cecy had come from Indiana for a visit, and Fred Garrett had motored across town to join them for dinner. Phil and Louie were

grinning at each other. The last time they'd been together was March of '44, when Phil was being shipped out of Ofuna and neither man knew if he'd live to see the other again.

The men smiled and talked. Fred, who was soon to become an air traffic controller, had a new prosthetic leg. In a festive mood, he bumped out to the dance floor to show the room that he could still cut a rug. Phil and Cecy were about to move to New Mexico, where Phil would open a plastics business. Louie and Cynthia were glowing from their honeymoon, spent sharing a sleeping bag in Louie's beloved mountains, where Cynthia, for all her finishing schools, had proven game for getting dirty. Louie was running again, full of big plans, as garrulous and breezy as he'd been before the war. As the men leaned together for photographs, all that they had been through seemed forgotten.

Sometime amid the laughing and conversation, a waiter set a plate in front of Fred. On it, beside the entrée, was a serving of white rice. That was all it took. Fred was suddenly raving, furious, hysterical, berating the waiter and shouting with such force that his face turned purple. Louie tried to calm him, but Fred was beyond consolation. He had come completely undone. The waiter hurried the rice away and Fred pulled himself together, but the spell was broken. For these men, nothing was ever going to be the same. —

At the end of World War II, thousands of former prisoners of the Japanese, known as Pacific POWs, began their postwar lives. Physically, almost every one of them was ravaged. The average army or army air forces Pacific POW had lost sixty-one pounds in captivity, a remarkable statistic given that roughly three-quarters of the men had weighed just 159 pounds or less upon enlistment. Tuberculosis, malaria, dysentery, malnutrition, anemia, eye ailments, and festering wounds were widespread. At one chain of hospitals, doctors found a history of wet beriberi in 77 percent of POWs and dry beriberi in half. Among Canadian POWs, 84 percent had neurologic damage. Respiratory diseases, from infections and exposure to unbreathable air in factories and mines, were rampant. Men had been crippled and disfigured by unset broken bones, and their teeth had been ruined by beatings and years of chewing grit in their food. Others had gone blind from malnutrition. Scores of men were so ill that they had to be carried from camps, and it was common for men to remain hospitalized for many months after repatriation. Some couldn't be saved.

The physical injuries were lasting, debilitating, and sometimes deadly. A 1954 study found that in the first two postwar years, former Pacific POWs died at almost four times the expected rate for men of their age, and continued to die at unusually high rates for many years. The health repercussions often lasted for decades; a follow-up study found that twenty-two years after the war, former Pacific POWs had hospitalization rates between two and eight times higher than former European POWs for a host of diseases.

As bad as were the physical consequences of captivity, the emotional injuries were much more insidious, widespread, and enduring. In the first six postwar years, one of the most common diagnoses given to hospitalized former Pacific POWs was psychoneurosis. Nearly forty years after the war, more than 85 percent of former Pacific POWs in one study suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), characterized in part by flashbacks, anxiety, and nightmares. And in a 1987 study, eight in ten former Pacific POWs had "psychiatric impairment," six in ten had anxiety disorders, more than one in four had PTSD, and nearly one in five was

depressed. For some, there was only one way out: a 1970 study reported that former Pacific POWs committed suicide 30 percent more often than controls.

All of this illness, physical and emotional, took a shocking toll. Veterans were awarded compensation based on their level of disability, ranging from 10 percent to 100 percent. As of January 1953, one-third of former Pacific POWs were categorized as 50 to 100 percent disabled, nearly eight years after the war's end. —

These statistics translated into tormented, and sometimes ruined, lives. Flashbacks, in which men reexperienced their traumas and were unable to distinguish the illusion from reality, were common. Intense nightmares were almost ubiquitous. Men walked in their sleep, acting out prison camp ordeals, and woke screaming, sobbing, or lashing out. Some slept on their floors because they couldn't sleep on mattresses, ducked in terror when airliners flew over, or hoarded food. One man had a recurrent hallucination of seeing his dead POW friends walking past. Another was unable to remember the war. Milton McMullen couldn't stop using Japanese terms, a habit that had been pounded into him. Dr. Alfred Weinstein, who had infected the Bird with dysentery at Mitsushima, was dogged by urges to scavenge in garbage cans.* Huge numbers of men escaped by drinking. In one study of former Pacific POWs, more than a quarter had been diagnosed with alcoholism.

Raymond "Hap" Halloran was a navigator who parachuted into Tokyo after his B-29 was shot down. Once on the ground, Halloran was beaten by a mob of civilians, then captured by Japanese authorities, who tortured him, locked him in a pig cage, and held him in a burning horse stall during the firebombings. They stripped him naked and put him on display at Tokyo's Ueno Zoo, tied upright in an empty tiger cage so civilians could gawk at his filthy, sore-encrusted body. He was starved so severely that he lost one hundred pounds.

After liberation and eight months in a hospital, Halloran went home to Cincinnati. "I was not the same 19-year-old Raymond whose mother kissed him goodbye that fall morning in 1942," he wrote. He was intensely nervous and wary of anything approaching him from behind. He couldn't sleep with his arms covered, fearing that he'd need to fight off attackers. He had horrific nightmares, and would wake running in his yard, shouting for help. He avoided hotels because his screaming upset other guests. More than sixty years after the war, he was still plagued by "poor inventory control," keeping eight pillows and six clocks in his bedroom, buying far more clothes and supplies than he'd ever need, and stockpiling bulk packages of food. And yet Halloran was fortunate. Of the five survivors of his crew, two drank themselves to death.*

Some former POWs became almost feral with rage. For many men, seeing an Asian person or overhearing a snippet of Japanese left them shaking, weeping, enraged, or lost in flashbacks. One former POW, normally gentle and quiet, spat at every Asian person he saw. At Letterman General Hospital just after the war, four former POWs tried to attack a staffer who was of Japanese ancestry, not knowing that he was an American veteran.

Troubled former POWs found nowhere to turn. McMullen came out of Japan racked by nightmares and so nervous that he was barely able to speak cogently. When he told his story to his family, his father accused him of lying and forbade him to speak of the war. Shattered and deeply depressed, McMullen couldn't eat, and his weight plunged back down to ninety pounds. He went to a veterans' hospital, but the doctors simply gave him B12 shots. As he recounted his experiences to a military official, the official picked up a phone and began talking with someone else. After two years, McMullen got his feet under him again, but he would never really recover.

Sixty years after VJ Day, his dreams still carried him back to the camps. Recounting his war experiences was so painful that it would leave him off-kilter for weeks.

The Pacific POWs who went home in 1945 were torn-down men. They had an intimate understanding of man's vast capacity to experience suffering, as well as his equally vast capacity, and hungry willingness, to inflict it. They carried unspeakable memories of torture and humiliation, and an acute sense of vulnerability that attended the knowledge of how readily they could be disarmed and dehumanized. Many felt lonely and isolated, having endured abuses that ordinary people couldn't understand. Their dignity had been obliterated, replaced with a pervasive sense of shame and worthlessness. And they had the caustic knowledge that no one had come between them and tragedy. Coming home was an experience of profound, perilous aloneness.

For these men, the central struggle of postwar life was to restore their dignity and find a way to see the world as something other than menacing blackness. There was no one right way to peace; every man had to find his own path, according to his own history. Some succeeded. For others, the war would never really end. Some retreated into brooding isolation or lost themselves in escapes. And for some men, years of swallowed rage, terror, and humiliation concentrated into what Holocaust survivor Jean Améry would call "a seething, purifying thirst for revenge." —

The honeymoon in the mountains had been Cynthia's idea. Louie loved her for being so sporting, and for choosing something so dear to his heart. "You must look about you and remember what the trees + hills, streams + lakes look like," he wrote to her before their wedding. "... I will see you among them for life." Drifting off beside Cynthia each night, Louie still saw the Bird lurking in his dreams, but the sergeant hung back as if cowed, or perhaps just waiting. It was the closest thing to peace that Louie had known since Green Hornet had hit the water.

The drive back to Los Angeles carried them from the great wide open to the confines of Harry Read's mother's house. Cynthia was uncomfortable living there, and Louie wanted to give her the home she dreamed of. He needed to find a career, but was unprepared to do so. Having left USC a few credits short, he had no college degree, a critical asset in a job market glutted with veterans and former war production workers. Like many elite athletes, he had focused on his sport throughout his school years and had never seriously contemplated life after running. Now nearly thirty, he had no idea what to do for a living.

He made no effort to find a real career or a nine-to-five, salaried job. His celebrity drew people into his orbit, many of them hawking ventures in which he could invest his life insurance payoff, which he'd been allowed to keep. He went to military-surplus sales, bought Quonset huts, and resold them to movie studios. He did the same with iceboxes, then invested in a telephone technology. He turned respectable profits, but each investment quickly ran its course. He did, however, earn a steady enough income to rent an apartment for himself and Cynthia. It was only a tiny place in a low-rent quarter of Hollywood, but Cynthia did her best to make it homey.

At the end of his first day in the new apartment, Louie slid into bed, closed his eyes, and fell into a dream. As always, the Bird was there, but he was no longer hesitant. The sergeant

towered over Louie, the belt flicking from his hand, lashing Louie's face. Every night, he returned, and Louie was helpless once again, unable to flee him or drive him away.

Louie threw himself into training. His long hikes became runs. His strength was coming back, and his dodgy leg gave him no pain. He took it slowly, thinking always of London in '48. He was aiming for the 1,500 meters, and assured himself that if he couldn't make it, he'd return to the 5,000, or even the steeplechase. But without extending himself, he began clocking miles in 4:18, just two seconds slower than the winning time of the Zamperini Invitational that he'd seen in March. He was coming all the way back.

But running wasn't the same. Once he had felt liberated by it; now it felt forced. Running was joyless, but Louie had no other answer to his internal turmoil. He doubled his workouts, and his body answered.

One day, with Cynthia standing by, holding a stopwatch, Louie set off to see how fast he could turn two miles. Early on, he felt a pulse of pain dart across his left ankle, just where it had been injured at Naoetsu. He knew better than to keep pushing, but pushing was all he knew now. As he completed the first mile, barbs of pain were crackling through his ankle. On he went, running for London. Late in his last lap, there was an abrupt slicing sensation in his ankle. He half-hopped to the line and collapsed. His time was the fastest two-mile run on the Pacific coast in 1946, but it didn't matter. He was unable to walk for a week, and would limp for weeks more. A doctor confirmed that he had disastrously exacerbated his war injury. It was all over. —

Louie was wrecked. The quest that had saved him as a kid was lost to him. The last barricade within him fell. By day, he couldn't stop thinking about the Bird. By night, the sergeant lashed him, hungry and feral. As the belt whipped him, Louie would fight his way to his attacker's throat and close his hands around it. No matter how hard he squeezed, those eyes still danced at him. Louie regularly woke screaming and soaked in sweat. He was afraid to sleep.

He started smoking again. There seemed no reason not to drink, so each evening, he swigged wine as he cooked, leaving Cynthia sitting through dinner with a tipsy husband. Invitations to clubs kept coming, and now it seemed harmless to accept the free drinks that were always offered. At first he drank just beer; then he dipped into hard liquor. If he got drunk enough, he could drown the war for a time. He soon began drinking so much that he passed out, but he welcomed it; passing out saved him from having to go to bed and wait for his monster. Unable to talk him into giving it up, Cynthia stopped going out with him. He left her alone each night while he went out to lose the war.

Rage, wild, random, and impossible to quell, began to consume him. Once he harassed a man for walking too slowly on a crosswalk in front of his car, and the man spat at him. Louie gunned the car to the curb, jumped out, and, as Cynthia screamed for him to stop, punched the man until he fell to the ground. On another day, when a man at a bar accidentally let a door swing into him, Louie chested up to him and provoked an embarrassing little scuffle that ended with Louie grinding the man's face in the dirt.

His mind began to derail. While sitting at a bar, he heard a sudden, loud sound, perhaps a car backfiring. Before he knew it, he was on the floor, cringing, as the bar fell silent and the patrons stared. On another night, he was drinking, his mind drifting, when someone nearby

yelled something while joking with friends. In Louie's mind, it was "Keirei!" He found himself jumping up, back straight, head up, heart pounding, awaiting the flying belt buckle. In a moment the illusion cleared and he saw that, again, everyone in the bar was looking at him. He felt foolish and humiliated.

One day Louie was overcome by a strange, inexplicable feeling, and suddenly the war was all around and in him, not a memory but the actual experience—the glaring and grating and stench and howl and terror of it. In a moment he was jerked back out again, confused and frightened. It was his first flashback. After that, if he caught a glimpse of blood or saw a tussle in a bar, everything would reassemble itself as prison camp, and the mood, the light, the sounds, his own body, would all be as they were, inescapable. In random moments, he felt lice and fleas wriggling over his skin when there was nothing there. It only made him drink harder.

Cynthia urged Louie to get help, so he went, reluctantly, to see a counselor at a veterans' hospital. He spoke of the war and the nightmares, and came home feeling as turbulent as when he'd left. After two or three sessions, he quit.

One day he opened a newspaper and saw a story that riveted his attention. A former Pacific POW had walked into a store and seen one of his wartime captors. The POW had called the police, who'd arrested the alleged war criminal. As Louie read the story, all of the fury within him converged. He saw himself finding the Bird, overpowering him, his fists bloodying the face, and then his hands locking about the Bird's neck. In his fantasy, he killed the Bird slowly, savoring the suffering he caused, making his tormentor feel all of the pain and terror and helplessness that he'd felt. His veins beat with an electric urgency. Louie had no idea what had become of the Bird, but he felt sure that if he could get back to Japan, he could hunt him down. This would be his emphatic reply to the Bird's unremitting effort to extinguish his humanity: I am still a man. He could conceive of no other way to save himself.

Louie had found a quest to replace his lost Olympics. He was going to kill the Bird.