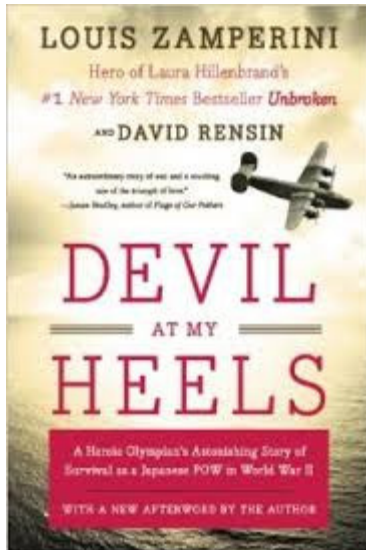


## **Book Review – Devil at my Heels** **by Louis Zamperini and David Rensin**

*Review by Chris Hope, Master CFI*



They called him Lucky Louis. How else could you explain how a boy could live to adulthood after falling into a ten-foot deep vat of oil? Or after riding the rails as a teenager in the 1930's? And how does a person survive an aircraft ditching in the Pacific Ocean during World War II, and then survive the next six weeks floating among sharks and the Japanese navy?

Lucky Louis did this and more. He found release from the chip on his teenage shoulder by running. And running and running more, and then finally realizing while running in the Olympics in Berlin in 1936 that he could be the first man to break the four-minute mile. He joined the Army Air Corps as a bombardier on the B-24 and survived his first bombing missions. However, on a milk-run of a search and rescue mission, his aircraft was forced to ditch in the Pacific Ocean, leaving only three survivors. It took six weeks, but he and the other last survivor were picked up by the Japanese and interred for the next two years.

Louis (through David Rensin) tells the straight-forward story of his life. He admits that there were a lot activities as a kid that he was not proud of. And after his release from the POW camp in Japan, he suffered stresses that he could not understand and could not deal with.

In late 1949, four years after returning from prison and celebrating all of the highs of being feted as a hero, he finds himself fallen as low as he can go - no job, a wife about to leave him, and a feeling that life has dealt him the dirtiest of hands. At his wife's insistence, he listens to Billy Graham talk about giving one's life to Christ, and his life changes again.

Fifty-two years later, as he is recounting his story (and still climbing mountains and skiing down them) he feels as lucky as he did eighty years earlier. But he feels a strong sense of contentment, as he has learned and relearned over the past fifty years that "to whom much has been given, much is expected." He came to realize that he could not have become the man he was, and affected so many people that he did, if he had not been the man he was before.

This book was first published in 2003. Shortly afterward, Laura Hillenbrand would learn of Louis' running exploits while she researched her best-selling book, "Seabiscuit", the story of another amazing runner. Her research would result in

“Unbroken”, a best-seller being released as a movie later this month. I reviewed that book a couple of years ago (see my book review link below.) Louis passed away in July 2014 at the age of 97, still living as an inspiration to all who met him.

*Chris loves to read, write, and fly, but not necessarily in that order*

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