



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Olean Native and World War II Hero Louis Zamperini Inducted into New York State Senate Veterans' Hall of Fame

CATHARINE YOUNG June 2, 2014

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Recognized as One of New York's Great Veterans

ALBANY - In recognition of his incredible life of perseverance and survival, U.S. Army Air Forces Captain Louis Zamperini was recently inducted into the New York State Senate Veterans' Hall of Fame as Senator Catharine Young's 2014 nominee.

The New York State Senate Veterans' Hall of Fame was created in 2005 to honor those veterans who have distinguished themselves in their valiant military service and continue to devote themselves to serving their neighbors, communities, and country - criteria Captain Zamperini exemplifies.

At the induction ceremony in Albany on May 20, 2014, Captain Zamperini and other veterans from around New York State were honored for their contributions and lives of service. At 97 years old, and now living in California, the Olean-born Captain Zamperini was unable to attend the ceremony, but he was still honored with the other inductees.

"Louis Zamperini's amazing and inspiring story is one of fortitude, heroism, and perseverance. He undoubtedly belongs in the New York State Senate Veterans' Hall of Fame for all he has done. As an Olympic track star, World War II hero, and inspirational Christian speaker, Captain Zamperini has truly served his country and fellow man with unparalleled devotion and distinction," said Senator Young.

Captain Zamperini's incredible journey began when he was born on January 26, 1917, in Olean, New York, to Italian immigrants. He would go on to become an internationally renowned Olympic athlete, famed prisoner of war, and inspirational speaker whose life was recounted in the best-selling biography *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption*. Later this year, a hugely anticipated film about his life, *Unbroken*, will be released in theaters across the country.

As a standout track athlete, Captain Zamperini achieved his first milestone in 1934, setting a world interscholastic record for the mile. He earned a scholarship to the University of Southern California and a place on the 1936 U.S. Olympic team that competed in the Berlin games. He was the youngest ever American qualifier in the 5,000 meter race, and in 1938 he set a national collegiate mile record of 4:08, which stood for 15 years.

When his country needed him at the height of World War II, Captain Zamperini enlisted in the Army Air Forces, trained as a B-24 Liberator bombardier, and deployed to the Pacific Theater with the 307th Bombardment Group. In April 1942, during a missing aircraft search, his bomber crashed into the ocean, killing eight of the 11 men aboard.

With little food or water, the resiliency Captain Zamperini demonstrated as an Olympic runner took on new meaning. With the two other survivors, Russel Phillips and Francis McNamara, he drifted in a life raft, fending off sharks, a violent storm, and attacks from a Japanese bomber.

On their 47th day at sea, Captain Zamperini and his now single fellow survivor, Russel Phillips, drifted to the Marshall Islands. Being a Japanese military outpost, they were immediately captured by the Japanese Navy. They were badly mistreated, routinely beaten, and held in captivity, first on the Marshall Islands and then in Japan, until the end of the war in August 1945.

Having already been declared missing at sea, and then listed as killed in action, Captain Zamperini's incredible will and perseverance saw him through his trials. With the war's end, he returned home to a hero's welcome.

After the war, he married his late wife Cynthia Applewhite in 1946 and, with the help of Rev. Billy Graham, became a world renowned Christian inspirational speaker.

For his 81st birthday, Captain Zamperini returned to Japan, offering forgiveness and reconciliation to his captors as he ran in the Olympic Torch relay for the 1998 Nagano Winter Games.

Now residing in Los Angeles, California, Captain Zamperini continues to travel and share his inspirational testimony.

“The remarkable story of Louis Zamperini has inspired millions. His life teaches us to never give up and to always persevere to the end. We should be proud that his miraculous journey began in Olean where he was born,” said Senator Young.

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