



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

## Louis Zamperini

CATHARINE YOUNG May 17, 2014



Captain

Captain Louis Zamperini

**Award:** Honoring Our Veterans

**Year:** 2014

Born on January 26, 1917, in Olean, New York, to Italian immigrants, Captain Louis Zamperini would go on to become a nationally renowned Olympic athlete, war hero, and inspirational speaker.

As a standout track athlete, in 1934, Zamperini achieved his first milestone, 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, where he was the youngest ever American qualifier in the 5,000 meters. In 1938 he would set a national collegiate mile record of 4:12, which stood for 15 years.

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, Zamperini and the two other survivors drifted in a life raft, fending off sharks, a storm, and attacks from a Japanese bomber.

On their 47th day adrift, Zamperini and his now single fellow survivor reached the Marshall Islands and were captured by the Japanese. They were beaten and held captive until the end of the war.

Having already been declared missing at sea, and then killed in action, Zamperini returned home to a hero's welcome.

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

For his 81st birthday, Zamperini returned to Japan to run in the Olympic Torch relay for the 1998 Nagano Winter Games.

Residing in Los Angeles, California, Zamperini continues to travel and share his inspirational testimony.