

Opening

Is this a Hooah Day on Kwajalein Atoll or what? I want to thank all of you for taking the time to join with us here today as we dedicate the Louis S. Zamperini Café Pacific Dining Facility.

Mr. Zamperini and his family couldn't attend today – we will visit with them on Friday and deliver a DVD containing this dedication ceremony.



Recognitions - Omitted

- We've gathered here today to recognize Mr. Louis Zamperini, an Army Air Forces Bombardier and World War II Prisoner of War and to name our dining facility in his honor
- His story is one of service and perseverance, of forgiveness, and a life well lived....that for a moment in time connected with Kwajalein

Youth

- Louie Zamperini didn't realize it at the time, but events from his childhood and teenage years played a significant role in shaping him into the man who survived 47 days afloat in the open ocean, 42 days of intense interrogations here on Kwajalein Atoll, and more than two years as a Japanese Prisoner of War
- When he was two years old, his family moved from Olean, New York, to Torrance, California
- The son of Italian immigrants, he spoke no English when his family moved to California
- This made him a target for bullies
- His father taught him how to box in self-defense, and soon he was in his own words, "beating the tar out of every one of them... but I was so good at it that I started relishing the idea of getting even. I was sort of addicted to it"
- To counteract his knack for getting into trouble, his older brother Pete got him involved in the school track team – an activity where he truly excelled



- In 1934 Zamperini set a world interscholastic record for the mile
 - The record would last for over twenty years, until broken by Dennis Hansen in 1959
 - Won a scholarship to the University of Southern California and eventually a place on the 1936 U.S. Olympic team

Olympics

- At 19, he was the youngest U.S. qualifier in the 5000 meter event
- Unfortunately he threw away his once-in-a-lifetime chance at Olympic glory
 - As he explained later, “Well, you have to understand what those times were like,” he says sheepishly. “I was a Depression-era kid who had never even been to a drugstore for a sandwich. Here I was, leaving Torrance, going on a train to New York City, going on a boat to Germany. This was more exciting to me than making the [Olympic] team. And all the food was free. I had not just one sweet roll, but about seven every morning, with bacon and eggs. My eyes were like saucers.”
 - By the end of the trans-Atlantic voyage, the saucer-eyed Olympic hopeful had put on 12 pounds. With this extra cargo packed onto his kinetic frame, Zamperini finished the 5,000 meter in eighth place,
 - Even so, he managed to delight an arena full of spectators, including Adolf Hitler. As he later recalled, “...I sprinted the whole last lap, running it in 56 seconds after three whole miles. The crowd was going nuts.”
- Though he didn’t medal in 1936, he was favored to win in the 1940 Games – but World War II intervened



Military career and Prisoner of War

- Drafted in 1941, 2nd LT Louis Zamperini served as a bombardier with the Army Air Forces
- He was assigned to a B-24D, and transferred to Hawaii in November 1942



- Having survived raids on Wake Island, Makin, and Nauru, and the Japanese attack on Funafuti, on 27 May 1943, he and his crew volunteered for a rescue mission off the coast of Palmyra
- As a result of engine failure, the plane crashed into the Pacific
 - Of the 11 men on board, only three survived the crash: 1st LT Zamperini, his friend and pilot 1st LT Russell Phillips and tail gunner SGT Francis McNamara
 - At a time when most downed crews were never found, Zamperini and Phillips survived 47 days afloat in the open Pacific
 - Enduring searing heat and fierce storms that threatened to capsize their rafts
 - Adrift with little food and no water, they subsisted on captured rainwater and small fish eaten raw
 - On two occasions, they caught small sharks circling their life boat with their bare hands
 - Their only other source of food came from the sky
 - Gooney birds – albatrosses – are beautiful and graceful creatures in flight, with six- to eight-foot wingspans – but when eaten raw were gamey and had a foul odor
 - On their 27th day at sea they thought they had been spotted by a search plane
 - Unfortunately the plane was a Japanese Sally bomber
 - They were strafed with machinegun fire for nearly 30 minutes and were bombed with a depth charge that fortunately didn't explode
 - The Japanese then disappeared, leaving two wrinkled rafts, riddled with bullets, rapidly deflating, and three desperate men not certain they'd survive another day
 - Unfortunately, SGT McNamara died after thirty-three days at sea
- On their 47th day adrift – on 15 July 1943, Zamperini and Phillips reached land in the Marshall Islands after drifting more than 2,000 miles
 - They were immediately captured by the Japanese Navy, and transferred to Kwajalein Atoll, or “Execution Island”
 - Mr. Zamperini was held in the cell which previously held the nine Marine Raiders captured on Makin

- 1LTs Zamperini and Phillips survived 42 days of interrogations before being moved to Ofuna, a secret interrogation center in Japan and later Prisoner of War camps where they were tortured and enslaved
- They remained prisoners until the end of the war – August 1945
- He was promoted to Captain while in captivity
- His military career and his time as a POW are documented in the book “Unbroken” by Laura Hillenbrand
 - Testament to his perseverance, determination, and won't quit character

Post-War Life

- In 1946 he married Cynthia Applewhite, to whom he remained married for 55 years until her death in 2001
 - He had a daughter Cynthia and a son Luke
- Suffering from what today we call severe PTSD, Mr. Zamperini found a route to recovery and a new calling through the sermons by Rev Billy Graham
- His wife Cynthia was instrumental in getting him to go to Billy Graham's meetings and not leaving before he was converted
- Mr. Zamperini became a born again Christian after attending a crusade led by evangelist Billy Graham
- Rev Graham later helped Zamperini launch a new career as a Christian inspirational speaker
- One of his favorite themes is "forgiveness," and he has visited many of the guards from his POW days to let them know that he has forgiven them
 - Unfortunately his greatest antagonist refused to meet with him
 - Mr. Zamperini had been singled out by a sadistic guard named Mutsuhiro Watanabe, known to prisoners as "the Bird,"
 - The Bird intended to make an example of the famous Olympian
 - Because war-crime prosecutions were suspended in the 1950s, he was never brought to justice



- In the 1950s, Mr. Zamperini established the Victory Boys Camp, to provide guidance and support to disadvantaged boys and has helped to establish similar programs around the world
- Mr. Zamperini also retained a connection to Kwajalein, returning to help investigators' try to locate the remains of the Makin Raiders in January 2002
- Zamperini has toured the world speaking of his wartime experiences and the powers of hope and forgiveness
- In his words and actions, Louis Zamperini continues to be an inspiration for us all
- Ever the athlete, for his 81st birthday in January 1998, Mr. Zamperini ran a leg in the Olympic Torch relay for the Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan
- In March 2005 he returned to Germany to visit the Berlin Olympic Stadium for the first time since he competed there

Dedication

- Our Dining Facility will not be the first place named for Mr. Zamperini
- Torrance High School's home football, soccer, and track stadium is called Zamperini Stadium
- Torrance Airport is Zamperini Field
- The entrance plaza at USC's track & field stadium was named Louis Zamperini Plaza in 2004
- Today, here at US Army Kwajalein Atoll, we add another place to the list of locations bearing his name
- Our intent is to inspire current and future generations of Soldiers and Civilians who server here at Kwajalein – with the spirit of service, perseverance, commitment, and character embodied in the life of Captain Louis Zamperini
- In a few minutes we will unveil the plaque and sign the will identify this building as the Captain Louis S. Zamperini Dining Facility

