

LOUIS S. ZAMPERINI
1936 OLYMPIC GAMES
TRACK & FIELD



© THE AMATEUR ATHLETIC FOUNDATION OF LOS ANGELES
AMATEUR ATHLETIC FOUNDATION
OF LOS ANGELES

AN OLYMPIAN'S ORAL HISTORY
INTRODUCTION

Southern California has a long tradition of excellence in sports and leadership in the Olympic Movement. The Amateur Athletic Foundation is itself the legacy of the 1984 Olympic Games. The Foundation is dedicated to expanding the understanding of sport in our communities. As a part of our effort, we have joined with the Southern California Olympians, an organization of over 1,000 women and men who have participated on Olympic teams, to develop an oral history of these distinguished athletes.

Many Olympians who competed in the Games prior to World War II agreed to share their Olympic experiences in their own words. In the pages that follow, you will learn about these athletes, and their experiences in the Games and in life as a result of being a part of the Olympic Family.

The Amateur Athletic Foundation, its Board of Directors, and staff welcome you to use this document to enhance your understanding of sport in our community.

ANITA L. DE FRANTZ
President
Amateur Athletic Foundation of
Los Angeles
Member
Southern California Olympians

AN OLYMPIAN'S ORAL HISTORY
METHODOLOGY

Interview subjects include Southern California Olympians who competed prior to World War II. Interviews were conducted between March 1987, and August 1988, and consisted of one to five sessions each. The interviewer conducted the sessions in a conversational style and recorded them on audio cassette, addressing the following major areas:

Family History

Date/place of birth; occupation of father/mother; siblings; family residence;

Education

Primary and secondary schools attended; college and post-collegiate education;

Sport-Specific Biographical Data

Subject's introduction to sport—age, event and setting of first formal competition; coaches/trainers/others who influenced athletic development; chronology of sports achievements; Olympic competition; post-Olympic involvement in sports;

General Biographical Data

Employment history; marital history; children; communities of residence; retirement;

General Observations

Reactions and reflections on Olympic experience; modernization of sport; attitudes on and involvement with the Olympic Movement; advice to youth and aspiring athletes.

Interview transcripts were edited and may include additional material based on subsequent conversations and/or subject's own editing.

LOUIS S. ZAMPERINI

1936 OLYMPIC GAMES - BERLIN

5,000-METERS

INTERVIEWED:

June, 1988
Hollywood, California
by George A. Hodak

LOUIS ZAMPERINI Interviewer:
George A. Hodak

Hodak: Today I am in Hollywood, California, *and* have the pleasure of interviewing Lou Zamperini. Mr. Zamperini competed in the 1936 Olympics in the 5,000-meter run. First off Mr. Zamperini, let's begin with the most basic details, such as when and where you were born. Beyond that, I'd like you to talk a bit about your family background.

Zamperini: Well, I was born January 26, 1917, in Olean, New York, which is in upstate New York. When I was two years old, I came down with pneumonia. My brother, who was two years older, also had pneumonia. So the doctors told my parents, "You have to get these kids out to California where the weather is warmer and the climate is much better." Before we left, our house burned down. I had fallen off and rolled under the bed. My dad had everybody outside on the lawn, and he went back in looking for me, and he couldn't find me. Then he saw my hand move under the bed and realized it was me. He then grabbed me and we ran out. And as he got out, the porch collapsed and he was burned on his feet. But he saved my life as a two-year-old, and that was my first real narrow escape . with death, which I was to face again later on in the war.

Then we came to California, and we lived in Long Beach to begin with. When I was two-and-a-half or three years old, some kid challenged me to the first race of my life. He challenged me to race down to the corner and across the street to touch a palm tree on the far side. He beat me, and in doing so he was hit by a car and mangled. So that was the second time in my life that I narrowly escaped death. Fortunately, I

lost the first race of my life.

Hodak:

Zamperini: You mentioned your older brother. Is he the only sibling you have?

No, I also have two sisters. Pete is the oldest, then myself, and then I have two younger sisters.

Hodak:

Zamperini: Tell me a bit about your mother and dad.

Zamperini: Well, my dad was born in northern Italy, in Verona, and was raised up around Lake Garda, where he had done some landscaping as a youngster for Admiral George Dewey. He came to America and met my mother, who was half-Austrian and half-Italian. They were married and that was the beginning of our family in New York.

Hodak:

Zamperini: What occupation or trade was your father involved in?

Zamperini: Being an immigrant, he came over here taking whatever job he could, and so he became a coal miner. There were a lot of openings for coal miners. But it was tedious work and, of course, all that breathing of black dust. Well, he got himself a set of books and educated himself in electrical engineering. He got a taste of that back in New York, and then when he came to California he applied for a job with the Pacific Electric "Big Red Cars." He got a job there as an electrical engineer keeping the generators and transformers going on the cars. So that was his life's work until he died.

Hodak:

Zamperini: Did you grow up speaking Italian?

Zamperini: Yes, I spoke only Italian until I was probably six or seven years of age. I was put back in school because I couldn't understand the teacher, and she couldn't correspond with me. So the principal gave my parents orders that they had to speak

English at home, (laughter) Well, my dad's English wasn't the greatest, so I mispronounced a lot of words. It was a handicap for me for a year or two, but I finally picked up English and forgot most of the Italian, except food and swear words—I remember those, (laughter)

Hodak: Was your father an athlete?

Zamperini: Yes, he was a strong individual, of course, a miner. And he had done some boxing and was crazy about sports. But he wanted my brother and I to go into baseball because that was his sport, the one he loved. Much to his disappointment, we ended up in track and field. After that he became a fanatic follower of track and field and never missed a track meet.

Hodak: Where did your interest in track and field initially take root?

Zamperini: Well, my brother was a runner before I was. I'd say at the age of 15, the greatest challenge of my life was my transition from an errant, undisciplined and dissipated teenager to a disciplined and dedicated athlete.

Hodak: What caused this transition?

2141 W. Adams Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90018

Zamperini:

Well, my brother got tired of the police coming to the house for various and sundry things that I had done in Torrance, and he felt that maybe athletics was the answer to my problem. He got ahold of the principal of school and the chief of police, and they decided that sports would probably be the ticket. So they got me out on the field running the 660-yard run—and I never suffered so much in my life. I felt severe pains of exhaustion. I'd been smoking and dissipating to the point where this was extreme suffering. And I swore I'd never run another race. I came in last and I thought, "This is it! This is no fun." Well, about a week later we had our first dual meet, and they talked me into going out again. Again, I suffered that horrible

pain of exhaustion from not being in shape. But coming down the home stretch—I didn't win, I got third place—I passed one of our opponents and i heard the kids from my high school hollering, "Come on, Louie!" I had no idea that anyone even knew my name, and yet the whole group of kids in the grandstand was hollering, "Come on, Louie!" So I came in and got third place.

That night I had to make a decision: Give up this suffering on the track and continue with my delinquent life, or decide whether the recognition was worth it. The recognition, I really have to admit, tasted pretty sweet. So before I went to bed that night, I made up my mind—and really made up my mind—that I would be a runner.

So I began to train just as fanatically as I had dissipated, which was some real hard training. (laughter) I came in second and third again, and finally, I won my first race. I couldn't believe it! Then I won another one and another one and finally made the all-city finals. So here I am running against the best 660-yard fellows in L.A., and I came in fifth. Now, fifth place was a place; today we say one, two and three, but at this meet, if you got in the first five places you got a medal. So I got a little bronze button to pin on my sweater, and that was like winning a gold medal. I proudly displayed that around the school, and of course the *Torrance Herald* had this on the front page. They had never even had an athlete make the all-city before. So that was the beginning of my track career.

What happened after that was a strange twist in my training. I had made up my mind to run everywhere. Instead of hitchhiking to the beach four miles, I ran to the beach. I'd run from Redondo to Hermosa and back, and then run home at night. All summer long, that's what I did. So I piled up a lot of miles. But I had no idea how fast I could run. I had no

idea what I was doing to my body. I was conditioning my body and not realizing, not having studied physiology, what was happening. Then fall came around, and I was put in a two-mile cross-country run at UCLA. There were 101 runners out there from all over the state, and my first thought was: "I just hope I don't get last." When the race was over, I looked back and I had won it by a quarter of a mile. I thought I must have cut some corners, but they assured me that I ran the full course. I had no idea I was in such good shape because I had never timed myself. I just ran, ran, ran, and it paid off. So then I realized that I could be a runner—really a runner.

So I never lost another race throughout my high school career; half-mile, mile or two-mile. Then I began to set my goal: I wanted to break the world's high school mile record in my senior year. Then I wanted to go on to USC and break the NCAA mile record, and then make the 1940 Olympics in Tokyo. I got my high school world's record a year before, as a junior, which was a good thing for me, because my grades were not up to going to college. So I was getting scholarship offers in the mail from different universities, and it made me realize that I could go to college. But I had to make up my grades, so I went to summer school, became student body president, had to study even harder, and finally got my grades up to par.

Nineteen thirty-six comes by, and the Olympics are here. Even though I had the world's record in the high school mile, I wasn't nearly good enough to compete with the great milers in the nation like Glenn Cunningham and Bill Bonthron. I knew I couldn't make it in the mile, so I kind of gave up.

Hodak:

Before we go further with that, let's not pass over your race at the Coliseum, in May of '34, where you set the national interscholastic mile record, which, I believe, stood for 18 years. Talk a bit about that race. I think it is interesting to note that the top six competitors all ran under four-and-a-half

minutes. Were you surprised at how well you did?

Zamperini: Where I came from I had no competition in the mile, so I was running by myself every race. I was running 4.28 and 4.29 on my own. I knew that the record was 4.24 at that time, held by a fellow at Mercersburg [Pennsylvania] Academy. Anyway, when the race started off there were two Indians from the American Institute of Indians that went out and set their own fast pace. The newspapers said that they had set the pace that caused me to break a world's record, which was not true. I ran my three quarters as fast as I had planned to run them. So when they went out, I let them go. I didn't even see them—I didn't care about them. I thought, "They're going too fast for me. If I lose, I lose. But I know what my pace is, and this is it." So I ran my three quarters in exactly the time I had planned to run it in. I finally caught up to them, and then I just turned on a last lap that was considered fast in those days, 64 seconds, and I came in at 4.21 and two-tenths seconds. It was a great race. There were some great runners in there, guys like [Gaylord] Mercer and [Virgil] Hooper. I think Hooper had a boil on his neck, which could have taken a lot out of the guy. But I talked to him and he said, "No, you would have won anyway." He was just a real gracious guy. He made me feel good.

Shortly after I broke the high school mile record and I got all that publicity, the city of Torrance decided they wanted to help Jim Thorpe. Jim Thorpe was having a struggle financially, so they had booked him at various clubs, the Lions and Shriners and so forth, to say a few words and put on a little show. And I was to go along with him in the South Bay area, as the local record-holder in the mile. I liked Jim. He was just a big, oily fellow. But he did have an axe to grind. He was broke, and he didn't hold back on letting you know that things were rough on him ever since he was declared a professional for a measly 20 dollars. It ruined his whole life. So we would

go to a big club where there were two or three hundred men, and he'd come with his full chief regalia on, feathers and all. I would just get up and say a couple of words about my record, and then he'd get up and put on this show. And he got all of ten dollars for every performance. If he did two or three meetings a week, he got 30 dollars. But I'm glad, and I feel very fortunate that I was allowed to be part of that and to get to know the fellow. Otherwise, I probably never would have met him. But he was the greatest. As an athlete, I can't believe that we would take a man with such diversified athletic ability and cannonball him for 20 dollars. It doesn't make sense.

Hodak: It certainly doesn't. Now, when you were in high school, what other things spurred you on to become a serious runner?

Zamperini: My brother took me to the Coliseum to watch the national collegiates in which Glenn Cunningham was running against Bill Bonthron in the mile run. Of course, Glenn Cunningham was my hero. I'd read the story of Cunningham, how he had been burned as a child. And I've seen him in the shower, and he was burned on both legs, up to the middle of his back. I don't know how Glenn ever ran. When I read the story of Glenn Cunningham, I realized I had a chance to be a champion. He was my inspiration. But when I saw him get beat by Bill Bonthron, and Bonthron break the national collegiate record, I just said to myself as I watched the finish of that race, "Someday I'm going to get that record back for Glenn . . . and me." That was my inspiration to go on and set my goal for the NCAA mile run. I had to have that record.

Hodak: Which you did get eventually.

Zamperini: Eventually, yes.

Hodak: Two years in a row. Now, you mentioned earlier you had your

sights set on the 1910 Olympics, not so much the 1936 Olympics. How quickly did it dawn on you that you had a chance of making the Olympic team in 1936?

Zamperini: Well, I didn't really think I had a chance. Like I said, I gave up. Then I read in the paper where the second best 5,000-meter runner was going to compete in Los Angeles. So I thought, "Well, I'll give it a stab," just to see how close I could get to a man who I was sure was going to make the team. I had two weeks to train. I got five milerers out there to pace me, each one a fresh miler. They ran my guts out for five miles and I came in with my toes bleeding—it was just a real hot pace. Then I tapered down. And when the race finally came about, my brother, who was coaching me then, said, "Louie, there are a lot of laps on the 5,000-meter. You're not used to running that far, so I'll let you know when the last lap comes so you can move out and do your best." Well, he miscounted the laps and had me go out the last half-mile, which was probably to my benefit because when I took off ahead of Norman Bright, he wouldn't let me stay out front. It drove the grandstand crazy because he'd pass me and I'd pass him. I couldn't believe that I was staying up with this guy. Then on the last 220, on the far stretch, he passed me, and then I passed him going into the curve and began to pull away—5, 10, 15 yards. But we had been lapping the various runners. There was a fellow in front of me from San Pedro that I was about to lap. The officials were so excited about the race they weren't paying attention to their duties. So instead of motioning the fellow to step off the track—which is just a half-step to your left to get off the track—the minute I started to pass him, and I had my momentum going, they motioned him to get off the track this way towards the grandstand. So he kept going that way right in front of me, and I couldn't get around him. I bumped into him and went down with one hand on the ground, and by the time I got upright. Bright was heading for the tape. So I had to catch him again, and I

did, just as we got to the tape. It looked like a dead heat, but they gave him the race by about an inch. Also, the officials were so excited about that finish—me having to make up my ground again—they dropped the tape before Bright even got there. It was just a series of official blunders, but you couldn't blame them because it was an exciting race.

Hodak: And this gave you a sense that you could qualify in the 5,000-meter run?

Zamperini: Well, I couldn't believe that I could have beaten Norman Bright. On the strength of this performance, the city of Torrance got together. My dad worked for the railway so I had a pass; one pass a year to anywhere in America on the Southern Pacific. So I had my way paid. I got my ticket from Southern Pacific free of charge and the city of Torrance raised some spending money for me. They gave me a suitcase. You remember the "Torrance Tornado." Well, I covered it up with adhesive tape because I didn't want the other athletes to see that. They gave me everything—shaving gear, clothing. I was all decked out. I went to New York for the big tryouts at Randall's Island—and it was hot! I think it was the hottest day New York had had in 98 years.

I really didn't have much self-esteem as a runner. I knew I couldn't beat Don Lash. He was the world-record holder in the two-mile. But all I had to do was get within three places, and there were at least three great runners. There were Don Lash, Norman Bright, Tommy Deckard, and two others. The heat had a terrible effect upon the sandy-haired, redheaded fellows like Norman Bright. His performance would have been a lot better if it hadn't been for the heat. The dark-haired fellows like myself were not subject to any . . . well, we are more resilient. So they were dropping. They were passing out on the track, and we were jumping over them. For the last 300 yards it was just Don Lash and myself. I looked back and I

saw the third guy about 40 yards behind. I thought, "I can't believe it! I'm with Don Lash." So I tried to pass him going into the last 220, and he was just too smart to let me pass so he made me run on the second lane all the way around. That was an exciting race because we didn't give a fraction of an inch. We ran a dead heat. You can imagine the excitement from that. A dead heat for 220 yards, right to the finish. It didn't bother me whether he won or lost; I made the team and that was it. The greatest thrill and adventure of my life was making the Olympic team.

Hodak: What else did you get to see of the tryouts? Did you see other performances you might care to mention?

Zamperini: I watched most of the events, and I saw some great athletes that should have made the team not make it.

Hodak: I think the 1936 tryouts were really known for that.

Zamperini: Yes, great athletes like George Varoff, the pole vaulter, and Norman Bright; I'm sure if it had been a cool day he would have made the team. I'm sure he would have been a lot closer to the finish than the third man. He was a great runner, but the heat got him down. If you've got freckles and red hair, you better watch out! The heat will get you.

Hodak: Now, how much time before you left for Berlin via the *SS Manhattan!*

Zamperini: Well, of course we got ourselves tailored and fit with suits, straw hats, white slacks, and a beautiful Olympic coat with Olympic buttons and a shield on each button. You know, we were a team. So now we all looked alike. And they took a big picture of us on the deck of the boat the day we left, and on the front page . . . it was really a shocker to me to be on the front page with another athlete, Frank Wykoff, who after

Charlie Paddock was considered the world's fastest human. So here was one of the oldest guys—I guess he was the oldest runner on the team. They didn't expect him to make the team, but he made it in the relay. And there I was, the youngest runner on the team. And they had the two of us together—the young and the old.

Hodak: What about the interaction on board the ship? What was the spirit or the camaraderie like amongst the athletes?

Zamperini: The camaraderie among the athletes was great. The older athletes kind of took me under their wing. Everything was new to me. I had never been on a boat before, and I'd never really been away from home before. And to sit down at breakfast, lunch and dinner at a big, round table just loaded with all kinds of goodies . . . well, I began to put on weight. I'm afraid I gained about 14 pounds before I got to Germany.

Hodak: I don't think that was an uncommon experience for athletes on the ship to Berlin.

Zamperini: Some of them were smart, like Cunningham and the rest of them. But I just wanted to eat. I was hungry and that was it. And I was underweight. When I ran in the tryouts, I was really underweight. So I gained that back in a hurry, and then put on some extra.

Hodak: Were you able to work out at all on the ship?

Zamperini: We worked out on the deck, yes. The only place you could really work out was on the first-class deck. That's where all the movie people were. We'd just jog around the deck *up* there. Of course, during my running years I had also, you might say, inherited a lot of other heroes in the different fields of swimming and rowing and other sports and, naturally, I wanted to meet all these great athletes. So I'd spend my time

meeting and talking to them, and I noticed that most of them had the souvenir-collecting attitude, you know. (laughter) With my former training as a juvenile delinquent, this was an easy task for me, to pick up souvenirs like ashtrays, towels or whatever. That seemed to be the number one hobby during the entire Olympic trip.

Hodak: Your souvenir collecting culminated in Berlin, which we will get to. Is there anything else noteworthy about the trip over?

Zamperini: There was one big issue that took place. We had a famous swimmer named Eleanor Holm who had gone to the first-class section to be with the son of Hearst, the newspaper magnate. And she was dancing up there in first class, and I think she was seen drinking a glass of champagne. As a result of the champagne . . . I think she was warned or something, I'm not sure. But anyway, she evidently went ahead and had her champagne, and the Olympic Committee took a quick vote and dismissed her from the team. Of course, Hearst immediately hired her as a correspondent, so she went to the Olympics anyway. But she didn't swim.

Hodak: Did the athletes feel that she deserved that type of treatment?

Zamperini: Well, some of them did, I guess. I don't know, there can be a little jealousy among some athletes. But most of them felt that the punishment far exceeded the crime, you might say. A glass of champagne on a boat going across the Atlantic . . . Now, what killed me was that most of these athletes, you know, after sweating all day, liked to have a glass of beer. On the deck there was a little opening where you'd go and buy a glass of beer. I'd say most of the athletes that I saw would just take a workout, and then while walking the deck they'd stop and have a glass of beer.

Hodak: But beer didn't have the connotations champagne did to the

Olympic officials?

Zamperini: Right. I think the Olympic Committee probably just tied the first class, the dancing, the champagne and her association with Hearst together. Now, whatever her association was, I don't know. Only she knows and Hearst would know, but evidently the total picture didn't look good to the Olympic Committee and they dismissed her.

Hodak: How were you greeted once you arrived in Hamburg, and then eventually Berlin?

Zamperini: The thing that stood out to me was the fact that we received such really gracious treatment by the German officials, the German people, and those in charge of the Olympic Village. I have never heard of any Olympics where athletes were treated with better care than in the 1936 Games.

Hodak: And the Olympic Village was part of these elaborate preparations?

Zamperini: Yes, the Olympic Village was really a sight to behold. They had everything there. They had wild animals running over the grounds. They had a sauna for the Finns, and they had a lake to come out of the sauna and dive into. They had green grass mowed like a golf course. The buildings we lived in were more like motels. There were no bathtubs, only showers. I think Hitler had all the bathtubs taken out of Germany because he didn't feel that they were sanitary. So we had showers. The place was immaculate. Now, some American athletes, when they had eaten their bananas and apples they would throw the skins and the cores on the ground. The Germans would run right over, pick it up and put it in the trash. It was probably the cleanest country I have ever seen in my life, and I don't expect to see in my lifetime another country as clean as Germany was at that time. Of course, I realize they were

putting on a show, too. But, it was a clean country and the people were most generous. We were given cards, like an Ovaltine card. Anywhere we walked in Berlin, we could go up to an Ovaltine counter, they'd write the number down and give us all we wanted to drink.

After the Games were over, again, they had parties for us—one after the other. They had young frauleins waiting on us and serving us. In front of each plate was a bottle of white wine and a bottle of red wine in case you didn't like the white. The service was just unbelievable. We were treated like kings.

Hodak: What other things did you notice about Berlin? There was certainly a regimented order to Berlin. Did the military aspect strike you much?

Zamperini: Yes, it was unique to us, coming from America. We'd see uniformed people in the Village. They were there like guards to protect us, I guess. But when we passed them by, we'd give them the Hitler salute and they'd laugh. We'd throw our hand out and say, "We/7 Hitler," and they'd say, "We/7 Adolf" or whatever. It became kind of a joke. Whenever we saluted the military, they always laughed and saluted us back in a comical fashion. They knew that we weren't under Hitler and we were Americans, and they accepted it as a humorous thing.

Hodak: So how does your event enter into the schedule of competition?

Zamperini: Well, they had to run heats. I forgot, I didn't know that they had heats. And I had to run 5,000 meters just to get into the finals. So I was still trying to lose weight, you know. I finally got into the finals, and there we ran in bunches according to pace. The great Finns were one, two, three up in front. There were seven guys in the front pack, another five here, and another four or five there. So there were three packs of runners. I was in the second pack because I couldn't

keep up the pace with the extra weight I'd put on. But on the last lap I left my pack and ran the last lap in 56 seconds—and I never even knew I could run a quarter in 56 seconds.

So after I showered I went out with the American athletes and we were just off the box of Hitler. But between Hitler and us was a buffer zone of officers, like Goering and Goebbels. You weren't allowed to walk across and walk up to where Hitler was in his cement box, but you could get one of the officers to take your camera over and he would take a picture of Hitler for you. So I had Goebbels there, I gave him my camera and he went over. Hitler always wanted to know the name of the athlete. He had a fantastic memory. Here I was, I just got eighth place, but I ran my last quarter in 56 seconds—and who would remember that? But they saw a guy leaving a pack and coming up fast, gaining 50 yards, we'll say, on the leaders, which looked like, if I'd have started earlier, I might have done something. So when he took my camera over and gave my name to Hitler, Goebbels came back and said, "Hitler said you're the boy with the fast finish." And I just stood there with my mouth hanging open. How would he know? How would he remember? What a memory! And Goebbels said, "He wants you to come over." So I went over to meet him, shook hands with him, and that was it. So I met Hitler there. And I met him later on a nodding basis when they introduced me as the youngest runner of the team. So that was my only real association with Adolf.

Kodak: And you drew a little attention by scurrying up a pole to secure a souvenir, a Nazi swastika.

Zamperini: Yes, I was on the streets of Berlin, like we all were, hiking here and hiking there, seeing the sights. We were just amazed by the streets. There wasn't a spittle on the street, there wasn't a piece of paper on the street, nothing! Everything was

immaculately clean. They had a man on every corner with a broom, dressed in white, and he'd sweep up after the horses.

Then I passed the Reich chancellery, and I stood across the street looking at the chancellery. I saw a limousine pull up and I saw Adolf Hitler get out with some officers and go inside. On the front of the walk there were two guards marching back and forth. They'd march to the corner, turn about, march back, and do their goose-step around again. Then I saw this flag on the wall, and I thought, "Boy, I'd like to have that for a souvenir. That would just have to be the most unusual souvenir." It wasn't the most beautiful flag; the beautiful flags were hanging high from the tops of the buildings and they looked like they were silk. They were waving in the breeze—long, narrow swastikas. So I thought, "I can get this one, so I'll take it." I knew I couldn't get the other ones. So when the guards did their turnabout, I figured I had about 30 seconds to get across the street and away. I figured I had plenty of time, but when I got over there and on the wall I realized I had made a miscalculation. The flag was higher than I had anticipated, I couldn't reach it.

In the meantime, the guards had reached the corner, they turned about, and were shouting at me. I didn't know what they were saying, I didn't understand German, but I knew it wasn't pleasant. But I still wanted that flag. I just jumped up in the air about two or three feet and clutched the tip of the flag in my fingers, and it ripped from the pole as I fell to the pavement. I went down on my butt and got up and instinctively did the best thing that I do—run. So I started to run. But then I heard a crack like a gunshot. I turned to my right and this guard was running at me with his rifle pointing from his chest, leveled at me. And he was hollering—and I'll never forget those words—"*Halten Sie.*" I thought, "Well, that's pretty close to English." So I did the smartest thing I ever did in my life—I halted. They swung me around and

grabbed me a little roughly. When they saw the American flag and all that on me, I think the one guard, who spoke very poor English, probably thought I was one of the Jewish athletes that was getting even with the anti-Semitic movement or something. He asked me my name and I told him. So they took the flag. Some officer came out onto the porch and he went up to the guard and they went inside for about two or three minutes. He came out, and the only thing I remember is that he said something like, "Fritz," and I just assumed it was General von Fritz. Then he said, "Why did you tear down the swastika?" (They perhaps thought I did it for some political reason.) And I said, "Well, I just wanted to take the flag home to America to remind me of the wonderful time I had here in your country." That was the right answer. So he was told to present me the flag as a souvenir of this hair-raising experience. So I still have the flag today, (laughter) But there have been a lot of stories about that flag that weren't quite true and were presented later on in a variety of interpretations that kind of glorified the incident. But it really wasn't that big a deal. It sounds like it, talking about Nazism, the Germans, the Olympics and all that, but it happened that quick and it was over, and I didn't think anything about it. I got my flag and left, (laughter)

Kodak: Let's talk further of the Olympic Games themselves. Outside of your event, what other events really stand out that you were able to see?

Zamperini: Well, of course the pole vault, with the USC vaulting twins, Earle Meadows and Bill Sefton, that was fantastic. We picked up one, two, three in the vaults. The only other event that kind of broke my heart was Glenn Cunningham; I thought this would be his big chance to pull down a gold medal. He certainly deserved it with his consistent record-breaking races over the years. But Jack Lovelock had evidently been watching Glenn Cunningham run, knew his style of running.

and he knew that Glenn had a tremendous kick for the last 110 to 250 yards. And I think he realized that he had to really gut himself to 330 yards to take Glenn. So coming off of the first curve of the last lap he made a quick jump and passed Cunningham ten yards before Glenn knew what happened. He didn't expect it. And he held that ten yards all the way to the finish. If he had waited until the last 220, I think Glenn would have won it.

Hodak: So he kind of preempted Cunningham's—

Zamperini: That was the way to beat Cunningham; to try to outsprint him on a distance sprint, like a quarter-mile, 330. But you don't try to outrun him on the last 100. So that was, of course, my disappointment at the Olympics, to see that happen.

And one of my buddies was Hal Smallwood, and I sure thought he would do something great in the Olympics. Then, the night before his event, he had an emergency appendectomy, of all things. And then one other thing that really threw me for a loss was that just to be sure we would win the relay, and possibly break the Olympic record, [Sam] Stoller and [Marty] Glickman, who certainly earned their berths on the Olympic relay team, were pulled out by the coaches. Of course they argued the situation, but they were told, "You'll do as you're told. You're an athlete, we're the officials—and you'll do as you're told." And they put in Jesse Owens, Frank Wykoff, Foy Draper and Ralph Metcalfe. What a winning team that was! Sure, it was great to win, but how about those two fellows that went to the Olympics? When their kids say, "Daddy, what did you do in the Olympics?" they say, "Well, I didn't run."

Hodak: Do you think that was done solely to ensure a victory, and the fact that the athletes were Jewish didn't have any bearing on the decision?

I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I
I

Zamperini: There was no scuttlebutt about that. Whether that was in the officials' hearts, I don't know. But there was no scuttlebutt. All I knew was that we didn't like it, and Jesse Owens didn't like it. He was put in their place, and he tried to get out of it. He really tried to get out of it, and so did Metcalfe. But we were under the jurisdiction of the United States Olympic team, and when you are abroad, under their jurisdiction, you do as you're told.

Hodak: Yes, I wonder . . . in looking at the records and film it doesn't suggest that it was that close a race. I think the American team would have won regardless.

Zamperini: That's possible, I was just a kid. I don't know what the scuttlebutt really was except that we were all disappointed. You know, I'd hate to go clear over there and have them say, "Well, we're not going to run you. We're running somebody else in your place." First of all, I didn't know that they could do it. I thought if you made the team in a certain event, you participated. I didn't know they could pull you out of a relay and put somebody else in after you had made the team in that event. But evidently they had the power to do it.

Hodak: Do you remember Sam Stoller and Marty Glickman contesting this?

Zamperini: They were in a private room where I understand they contested it. I only know what went on in there from people that were there. They gave it to the media later on. Yes, we knew that they had contested it, sure. Why wouldn't they? You make the team, you go abroad, and then you're not allowed to compete. Even if we'd have lost it, I'd rather have seen them in the race than to win it and break a record without them. It just wasn't fair. That's my opinion.

Hodak: What would you say about Jesse Owens? How did he deal with

the crowds and the attention that came his way in Berlin?

Zamperini: Well, Jesse Owens was a remarkable athlete. He was a remarkable person. He, to me, had the most perfect athletic physique I had ever seen. He was just beautifully proportioned, his entire body. And he was a very gracious person. He had a real sweet nature about him. All the athletes loved him and that's why I say he's the kind of guy that said, "No, I don't want to take Stoller's place or Glickman's place." Because he was not the kind of a guy that would jump at the chance to do something like that. But he was also told what he had to do. He did it reluctantly.

Hodak: Did you see any of his other events?

Zamperini: Oh yeah, I saw all of his events. Who would want to miss Jesse Owens? He was just a show in himself. He was just athletic perfection personified.

Hodak: What other American or foreign athletes left a big impression on you?

Zamperini: Oh, it's so long back . . . I'll probably go home tonight and remember half a dozen, but I was impressed with the Finns in these 5,000- and 10,000-meter runs. [Forrest] "Spec" Towns, in the hurdles, was a colorful character. When he'd win a race he'd turn a flip, or he would jump up in somebody's arms. I remember when we got to Hamburg before the Olympics, this big German band was up there in the stands built inside this great, *huge* railroad station. It was an impressive sight. Here's this band and its very stiff-necked German leader up there leading the band. And ol' Spec goes up there and grabs the baton out of his hand and he leads the band, and then he turns around and leads the whole station. But he was a character—the only real character we had. But you expected it

of him. If he didn't do something outlandish, then it wasn't him. But he was a lot of fun.

Hodak: Anything you'd want to comment on regarding the Opening or Closing Ceremonies?

Zamperini: I was impressed with the torch relay, because they had run over 2,000 miles. But they ran that torch and timed it right into the stadium; whereas our torch relay stopped hours before and the torch was put in holding until the ceremony that evening, and then the torch was brought in. But the fact that they had run it that far and had timed it so well . . . to see this runner come in, knowing that they had started and never stopped, and the same light was still aglow. When they ran it into that stadium it was quite a thrilling event. From there to here with the same light, and kept that torch lit without a break. That was impressive!

Then, the funniest thing about the Opening Ceremonies was that we had these straw hats on, a Buster Keaton hat. They were nice looking hats. We were all out there on the field during the Opening Ceremonies, and there were at least 5,000 pigeons released. And those pigeons circled right overhead and dropped on us, and you could hear on these straw hats, *splat, splat*. (laughter) Everybody tried to stand at attention, but it was pretty hard.

Hodak: One of those untold Olympic moments.

Zamperini: Yeah, they should have told the pigeons, (laughter)

Making the Olympic team for me was a real high adventure, it really was. I think you've heard this during the last Olympics; it wasn't winning the gold medal that was the most exciting, it was making the team. You have to be on that team. And making the team is so exciting. There's a euphoria you can't

explain. But it is more than just competing in the Olympics, it's the total atmosphere at the Olympics and all the things that went on. It's the camaraderie, the big parties afterwards, the foreign athletes you meet. You get their addresses and you correspond for years. When you depart from all of your friends there is a nostalgia and there's a longing to do this again. That's about the way I see the picture of being on the Olympic team. It's more than just competing.

Hodak: In addition to your Olympic competition, there were a number of post-Olympic meets throughout Europe, the most notable of which was the British Empire Games. Talk a bit about how you got to London, your accommodations there, and the competition in the White Stadium.

Zamperini: The Germans had a big party for us in Hamburg before we left. We were to have a track meet that day, but nobody knew exactly when it was. So they took us to this beautiful dining room with a long bar and a trough down the middle where they'd slide these glasses of beer, you know. So then they fed us, and we drank our beer and we were getting stuffed. Then they announced that the track meet was to start. I think they pulled this on us. We didn't know it was to be held right away. We thought, well, maybe it's tonight, maybe it's tomorrow. I remember all the athletes were stuffed with food and drink and then went out there and they just couldn't do it. I refused to run on a full stomach. Anyway, that was our farewell to Germany.

And then we went to London, of course. We were immediately put on buses. We weren't allowed to really see London or Piccadilly Square. We were shuttled out, I don't know exactly where it was, way out of town, far away, so we wouldn't have any social life at all. And we were let out in front of these tall, narrow tenement houses with narrow stairways. I remember my room was on the fifth or sixth floor. I had to

carry my bag in front of me, that's how narrow the stairway was, and when I got to my room my legs were numb. I looked at that room and I thought, "I'd rather sleep on the street." I didn't know what the other athletes were thinking, but I turned around and went back downstairs and all the other athletes were standing around or sitting on the curb. I was the youngest runner on the team, so I looked up to the older fellows, the more mature athletes, to see what was going on. And what had happened was that the Olympic Committee had billeted themselves in the famous Victoria Hotel in London in Piccadilly Square. And they had taken the athletes and put us in these dreary-looking tenement houses. You know, I didn't come from a wealthy family, but I thought, "I can't sleep here. I'd rather sleep on the street." So it was agreed with all the athletes—I think there were 35 or 10 of us getting ready for the British Empire Games—that we would not compete. We would go on strike. We wouldn't work out that day; we just sat on the curb until the Olympic Committee came out, and then we presented them our petition. We said, "Now look, we want to stay in London. We want to stay at the same hotel you're in, the Victoria." They gave us an argument—when I say us, I mean I just listened, being a kid. Finally, hours went on and they came back again, and they couldn't convince us to stay and compete. So finally they agreed. Well, they had to agree or there wouldn't have been a British Empire Games with the Americans in it. We just were not going to compete.

Hodak: And who were the American Olympic officials that contact was made with?

Zamperini: Well, they were all there together. Avery Brundage, of course, was one of them, but I can't remember who the other officials were. They finally agreed to put us up in the Victoria Hotel, but we weren't to say a word to the press; which we were grateful not to do. Just to be able to be in town . . . I mean, you're there in Berlin, you see Berlin; we're there in

London, and we don't see London, we're out in the sticks, the boondocks. So finally we got in the hotel, and just to spite the Olympic Committee we found out what the most expensive French champagne was and we had it for breakfast, lunch and dinner. So when we finished competing there and we were ready to leave, the bill was submitted to the Olympic Committee. And they were furious. They tried to get us to pay for it but a couple of our spokesmen—I won't mention their names—who were the more mature guys and had been around a bit, they said, "Don't worry." They went inside to talk to the Olympic Committee, and when they came out they said, "Everything's okay." So whatever they said to them, they seemed to accept it. But we stuck it to them, you know, (laughter)

Hodak: So how did the competition itself go?

Zamperini: The meet itself was great. Overall, the American team did quite well regardless of the shabby way in which we were treated. But now we're at the Victoria Hotel, and we went from there to the Hotel Grosvenor, and we were in Piccadilly Square enjoying the atmosphere of London. Otherwise, I could never have said that I'd been to England if I hadn't been to London.

Then we went from London to Glasgow and competed there in a track meet. I ran the two-mile there. We stayed at the University of Glasgow. It was a beautiful city with cobbled streets. We went down to the docks where they built the big ships. I believe they built the *Queen Mary* there and others. It was quite an impressive city. After Glasgow, on the way back we stopped at Edinburgh; no running, we just visited the Edinburgh Castle and took a dip in their city swimming pool. We then went back to London, boarded a ship, and stopped off in Le Havre, France, and then on home.

Hodak: Do you recall hearing much about the dispute that arose over the AAU's efforts to have Jesse Owens compete in Stockholm, and his shying away from this?

Zamperini: Right, Jesse Owens, I think what he said—and I don't think it was an excuse, he really felt it—was, "I'm homesick, I want to go home." That's about as much as I remember him saying. He didn't want to be exploited all over the world. They wanted to send teams around the world, I guess, just completely around the world. And of course, without him it wouldn't have been that great a trip.

Hodak: I think he was physically exhausted at this point, too.

Zamperini: Well, think of it, not only the physical training for four events, but then the four events themselves, plus all of the accolades heaped upon you. That is wearing. Thousands of autograph-seekers . . . I mean, he spent hours outside the stadium signing autographs. We signed autographs, but not like Jesse Owens. And it just wore him out and he just thought, "I want to go home."

Hodak: I think his coach at Ohio State, who went with the Olympic team, Larry Snyder, felt very strongly that he was being used, in a sense. I think he is quoted as saying that the athletes were being shipped around like trained seals. I don't mean to dwell on the negative, but it does illustrate something about the organization of sport in this era. There was a certain friction.

Zamperini: Right, there was. When you think of the contrast See, I can't make excuses for the Germans. Hitler had to put on a big show, a good show. But we were treated like kings. Then to find the contrast between being treated like kings and then being shoved in a tenement house miles from town. It didn't set too well with the athletes.

1

Hodak:

And the return voyage, anything notable about that?

Zamperini

The voyage back was without any incidents at all. We just had a lot of fun. There were dances aboard. There were some rough seas and everybody on the dance floor ended up in the corner of the ship, [laughter] It was really a riot. But when we got to New York we were greeted graciously by New York City. Mayor [Fiorello] La Guardia himself picked up four of us in his own private limousine. Being Italian, of course, I was one of them. Mayor La Guardia, to me, was really a neat person. He was really pleased to see us and treated us graciously. He gave us a special medal that New York had made up. I'll never forget that.

Hodak:

So you had a week in the city of New York?

Zamperini

Right, they couldn't do enough for us. Everything was free. They had shows for us, they had parties, celebrations, banquets. It wasn't anything pushy, we just went along with the flow and it was real nice.

Hodak:

How did you get back to Los Angeles?

Zamperini

Well, in those days we took the train everywhere . . . four or five days coming home. It was a long haul but, then again, it gave you a chance to meet everybody on the train. Today you fly around the world on a 747 and you don't meet anybody.

Hodak:

So was there a greeting waiting for you in Torrance?

Zamperini

That was a shocker. I got in in the evening and someone drove me to the outskirts of Torrance. Then they stopped the car. I looked around and a big flatbed truck drives up with a throne on it. They took me out of the car, put me up on the truck and said, "Sit in that chair." So I sat in the chair wondering what was going on. "We're going to take you into

Torrance in style." So I rode the last mile in on this flatbed and the whole city had turned out. (MI tell you, I couldn't believe it. Of course, there were only 5,000 people in the city at that time, but they were all there in the Torrance square. I was just overwhelmed. Everybody was there—even a crippled woman I knew who was in a wheelchair. I couldn't believe that she had come down to see me. She liked argyle socks to wear on her feet when she was in the wheelchair, so I had brought her a pair from New York. I jumped off of the platform and gave her the socks and a big hug, and that was the beginning of the celebration. It went on with dances and dinners and parties. It was quite a reception by my hometown.

Hodak: Now, you had attended and competed in the Berlin Games prior to your enrolling in USC, correct?

Zamperini: Right.

Hodak: What other schools did you consider attending?

Zamperini: Well, I spent a week up at Stanford with [Robert L.] "Dink" Templeton. Clyde Jeffrey was the top sprinter. So he and I were up there driving a sports car around, deciding whether we liked Stanford or not. And then Cal, and I got letters from various colleges back East.

Hodak: And were they offering you a scholarship?

Zamperini: Yeah, just a scholarship. There was never any money mentioned in regard to a scholarship, although they promised that they would get us some kind of a job. My brother was at Compton Junior College running a pretty good mile and half-mile. So the Dean, Dean Cromwell, came down to see me and he says, "Well, what I'd like to do is to get both you and your brother into USC. I'll give you both a scholarship." So I decided to go to USC. My brother and I entered; I entered

as a freshman and he was probably a junior by that time. So that's how my career began at USC.

Hodak: And 'SC had an extremely strong track tradition. They had a very good team at the time you entered school.

Zamperini: When you went to 'SC, you could ask any athlete on the field, "What event did you hold the world's record in in high school?" [laughter] Dean was smart because when he'd be introduced as the world's greatest track coach, he wouldn't stick out his chest, he would just say, "Well, I get the greatest athletes in the world. Why shouldn't I be the world's greatest track coach?" He had the world's champion half-miler, world's champion miler, world's champion pole vaulter, he got the best.

Hodak: Who were some of your teammates on the track team.

Zamperini: Well, Earl Vickery in the hurdles, Payton Jordan in the sprints, and of course just ahead of me was Sefton and Meadows. There was Barney Willis in the sprints; he also became a world champion all-round cowboy later on. That was his downfall in the sprints. He used to ride that short stirrup in roping, and he'd get about three-quarters down the 100-yard dash and his muscles would tie up. The horse was his undoing. (laughter) And we had Ross Bush, who was the world record-holder in the half-mile in high school. And there was Clarke Mallory in the high jump, Mike Portanova in the two mile, and Hal Smallwood in the 440. There were so many great ones, like Clark Crane, who came from Compton. But they were all champions in high school, and they were a great bunch of guys. It was really a pleasure to travel. We still traveled by train. We'd go up to Oregon or Washington or Cal on the train, and that was a lot of fun.

Hodak: What about Dink Templeton? How did he strike you?

Zamperini: Well, ol' Dink was a strange guy, and yet he was a great coach. And he was funny. He'd make some of the most outlandish remarks. You couldn't believe him, yet he was so convincing that you thought, "Well, I wonder if I believe him or not?" But they all wanted to do Dean Cromwell in, you see—everybody. The Eastern coaches especially, they would have done anything to get Dean out of the picture.

Hodak: So let's go into a little bit about your collegiate career, the records you established, and what events you might have run outside the mile.

Zamperini: I started out as a freshman and ran the mile. I went skiing and tore my knee and ankle ligaments and was laid up for three months. And right at the end of track season, as a freshman, I was invited back to the Princeton invitational and, much to my surprise, I won the two-mile. And they gave us a beautiful solid silver plate with the competitors' autographs etched on it. The next year I went back again, and they gave us a gold stopwatch with split-hand seconds—you know, things that were really practical, (laughter)

That was my freshman year. Now, my sophomore year, in my mind I still remembered Glenn Cunningham getting beaten by Bonthron, and I had to get that record. It may sound a little childish, but it really meant that much to me. And I had planned in advance to stay out of certain races that were not school-scheduled meets. I had planned to do a special training program secretly, without Dean Cromwell knowing about it, which entailed what they were against in those days—and that was running uphill. They said we'd do damage to our hearts and all that stuff. And we were told not to run up the stairways. The doctors, I guess, didn't know at that time that it not only didn't hurt you, but it did you good. [Roger] Bannister, that's all he did. And all the great four-minute milers . . . it was all agony hill, running up those hills.

So I had planned months before . . . I figured I could probably break that record in my junior year. But the way I was running as a sophomore, I figured I could do it my sophomore year. So I began to set my sights on it. I knew there were some great runners, like [Chuck] Fenske, [John] Munski and [James] Smith, and they were tough. But I just decided to set my sights on that and have this special training program. But then something happened that messed the whole thing up; but by the same token, I was allowed to eventually do my style of training, because the coach and the team were in the East and I was left alone out here. So I was able to train on Bovard Field, and then in the evening I would climb over the Coliseum fence and run up the stairways. They were the only mountains I could find around USC. I ran those stairways, and when I got to the top of the stairways my legs were just burning like fire. Then I'd walk around the top row and down again, and run up another flight. I'd do that until I couldn't move anymore. And I did that for a week after each normal workout.

Hodak: I'd like to interrupt you for a minute. When you mentioned that something happened which kept you in L.A. while the team was in the East, are you referring to the incident involving the Compton Relays?

Zamperini: Yes. I'll get into that now. I had just finished running in the Fresno Relays for USC, and the promoter of the Compton Invitational handed me an entry blank and asked me to sign it. I told him that I didn't think I was going to run in the Compton meet. It was not a scheduled USC track meet, and that's what I received my scholarship for, I had other plans. To me, the most important thing in life at that time was to break the national collegiate record. So I just didn't want to run in that meet. I had a special training procedure that I was going to adopt a few weeks before the NCAA so I could be sure and break that record. So they let it go at that. Then, just

a few weeks before the meet, they came to me again with the application, and I said, "No, I'm still not intending to run in the Compton Invitational." Most of the 'SC athletes did run in it year after year.

Hodak: Were milers featured in these invitationals?

Zamperini: Well, at this particular invitational they were inviting my old buddy from the Olympics in 1936, Don Lash. They were making a big duel out of it—he and I together at the meet, two Olympians. And what actually happened was that it was a sellout. They sold every ticket. And I told them that I still didn't intend to run. I told the papers that, but the two big papers called my coach and got a confirmation that I was going to run. The *Long Beach Press Telegram* under Charlie Paddock, the Trojan newspapers, plus the *Pasadena Star News* all printed that I wasn't going to run, because I'd told them I wasn't running. When it got close to the meet, my coach realized that I was serious. Dean tried to convince me that I should run. I told him that I wasn't going to run, I had other plans. It was not a school-sanctioned meet and it was really not necessary for me to run in it. So he cornered me on campus one day with Leo Adams, who was then in charge of the Coliseum. They got me in the car between the two of them and the coach said, "Louie, I just talked to Dean [Hugh] Willett, and he said if you don't run in the Compton meet Friday night the entire track team will be withheld from the NCAA," which was the big meet of the year. And I felt real bad so I said, "Colly, I don't want to run but if that's the case, then I'll run."

So I went back to my room and sat there with my buddies, and we began to talk with the other track athletes. I began to think, and I said, "Hey, no one person is that important. What's wrong? There's something wrong." So then I called Dean Willett, and he had no idea what I was talking about. So

then I knew that my coach had lied to me just to get me to run. Now in the meantime, the woman at the place where I was staying on campus had called the school and told them that I was not eating my meals and that I was ill. And I was, I was sick. I hadn't worked out all week. And so this was another reason for not running. It would be the final blow. But when I called Willett and he didn't know what I was talking about, then I knew they had lied to me. So then I called the coach back and I said, "Dean, I called Willett." And he said, "You didn't!" I said, "Yeah, I called Willett, and he said he didn't know what I was talking about." And then Dean said, "I think you'd better go down to Compton and see the promoter of the track meet." I said, "Okay coach, I'll go down and see him." So what I did was I got two of my athletic buddies to go with me for witnesses in case something happened.

I was immediately pulled into a room and my two buddies were locked outside, so I had no witnesses. And when I went inside, the promoter said, "Louie, what do you want? Four or five gold watches?" (That's what they evidently gave away for winning.) He said, "Do you want four or five gold watches?" That was the only mention of anything of value for running. I said, "No, I just don't want to run. I have other plans." So finally we had a pretty heated argument back and forth. But I knew I wasn't obliged to run in anything but a school-sanctioned track meet. So I finally left with my two buddies, and I told them what happened. I'd have been a fool to run anyway because I hadn't worked out all week, I'd been ill and had lost about seven pounds. So under any circumstances—if he'd have offered me a thousand dollars I wouldn't have run because I would have performed badly. Two weeks before, sure, I could have done it. But when I hadn't eaten well for two weeks and I was ill spending half my time in bed

So I went back and the coach called me again. And this is the

day of the track meet, this is Friday. He called me and tried to convince me that I should run, and I said, "Dean, there's no way I can run now. First of all, I haven't worked out, I've been ill. I didn't want to run in the first place, the pressure's been put on me, and I'm under such a stressful situation I just don't feel like I could run." And all he said was, "Louie, I'll see you down there," and he hung up—which was good psychology. It made me feel terrible. I felt like the guilty party. And I sat around and moaned and groaned, and my buddies were trying to cheer me up. They said, "Louie, if you don't run tonight, we're not going to compete." And both of these fellows had signed entry blanks. So I said, "No, I think I'll go down to the United Artists theater and go to a movie," and they said, "We'll go with you."

So we got into my little '31 Ford coupe and started down to the movie. We turned on the radio and there's the track meet at Compton. We turned it on just as the mile race started. And they had me in that race for about a lap and a half, (laughter) They kept saying, "Zamperini is in third place, pulling up to second now, coming around the far turn. He's moved into first place coming down in front of the grandstand." And I thought, "How can I be there and here?" Then they said, "No, no, that's not him, that's so and so." So that was it. And all through that movie I was distraught. I don't even know what movie we saw, I was just sick to my stomach from all of this piling up on me. So after the movie—of course, we didn't know what was happening in the meantime—we drove back home. I noticed a note on the front door of my place that said, "Louie, don't stay here tonight," and it named all the sportswriters that had been trying to get at me. So I went with one of my buddies to his house and we stayed there. The next morning we woke up and there was that big four-inch headline on the front page of the *L.A. Times*, and that made me sick. I just wanted to die. I didn't know what to do.

Hodak: The headlines in the local papers reported that you were missing because you hadn't come home that night?

Zamperini: Right, I hadn't shown up all night. They didn't say why I was missing, they just said I was missing. So someone knew Zack Farmer, who was one of the men who brought the '32 Games to Los Angeles, and we went to see him. And I told him the whole story, the truth. And I said, "Look, I want the truth printed but I don't want to involve Leo Adams or my coach in this. Now how can we do it without involving them?" So he wrote up this testimony or statement, you might say, to the press. And he wrote it and rewrote it so that I would not implicate USC, and I would not implicate my coach or Leo Adams, because I loved all three of them. So he did a beautiful job, and then the next day we called the press to meet me on campus at a certain house, and each one would be given my statement.

Hodak: And were you, in a sense, responding to allegations made by the Compton promoter?

Zamperini: Yes, the Compton promoter, evidently, when I hadn't shown up for the race, went ahead and started the race. He knew I wasn't there. But it was only when it was announced that I wasn't in the race that the audience began to scream and yell and holler, because they had paid money to see the race. Then he had made a statement that I had come down there; and I did not go down voluntarily. I was asked to go down there. And I certainly would not have gone down there to ask for any kind of remuneration, because I just was not in shape to run. As I said, two weeks before I was in top shape. So he made a statement that I had asked for a certain amount of money to run, and he wouldn't give it to me, and so I disappeared. That's the way he put it.

Hodak: So you were trying to clear the air with this press release?

Zamperini: Right. So I cleared the air. I could only hurt the one person, but he deserved to be hurt because he would not cooperate with my decision. I did not want to run. I am a free soul in a free country and it was not a USC-sanctioned meet, and so under the rules of USC I didn't have to run. But I said I had other plans. I wanted to break that NCAA record. Now, it looked like my dreams were shattered by this ordeal. The statement started out the next morning on the front page again, "It's a contemptible lie!" That's the way I started out my statement about the allegation that was made from Compton—which it was. The only offer of any value to me was the watches, the gold watches. And I could care less about the gold watches, and money was the furthest thing from my mind. I had a one-track mind for that NCAA mile record and that was it.

So I was then made ineligible, temporarily taken off the track team at USC until the AAU looked into it. Having been pulled from the team, I missed the Pacific Coast Conference and ICAAAA meets and was reinstated a week prior to the NCAA meet. The AAU asked for my entry blank and when they got it, it was blank. My name was typed in and I had *never* signed it. They said as far as they were concerned—and this was on the front page again—Louie Zamperini is totally exonerated and eligible to compete at any time. The headlines in the papers read: AAU to Ignore Zamperini Ban. And here I'll quote from the article: *"Though suspended by the coach of his university, Louis Zamperini, USC distance runner, is still an eligible amateur insofar as the Amateur Athletic Union is concerned. Since Louis Zamperini had not signed an entry blank to compete, he was not officially required to compete. Therefore, no effort will be made by the AAU to investigate the various ramifications of the situation that brought about this suspension."*

Charlie Paddock wrote in my defense, saying, "I have been in

amateur athletics 25 years and I still do not understand the fine lines that define a hero from a culprit. If all this is in the spirit of fun without pay, and on a strictly amateur basis, what is the difference between the case of a famous sprinter, George Anderson, who signed an entry blank to run at Compton, but did not show, and Louis Zamperini, who did not sign an entry blank and did not show for the 1500-meter race."

I also should add that my teammates circulated a petition to have me reinstated. Coach Cromwell presented the signed petition, along with his own recommendation, to Professor Hugh Willett, faculty representative at USC. Coach Cromwell also said that since the Compton affair, he had learned that I was offered quite a sum of money to compete against Glenn Cunningham and the university told me I could not run that race. He said I showed a very fine attitude by dropping the matter without a word of protest.

So in the meantime, the track team had gone East to run in an AAU meet, and I wasn't on that trip. That was also good because it gave me a chance to bounce back. I only had two weeks to go. So then I took my workouts and I felt better. After the air was cleared, I felt better because both the coach and Leo Adams came to me, and they were so grateful that I hadn't implicated them in this. Because they were putting the pressure on me; why, I don't know. I wouldn't even speculate on why those two were so intent on me running in an invitational meet like Compton. So they became closer to me than ever before because they realized that I had protected them from whatever it was. Dean and I then became inseparable, and Leo Adams got me a good job working at the Coliseum.

So anyway, I did my workouts. The team was gone, the coach was gone. After a week of this real strenuous, hard workout I was flown back to Minneapolis to meet my coach and track team.

When I got there, I wanted to rest during those few days. I just wanted to just do speed work. And Dean agreed and, sure enough, he had me do starts with the sprinters, he had me jog around the track, and run a couple of easy quarters.

Hodak: What do you mean by speed work?

Zamperini: Well, I'd go out and run 10 or 15 starts out of the holes. That's good for a distance runner because it helps build up the iliacus muscles for your lift at the end of the race. I'd do a couple of easy quarters, and Dean would feel my forehead and say, "Well, you're almost sweating, you'd better take a shower." (laughter) Much different than the week before, running up those stairways.

I just felt like a tiger all week at Minneapolis. I had two close friends then, Clarke Mallory and Payton Jordan, who later became an Olympic coach at the Mexico City Olympics. Well, as we were laying in bed reading magazines, there was a knock at the door and there was coach [John] Nicholson from Notre Dame, an Eastern coach. He said, "Louie, I came up here to warn you about something. I'm ashamed to admit this, but I just came from a meeting of Eastern coaches, and they're going to tell their boys tomorrow to do everything they can to get you out of that race." And I said, "Well, I appreciate you telling me coach, but I can kind of take care of myself." But I didn't realize what was in store for me. I was a marked man in that race. The Eastern coaches didn't want Dean Cromwell to have a champion miler, you see.

But I was keyed up for this race. In fact, before the race I said, "I want to go to a movie. I want to get my mind completely off the race. I want to relax." I couldn't think of anything better than a movie on revenge, which was *The Count of Monte Cristo*. So we sat through that twice and then we

took a taxi to the stadium. They were announcing the three or four fellows they thought would win the race, and my name was not mentioned. See, they were catling these guys out one at a time and they would jog up and down in front of the stands.

But once the gun went off, I just felt like I could never get tired. I planned on moving out the last half-mile because I was really fresh. The race seemed awful slow to me—and it was, because I was in such great shape due to that super workout running up the stairways. But part of the plan of the Eastern coaches was to box me in—and I was boxed in. I couldn't move during that first half-mile. It was deliberate. I started to question these guys, and they cursed back at me. And they would trip me and elbow me. Finally, in the fourth lap I really knew I had to get out, but I couldn't get out. I questioned these guys again, and they cursed at me. When I'd try to pass a guy he'd come back with his elbow and hit me in the ribs, one which I found later was cracked with a hairline fracture. They reached back with their spikes. They had removable spikes that were specially filed to rip my legs. I got four gashes, each one two inches long, two on each leg. I had a spike run through my foot. They also tried to knock me off the track. About the last 120 yards I was severely boxed in. But as we turned to hit the straightaway, the formation that was surrounding me kind of broke up and gave me a little opening. But I still had to force myself through. Then I took off and passed Chuck Fenske and just kept going until I hit the tape.

Hodak: What was your time in this race?

Zamperini: First of all, when I finished, my thought was, "It was so slow we didn't even break 4:20." And they announced it was a new national collegiate record, f:08 and three-tenths. And I couldn't believe it. I thought, "I could have run anything today. I don't care what it was, I could have run it." I

wasn't breathing hard when I finished. I finished with a half-grin on my face. After all that the guys did to me, and to think that I beat them, that gave me a certain amount of satisfaction. So I was grinning when I hit the tape. But they had to take me into the doctor, and he patched up my legs.

Then I came out for pictures that were in the newsreel. And in it you see these great big two-inch patches, four of them. People have said to me, "You know, when I saw you in the newsreel with those patches on your legs, I thought it's got to be soccer, it can't be track and field. You just don't draw blood in track and field." But both of my socks were full of blood when I finished the race. So that was the story of the NCAA, but I got my record. If that was the only thing I ever did in track and field, that made me happy. I got the record back and it was really for Glenn and me. Glenn was my hero. He was my inspiration. And that record meant that much to me to go through all that I went through to get it.

Hodak: Did you encounter more of this rough style of running later?

Zamperini: Running against Eastern runners, I found it to be common in the East, but never in my whole career have I met a runner in the West that would try anything illegal to win the race. But in the East they would do it. Now whether they were prompted by the coaches, I don't know. All I know is—and I won't mention his name—an Eastern runner got a scholarship to a university in Oregon. During a scheduled dual meet, we were in the same race. After the first half-mile he started to trip and push me, and I thought, "What's going on here?" Then I found out after the race that he wasn't a West Coast man, he was from the East. So it seemed to be typical—anything to win. So after that, I had to watch my step. But later I got a taste of the same thing running indoors. It's a very dramatic mile race indoors; much more dramatic than outdoors.

Hodak: And the indoor meets would be on the East Coast?

Zamperini: Right. But you'd take a beating with the jostling and the tripping and the elbowing, you know, fighting for position. They just have to win. The crowd goes crazy. They'd sell out the Garden in New York months before. It's a colorful event, running indoors.

Hodak: And you defended your NCAA title in '39?

Zamperini: In '39 I defended my title. It was a slow field and we didn't break that record then. Then I made the mistake of going indoors. The coach had warned me, he said, "First of all, you're not used to that kind of weather back there, you're a California boy. And indoor running is rough, there's a lot of jostling," as he called it. I said, "What do you mean?" "They'll trip you, they'll push you—and they want to win." And I thought I'd like to try it. So I went back there and got the lesson of my life again. I mean, it was win or else.

I remember I was sick all the time. I had to walk out of the stadium to Madison Square Garden and I walked across the street in a foot and a half of snow, got in the elevator, went up to my room to take a shower and I . . . that cold weather just knocked me for a loop. I had a strep throat all the time I was running. I would feel better and then I was sick again and I couldn't work out. But to run seven or eight or nine races under 4.10 in a row, that was unbelievable to me. And with the way I felt! I slipped, I was jostled, went off the track, my foot went under a platform of wood and it tore a ligament in my little toe, and that took awhile to heal.

When track season started again, it was still giving me trouble, but that wasn't my real problem. I began to work out intensely and was getting in pretty good shape, then all of a sudden I felt this sharp pain just under my collarbone. My dad was

timing me then, and he asked, "What's wrong?" I said, "I don't know, I just felt this sharp pain, it must be a nerve or something." But I didn't give it much thought. Then I went back to 'SC to work out and I just wasn't up to par, and my coach knew it. Dean said, "Louie, there's something wrong, are you getting enough sleep? Are you eating well?" I said, "Yeah Dean, I'm training like I always train." But I kept getting worse, so he finally sent me to a dentist, and they pulled a wisdom tooth that they thought was infected. Then they sent me to another doctor and they took a tonsil out; they thought that was it. Back to the doctor again; they punctured my sinus and flushed that out. They could not figure out what was wrong—and there obviously was something wrong. But nobody could put their finger on it. The doctors couldn't. Then, two days before the Cal meet, I'm invited to the California Club for lunch. The next morning I wake up with ptomaine poisoning. I'm not hinting or making any suggestions, (laughter)

Hodak: Purely coincidental (laughter)

Zamperini: It was really ironic that it would happen then. And I was sick. Man, they did everything they could for me. I had to compete because it was one of those meets where you're gonna win by a point. So the doctor gave me some paragoric for that, and then he gave me some stuff like cement, a white powder. He says, "This will do it." So I took that and ran in the mile, and I was beaten by guys who shouldn't have been within 30 yards of me. Anyway, so that was it, at least I had made a couple of points. Dean came around, I was lying down, and he says, "Unless we can pick up a couple more points, we're going to lose the track meet." I said, "Okay coach, I'll run the two miles." So I ran the two miles and around the middle of it, I collapsed. They took me to the hospital, and they still did not know what was wrong with me. And then the announcement was made that the Tokyo Olympics

were canceled, and that, again, was a depressant.

Then after getting out of USC in 1940, I went down with some of my athletic buddies to Lockheed to apply for a job. They gave us a complete physical. They x-rayed my lungs, as they did everybody else. They called me back in and said, "Do you know that you've had pleurisy in your right lung for a long time?" The doctor said, "How in the world did you ever finish a race on one lung?" A!! the time I was running, I was getting beaten by guys in 4:11, 4:12, 4:13, the fellows that I should have beaten by 20, 30 or 40 yards. So this was the reason—I had pleurisy.

Hodak: And you think you possibly could have broken the four-minute mile?

Zamperini: Running 4:08 so easily and running 4:06, 4:07 when I was ill; I know that the day that I broke the national collegiate record, yes, I could have run four flat. I'm a good judge of pace and timing, and I really thought we ran about 4:21 or 4:22 in that mile, and we ran 4:08. Yeah, I think I could have knocked eight or nine seconds off.

Hodak: You mentioned making the Olympic team as a big thrill and then breaking the NCAA mile record as an emotional thrill. Are there any other races or meets that stand out to the same extent?

Zamperini: It would have to be during the ICAAAA meet in New York in 1939. I had just defeated Johnny Woodruff in an easy 4:11 mile for a new ICAAAA record, when coach Cromwell held a quick session with his relay team to inform them that we were short one quarter-miler for the four-man mile. He said, "It looks like we have one of two choices, it's either Payton Jordan or Zamperini." The three quarter-milers unanimously chose Payton, with the argument that Zamperini is a distance runner

and Payton a top sprinter. Cromwell said, "it's possible that Payton may not be able to go the distance." They still chose Payton. With all due respect for the democratic process, Cromwell overruled their decision and entered me as leadoff. I was thinking to myself, "I hope coach knows what he is doing." Well, the gun cracks and I am immediately last and held that position for the first 220, which I ran in a slow 24.5 seconds. All of a sudden those in front of me began to slow down. I was sure of this because I wasn't going any faster. I began to weave forward through the pack and passed all but one as I gave the baton to Art Redding. He was so shocked to see me up front he almost fumbled the baton. I hadn't increased my speed the last 220. I simply held on to the same pace, repeating the 24.5, giving me an honest 49 flat quarter. Sure, I was beaten, but as Cromwell said, "You have just broken your own personal record in the 440. He then said, "Well, now Zamp, you have found out that you are a versatile runner—you can run anything from a 440 to a marathon. I am going to show you how to make three more Olympic teams.

Dean Cromwell never ceased to amaze me with not only his ability as a coach but his psychological analysis of each athlete. I would have to say that Cromwell was incomparable as a person and his decisions intuitive, and this certainly paid off for USC with the longest winning streak in the history of track and field.

So anyway, to resume with the issue of this pleurisy, I went in the Air Force and they x-rayed us and so forth and then called me in and said, "You have a cloud on your lung." They asked me if I'd ever had this or that, you know. I lied to them and said no. I really wanted to be in the Air Force. He said, "Well, okay. Come back in three weeks." I was stationed in Midland, Texas, taking bombardier training. I had three weeks there, and if I came back in three weeks and I still had the

cloud, they might have thrown me out. So I decided—I'm not a doctor—but I just thought, well, we perspire outside and we probably perspire inside, you know. And Midland, Texas, was hot! So every afternoon on their track I went out and ran four or five miles in that hot weather. I drank tons of water and ran continually. I did this for three weeks and, boy, did I get in shape. At the end of three weeks I came back in for my x-rays and they said, "Well, the cloud is very faint now, it's diminishing." I figured it can't be anything serious if it's going away. So they let me stay in, but I never told them that I had pleurisy.

But I got in real good shape and then went overseas with the 42nd Bomb Squadron of the 11th Bomber Group, and continued to run over there. I probably got in the greatest shape of my life. I was doing things—overweight, mind you, 12 or 15 pounds overweight—that I couldn't do when I was running 4:08, and that was to go out and run a solo mile by myself without pressure in 4:12, 4:13 and 4:14. Then they had Gunther Haag coming over from Sweden and they tried to get me to go back and compete against him.

Hodak: To go back to the United States?

Zamperini: He was in New York. They wanted me to come back to the United States, so they got in touch with General [Henry Harley] "Hap" Arnold to get me to come back to compete against Gunther Haag. I had given them my training schedule, and told them my times without competition. So I was in top shape again. So the lung problem . . . the way I handled that, evidently, caused it to disappear. Oh, there's probably some scar tissue there but the thing is I got in top shape again.

I was really looking forward to racing Gunther Haag, but I was notified that I was in a special bomb unit and couldn't leave the island. So my headquarters was Hawaii and I couldn't come

back to the States to run. But I ran there and did more workouts there than I did at USC. At USC I worked out once a day. In Hawaii I worked out twice a day. So I knew that hard work was the answer. And that's what happened to me. So if the 1940 Olympics had taken place, I think I would have been warned enough in advance about the pleurisy that I might have been able to get in shape for that. The end of track season then was June, so I would have had three months of hard workouts to get in shape for that, after I had taken the treatment for my pleurisy. But as long as I had the pleurisy, I couldn't get better, I just kept getting worse.

Hodak: So where did you go from Hawaii?

Zamperini: In Hawaii I was in the B-24 bombing unit. I graduated from bomber training in '42 and was assigned to a bomb unit. We flew to Hawaii and set up our base at, first, Hickam Field near Pearl Harbor. Then they set up a special air base on the other side of the island, Kahuku Air Base, and that's where we did our bomb training. We went through extensive training on dropping bombs and firing machine guns. We had to shoot skeets twice a week to learn how to lead a plane and so forth. We were really well trained. I remember our bombing missions at 10,000 feet averaged a margin of error of 50 feet, which is a bull's-eye. And that's pretty good. Of course, that was the famous Norton bombsight; and once you got onto it and got your coordination of your eyes and both hands, you could pretty well stick to that 50-foot, 75-foot error at 10,000 feet. Now, these are what I called marathon missions. In Europe they fly three or four missions in one day. They go back and load up. Our mission is to fly from . . . for instance, we were the first to bomb Wake Island after the Japanese took it. So we had to fly from Hawaii to Midway, load *up* with bombs, and fly to Wake Island round trip, which was unheard of. But we did it by taking out half the bombs and putting in bomb bay tanks, and we still were able to carry, with a half a bomb load,

as much as a B-17 carried with a full bomb load. So that's a mission for you. That's got to be . . . round trip from Midway to Wake is about 2,400 miles. So you figure a mission is 5,000 miles.

Hodak: And you were stretching the limit too much with fuel?

Zamperini: We were stretching the limit; sometimes we would land back at the base and as we'd be taxiing to our bunker one motor would run out of fuel. That's cutting it pretty fine. But we had to surprise the Japanese. They felt pretty secure on Wake, except for any Naval vessels that might come by and bombard them. But to have bombers surprise them at midnight on Christmas Eve, '42, well, they were not alerted to that. They were all asleep, we came and dove from about 10,000 feet. We did not have the Norton bombsight, we had what they called a 59-cent sight. It was a little half-moon thing with a weight on it, and we learned to use that in practice in Hawaii. So we'd dive-bomb, pull out at 3,500 feet, and drop our bombs—and we really leveled the island. However, we made a mistake by using our wing tank up first in gasoline, and when we dive-bombed, the bomb bay tanks were still full—and that's a lot of weight. When we pulled up, the tanks slipped two or three inches and the bomb bay doors wouldn't close. And flying back with the bomb bay doors open ate up our fuel and caused a parasite drag. But the Japanese thought we were carrier planes taking off from a carrier, they were so confused. Nobody could believe that a bomber could fly round trip that far. And that was the longest round-trip mission of the war up to that time. So we surprised them there. Then the next one was down to the island of Canton, from where we bombed the Marshall and Gilbert Islands; another one of those missions where you'd fly thousands and thousands of miles just for one mission and then you'd fly back.

Hodak: You were flying back to Hawaii?

Zamperini: Yeah, our base was Hawaii, and this is what fooled the Japanese. They couldn't figure out where this unit came from. And that was General Arnold's idea, to set us up as a kind of experimental bomb unit. And we did experiment, we tried skid-bombing. We dropped the bombs on the water like torpedoes, but a couple of times the bombs would hit the waves and bounce back up and hit the plane. (laughter] So we decided that skid-bombing wasn't too good an idea for a B-21. The dive-bombing worked out pretty good except for the bomb bay tanks slipping.

Then we went on perhaps the longest mission of all. We flew from Hawaii to the Ellice Islands way down in the South Pacific. We got there and found out that we were to bomb the phosphate island of Nauru, the greatest concentration of phosphate in the world. But we were not to go on a direct heading from the Ellice Islands. The particular island we were on was called Funafuti. Instead, we were to fly over towards Guadalcanal and come in on their heading so the Japanese would be confused again. And we were to keep radio silence. I believe the mistake the general made on that raid was that he had all flights fly over at exactly the same altitude, which is 10,000 feet. Once the Japanese zeroed in and got their anti-aircraft set up for 10,000 feet, we were sitting ducks. The first couple of planes got through okay, then of course they were alerted. Seven Zeroes took off—and we were the ones that got most of the hits. They all picked on our plane. So we had three Zeroes on us from the time we approached through the flak. They followed us away from the formation and they were determined to get us down. So we ended up with five cannon holes in the plane and about 600 bullet holes.

After I dropped my bombs I could hear moaning and groaning on the intercom. So I went back to the flight deck and the bomb bay doors were open. They couldn't be closed because one of the cannons hit the fuel line, you know, the hydraulic

fuel, so you couldn't raise or lower your flaps, you couldn't raise or lower your wheels, and there was purple fluid all over the airplane. Then I saw the radioman hanging from the catwalk, straight down, 10,000 feet above the water. He was pleading for help. He couldn't reach up with a hand, or he would have fallen. So I grabbed him and pulled him back up on the deck, and while I was doing that I felt something trickling down my neck. I looked up and saw the upper turret gunner was hit in the foot; his toes were dangling there and the blood was running down my neck. So I got the radioman secured and put an oxygen mask on him because there was nothing further I could do for him. The shrapnel had gone through his sheepskin and into his head, his back and his lungs. Then I gave the gunner in the upper turret a shot of morphine in his leg, then put sulfa drug on his foot and bandaged him up the best I could. I then headed back on the catwalk to the waist of the airplane, and everyone there was laid out—stomachs opened up from exploding bomb shells. It really was a mess.

Hodak: How large a crew would you have on a B-24?

Zamperini: Well, we had ten on a crew; four officers and six enlisted men. You have the upper turret, the belly turret, and the tail turret, and then you have the two waist guns. It was such a mess that I thought, "I can't handle all of this alone." Because the right tail was shot off, the pilot and copilot, to keep the plane from stalling out, each had both hands and both knees on the yoke forcing it forward. I called them and I said, "I've got to have help." So finally the copilot came back, a fellow named Cupernil, who had shared the Pulitzer Prize with somebody just before he got in the Army. He was a great guy. He came back to help me with the rest of the casualties. We had to strip off their clothes, put sulfa on them—everything we were trained to do. We put these large compresses on them and comforted them. That took a long time.

About that time, we were heading into the base, and we knew we didn't have any brakes. I thought, "How are we going to stop?" This island was as long as the runway—one mile. That's short. One mile for a bomber with no brakes. An idea hit me. I took a parachute and tied it to the tail gun, and two other parachutes and tied one to the right waist and one to the left waist window, then tied all three together to the tripod of the machine-gun mounts. I had it worked out so I could stand in the middle, and if I wanted to turn the plane right or left, I could pull the right or left parachute. I pulled the one out the rear to begin with, to slow down. In the meantime, I had tied the injured, with cord, to the machine-gun mounts with just a single wraparound and a loop. I did that so they didn't have to untie any knots. That way, they would be secure, yet by just throwing the cord over they could get loose in case the plane caught on fire.

Well, we were able to pump the wheels down. We had to do this by hand. Now, you have to pump the wheels down before you pump the flaps down, otherwise you can't see if the locking device is locking the wheels down. So I pumped the wheels down first, then pumped the flaps down prior to landing. And when we landed, there was one thing we hadn't realized: When I was in the nose of the ship, when I had just dropped my bombs, the navigator was in the nose turret. A 20-millimeter cannon came through the nose turret, and severed the cable on the nose turret, so he was unable to manipulate it and he was locked in there with that little door turned about 20 or 30 degrees. And there was no way he could get out of there. The 20-millimeter cannon shell went by my face and I heard it whiz by and hit the window. It made a loud crack and went down and hit the left wheel as it was pulled up into the wing. So the tire was flat, but we didn't know that. We lowered the tire and it looked like any other tire, until we hit the ground. And fortunately, because of that flat tire, it caused us to ground loop on that side and I didn't have to use

the parachutes. So we ground looped and I jumped out and gave the cross signal, and the Marines were out there in a flash. One of the Marines that came out there happened to be one of my running mates from USC, a half-miler named Art Redding, (laughter) He saw me and he said, "What are you doing here?" He was the first fellow there to help.

Hodak: So where was this landing?

Zamperini: This landing was on Funafuti. That island was a mile long and a quarter-mile wide, so you can imagine how small it was.

Hodak: And this was not your targeted landing? You had intended to return to Hawaii?

Zamperini: No, our job was to go back to Funafuti and then bomb Tarawa the next day. But here's what happened. Several planes were hit. According to General [Willis H.] Hale, we had the worst shot up B-24 that ever got back to the base. Somebody on another ship, some pilot, evidently panicked and broke radio silence and called the commander and said, "Should we take the heading back to Guadalcanal?"—and we were supposed to do that. We were supposed to start heading back towards Guadalcanal for a short while and then cut over—"Or shall we go directly back to Funafuti?" And the Japanese got that name, so they knew exactly where we came from. There was also a submarine, we were told, at a certain heading, 20 miles off of Nauru. So in case we had a crippled ship, we were to land in that vicinity and the submarine would pick us up. But no one had to do that. The submarine was there, nevertheless, and confirmed the kills. Our plane alone had shot down three Zeroes. I confirmed all three planes that crashed, and who got them. There were a total of seven Zeroes that took off and all seven were shot down—and we got three of them. Of course, we had awards on the island for

being the best on the machine gun.

So our plane was so badly shot up that we couldn't go on the Tarawa mission the next day. The radioman, by the way, died that night. The doctors gave us credit for saving three or four of the crew with the emergency first aid; that is, that these men didn't bleed to death. But that was something we were trained to do. Sure, it's shocking to see your buddies laid out like that, but when you're trained you go to work immediately, feelings don't interfere. We just did our job and that was it.

Hodak: So did you return to Hawaii, or did you stay in the South Pacific?

Zamperini: No, we didn't stay there. What happened was this. We went to bed that night. Now, the Japanese heard that captain that broke radio silence, and they knew the island was Funafuti. Evidently, the Marines weren't alert for some reason. I guess they thought, "Well, we really laid them flat." So planes had come in from Tarawa that night at about one in the morning. I heard some planes flying overhead and thought, "Well, somebody's coming in from the States." See, there are a lot of islands there, and the Japanese were trying to figure out which island these guys were on. They knew Funafuti, but they had to be able to pick it up at night. Well, they finally picked it up and, boy, they started at one end of that island and you could hear the bombs dropping, *boom*, then louder, *boom*. Boy, we were out of those tents in a hurry. There was one native hut there where there was supposed to be a bomb shelter underneath. It was raining and the ground was wet and slippery. And we didn't crawl in there—we dove in. One guy on top of the other into that thing. Just as we got in, *boom*, it hit right next to us and blew up our tent and the war correspondent's tent next to us, blew up the church, and killed a lot of guys and natives that didn't have enough sense to keep

their heads down. It was really a sad mess. They pattern-bombed that small island back and forth, back and forth. You see, the Marines, evidently, were not alert on their radar and hadn't picked up these planes, or maybe they thought they were friendly planes, I don't know. All I know is they got us but good.

Now, what made me mad was that the general had turned his report in in Hawaii and said that we had very light destruction on the island. But I have pictures here that show the total devastation of what they did to that island. There were a few B-21s that could be repaired, very few, and flown off to Tarawa the next day to bomb Tarawa, where these planes had come from. But where bombers were hit in their bunkers, there were holes like 30 feet deep and 80 feet across. The destruction of structures and aircraft was heavy. It was a small island. No matter where they dropped, they were bound to destroy something. In my diary I listed the number of men that were killed. But anyway, that was the last mission. Here you fly three missions, and that's a total of maybe 18,000 miles, (laughter) You know, in Europe they fly 100 miles for a mission, or some guy said they made four or five sorties in one day. Well, ours were long hauls. You were lucky to survive the flight alone, with all the storms and plane trouble we had.

Finally, we got back to the base at Kahuku and were to have a couple of days off. And then a report came in that a B-25 had gone down about 900 miles north of Palmyra, which is probably about 800 miles south of Hawaii. We weren't commanded to go, because we were entitled to a couple of days off, but the pilot of my plane volunteered the whole crew to go out and search since there were no other crews available. We had done this before and had actually found a B-25 crew that had ditched after running out of fuel. But the only plane available—our plane had to be serviced—was a plane that didn't fly combat, called the "Green Hornet." It was what we called a musher. It

would fly with the tail down; it couldn't carry a bomb load, couldn't get off the ground with one. Engineers from Consolidated Aircraft checked the plane over from stem to stern and said that it was exactly like all the other planes, it should fly. But it just wouldn't fly right. So it was just used for what we called the cabbage run. We'd fly to the main island of Hawaii and pick up lettuce, fresh vegetables, steaks, and stuff like that. But it was also used for something like this, a search mission. We didn't have any bombs aboard, there was no ammunition, so the plane was light.

Well, we got to the general area where the B-25 had gone down, where it last reported. We began to circle the designated area. The cloud cover was about 1,000 feet, therefore we had to fly at 800 feet, which is pretty low. We started to circle the area to see if we could spot any wreckage or a life raft or anything. And suddenly the RPMs dropped radically on the right outboard motor. The engineer was called to feather the motor. He was new and green and feathered the wrong motor, the troubled motor was vibrating badly and had to be feathered. Well, this plane could hardly fly on four motors with no bombs—and here we had two motors out. So she started to drop like a rock. We had just enough time to get to our stations. My station was the right waist window with a life raft that's in a container. The ship didn't make a normal water landing. Now, B-2's don't make a good water landing even during the best of conditions. So we went down at a fairly steep angle with the right wing up. We had full throttle on the two left motors but to no avail. The plane just yawed to the left, nosed down, hit the water, and then there was an explosion. I was trapped under the tripod of the machine-gun mount. The life raft was under me on the deck of the ship, and I was wedged between the life raft and the top of the tripod, which comes to a point. The tail evidently snapped off and the tail wires, which are springlike, just curled up around me. I was in great physical shape, but I could not

break loose. I was wedged in. Even if I could have budged, these wires were all around me. I thought, "This is a hopeless situation." And all of a sudden it started getting darker. I felt my ears pop . . . and then it felt like someone had hit me in the forehead with a sledgehammer. And then I lost consciousness.

Now, the plane was still sinking. Water pressure had caused me to be unconscious, and I'm still sinking deeper and deeper, there's more water pressure . . . and yet I regained consciousness and found myself freed and loosened from the tripod. I thought I was dreaming. I was thinking, "Maybe I'm dead. Maybe this is the afterlife." But as I swung my arms around trying to hold onto something my USC ring snagged onto the waist window. So I got my other arm down, and it took all the strength I could muster, and with the plane still sinking, I arched my back out, and that took some flesh off my back. I inflated my life jacket and after what seemed a long time, I popped to the surface, but I was swallowing saltwater and gasoline.

When I got to the surface I saw the usual rubble that follows a crash. I saw the pilot and the tail gunner, who were fortunately blown free during the explosion, now hanging onto a gas tank. But they were both in a state of shock. There was a life raft drifting away from the wreckage area—in fact, two life rafts. So I swam immediately aboard one raft, rowed to them, and pulled them in. Then, after that I had to row like mad to get the other raft, for added security. The pilot's head had two severe gashes on it and blood was just spurting out. I knew I had to get that blood stopped quickly or he'd bleed to death. Again, the training came into play. I had been an Eagle Scout, had taken advanced first aid at USC, and I'd taken a survival course in Hawaii which included first aid. I immediately found the pressure point on his neck and jaw and stopped the bleeding, took our tee-shirts off, made a huge

compress out of three tee-shirts, put it on his head, and wouldn't allow him to move a muscle for three weeks.

Hodak: So, other than the pilot and the copilot, the remainder of the crew had died instantly?

Zamperini: There was an officer who wanted to go to Palmyra with us so he came along just for the ride, so there were 11 men. So now there were 3 of us, out of 11, alive. Of course, we weren't church-going guys, we certainly never prayed while we were in combat. But after my escape, I was puzzled. I looked for a logical answer. "How could I have gotten loose?" I went through it again and again. My ears had popped, I felt the pressure on my forehead, I had lost consciousness—then I'm freed. And I finally had to come to the conclusion that there had to be some kind of divine intervention. I had begun to pray . . . my buddies saw me and they started praying with me. Of course on life rafts, that's what you do mostly—you pray.

Hodak: How many days were you floating on the rafts?

Zamperini: We were 47 days adrift, bobbing up and down. We had rations of concentrated chocolate aboard, but during a storm the first night it all went overboard. All we had left was three pints of water in cans. During the course of 47 days we were able to catch about five small fish. We also caught about three albatross; the first one we threw away because we couldn't stand the smell of it. But we got so hungry that the next one tasted like a hot fudge sundae with nuts and whipped cream on it. We caught two sharks by hand. We'd catch a gooney bird if it landed on our head or on the raft; we'd have to move very slowly to catch them. They have a fairly long beak and it's serrated. I still have white lines on my hands where they were chewed up by the gooney birds. Before we caught them, they usually had been feeding so we'd find small sardines inside them, which we then used for bait to catch larger fish. We

also used the bait to lure sharks. The bait was hung at the water line to attract the smaller sharks—three or four feet long. While the shark attempted to get the bait on one end of the raft I was on the other end, and quickly grabbed it by the tail and pulled him back into the raft. We had parachute flare cartridges that we'd shove in the shark's mouth. Once they bit down on the cartridge, they wouldn't bite the raft or you. What we really needed now was a knife; but all we had was a pair of pliers, and we never did figure out what they were for. They had a screwdriver on one end of the handle and a plier on the other handle. We used that to jam into the shark's eye, into his brain, and do him in. Now, it is difficult to cut into a shark. We didn't have a knife but we had these metal mirrors. So with the pliers we were able to break out teeth like a saw, big teeth. When I finished making a mirror into a saw, I think I could rip your arm open from shoulder to the elbow in one swish. Yet it took us awhile to open up a four-foot shark—that's how tough they are. The only part of the shark that we were taught we could eat was the liver. If you try to eat shark meat, it does make you ill. Shark meat can be eaten safely if it's cooked. We knew that vitamins were made from the liver, so on two different occasions we had a luscious, gooey, bloody meal of liver. The larger sharks were our constant companions and often would thrust their heads up over the raft trying to pick us off. We came to the conclusion that all they wanted to do was eat us.

Hodak: And you would depend on rainwater?

Zamperini: We had gone about a week without water and were desperate. Two of us, with the aluminum oars, would keep the sharks away while one guy would hang in the water. We'd give each other a half-hour in the water to keep from being dehydrated and to keep from sweating, and I believe that kept us from dying of thirst during those days. Every time we'd see a squall . . . they rained just 30 seconds, a minute or two

minutes, and *boom*, they're gone. We tried rowing to these squalls to get in on the water but we were killing ourselves trying and we knew it! We rowed like mad, never seeming to get there in time. I said, "Fellows, we've been praying about everything else and we seem to be getting along fine. Let's just pray for water, sit back and relax—otherwise we're going to kill ourselves." We were expending too much energy, so we just laid back and prayed. Then, here comes a squall; we just lay there and it came right over us. It wasn't raining then, but as soon as it got to us it rained. We had our pumps in a little container, so we ripped one end open and made a hood out of it. We'd hold that hood into the rain. We couldn't always drink the water we caught, because a whitecap would burst over us and spoil the water. But with the first swallow of water in eight days, I knew I was the wealthiest man in the world! There was one time that we thought we could drink at least five gallons apiece. Well, one day we got all we could drink . . . but we couldn't hold more than a pint. I suppose our stomachs had shrunk. We never moved a muscle. We just prayed and believed and the water came to us. The first time it happened, we thought, "Well, it's a coincidence." The second time, we began to wonder if it was a coincidence or if Cod was really answering our prayers? But the third time it happened, we were convinced. After that we kept on praying.

Finally, on the 27th day, we heard an airplane. We looked up and saw this speck far away, and we knew it was too far up and off course to do us any good. But we took a quick vote and decided on two parachute flares plus one packet of water dye in the ocean, then we picked up the mirrors and started to flicker them, but the plane disappeared. Then, all of a sudden it began to reappear. So they had seen something, the dye, the mirrors or whatever. They came back and of course we were so excited with joy, to think that tonight we'll be on the island of Palmyra eating steak and drinking with the Marines. The plane began to circle us, so we waved our shirts and

started yelling and screaming—and in return for that we got machine-gun fire. I thought, "Those idiots, they think we're Japanese." The next time it circled us, we looked closer and saw the red circle (the rising sun) on the fuselage. It turned out to be a Japanese "Sally bomber" we had mistaken for a B-25. So they strafed us for about 45 minutes. The first time they circled around, all three of us got in the water to avoid the machine-gun fire. The pilot and tail gunner were too weak to get back in the ship, so they stayed in the raft and I made my dive into the water. I preferred socializing with the sharks to being a target for the enemy. Every time that plane passed over, I was under the raft trying to avoid these sharks. We were taught to straight-arm them, show them your teeth and the white of your eyes, and that was supposed to scare them, according to this expert. But the eyes and the teeth didn't work. So the straight-arm sounded like the best idea. So when they'd make a pass, I'd just reach out and shove my hand on the snoot of their nose, and they would take off frightened, and that would give me a chance to get back in the raft. I was told by my Boy Scout master that bullets would stop about three feet into water, and that is about right. I could see the bullets coming through, slowing down and harmlessly sink to the darkness. So I'd keep my head below surface at arm's length every time the plane passed over. Then I'd pull myself back into the raft and watch; they'd make a quick circle again and I'd get back in the water. They hit the raft every time they'd pass over. I could see where the bullets missed the other two by a fraction of an inch, yet they weren't hit. And I wasn't touched. Finally, I said to Phil and Mac, "Pretend you're dead, put your arms over the raft."

Hodak: How did the raft stay inflated?

Zamperini: Well, if you took an innertube and put it in a swimming pool and shot it full of holes with a .22, it wouldn't sink, it would just ripple up. There would still be air in it. When you get

the weight in there, more and more air comes out. So the raft is now semi-submerged. We thought we were finished. So, finally they made a pass and didn't fire. Then they came around again and we saw the bomb bay doors open. These two guys pretended to be dead—in fact, we all pretended to be dead. Then I saw the bomb bay doors open and I thought, "Oh, no!" And, sure enough, they dropped a depth charge. And I saw that baby coming down, ducked under the water, and thought, "This is the ultimate in barbarism." I immediately shoved my head out of the water and saw it hit; it missed us by about 30-50 feet. Evidently, the bombardier didn't arm the bomb properly, because it didn't go off, and eventually it sank to the bottom—fortunate for us. They made another pass over and we just laid in the raft like we were dead. They didn't fire again—I am sure they figured we were dead, they saw the raft wrinkled on the water—and then they went back to their base.

We then spent the eight most miserable days of our lives, pumping constantly. We were so tired of pumping, we had to take the pump and push the pump away from us, put the handle on our chest, and pull the pump towards us. Then we'd take like five minutes each and go round the circle, then I would try to patch. I had to rip the canvas to get to the hole. We had a little patch-kit and in that was your dope, your rubber patch, and your sandpaper for roughing it up. But whoever made the raft made a mistake and put in real sandpaper; and sandpaper and water don't mix. So we pulled the paper out and the sand was on the bottom of the container, but there was no grit so we really couldn't get a decent patch. So we tried to scrape the rubber with the mirror that had the teeth on it. We got the top fairly well patched, then we had to patch the bottom. And this was really something. Now, one raft was shattered. So we only had the one raft now with three guys in it. The raft consisted of two innertubes covered by canvas. As the bullets penetrated the tubes, they left

holes on the bottom as well as the top. After patching the holes on the top, we had to figure out how to patch the bottom holes. We decided to let the air out of one half while we sat precariously on the other half. We would then pull the bottom face up in order to patch it. We were now confronted with a problem we could do without. The sharks we still had with us needed to be prodded away with the aluminum oars. Another problem was the saltwater lapping against the patch area, which kept the patch and patching dope from adhering properly.

Hodak: Which direction were you drifting?

Zamperini: I had studied weather and ocean maps prior to take off. And I figured that from where the plane crashed, the water current would carry us in an easterly direction. I knew that the currents were constant that way to the Marshall and Gilbert Islands. So I always had faith that if we survived long enough, we would probably drift into the Marshall or Gilbert Islands, which were about 1,500 miles.

We finally got the raft in fairly decent shape to where we only had to pump it up about once every 15 minutes. Now, the tail gunner was in real bad shape physically when we crashed. He was not prepared for anything like this, so he panicked the first day. He said, "We're gonna die, we're gonna die!" And I had to slap his face to bring him to his senses. The most important thing is to be prepared for survival; whether it is mountain climbing, survival on land or sea. If you take an examination in school and you're not prepared, you usually are fearful and can't function mentally. It has happened to me. I've gone into a classroom well prepared, sat right down, took my test and walked right out. So, to me this experience was a challenge because I was trained in survival. I was in top physical shape. My pilot was in good shape. We played three or four sets of tennis almost every day at the base. The tail

gunner would not take part in any physical exercises on the island. He chain-smoked, drank all he could drink, spent his nights in Honolulu. So the day of the crash, his body just wasn't physically able to take this great punishment. We had given him most of the food and water to keep him alive as long as we could and, finally, during the middle of the night, he groaned, stiffened up, and I knew he was dead. I said, "Phil . . . Max is dead." We just laid there all tangled up and didn't move until morning. We were tangled up with a dead man. That morning we said a eulogy the best way we could and slipped him overboard. He was just skin and bone, like all three of us, and he just sank out of sight. That left the two of us.

Hodak: This was what, the 33rd day?

Zamperini: This was the 33rd day. We had made a bet. I bet that we would spot land on the 17th day, the pilot picked the 46th day. We did spot land on the 17th day, an island. We were in an all-night storm, we kept about four inches of water in the raft for stability. We covered up, and we laid low in the raft to keep from being turned over. The next day there were great, huge waves. I couldn't believe it, it was like riding colossus out there. We'd be up on top of a wave then, *boom*, down in a trough. I looked over and I saw this green patch. I said, "Phil, I've just seen an island." He popped up and said, "I see it." Then it started getting calmer and calmer, and I said, "There's bound to be Japanese on those islands," so we kind of held off. We drifted into about a dozen islands. But we could see, as we got close enough, that they were deserted, there was no sign of life. There were huts, we could see bananas, we could see bread fruit and coconuts. Being a Boy Scout I couldn't wait to get ashore. Then, all of a sudden we heard motors, we looked up and saw two Zeroes, oh, probably up about 15,000 feet. They were up there practicing combat. We were just hoping they wouldn't see us. We then saw this

one island, we began to row towards it, then we saw a ship way off. The ship was evidently patrolling the island. And they kept going in one direction and then another. We laid low in the raft. But they finally saw us. When they passed by us they had their machine guns on us, then they opened their shirts and pointed to us. I thought, "They want to shoot us in the chest." So I opened up my shirt, closed my eyes, and Phil did the same thing—and no machine-gun fire. What they wanted to see was if we had a gun hidden, I guess. Then they made another pass. And they were still cautious, I think. There were just the two of us, hopeless and helpless skeletons. We couldn't even stand up the first day on the ship. They had machine guns aimed and had their knives pulled, (laughter) It was kind of humorous. They finally pulled us aboard and all we could do was barely crawl. They gave us a piece of biscuit and some water, and then they tied us to the mast of the ship.

Hodak: How much longer do you think you could have survived on the raft?

Zamperini: We would have outlasted the raft, I think. The raft was a mess. The rubber was now turning to gum from the sun. The yellow on the raft was all in our clothes, so it was ready to pop. I think the raft would have probably lasted two more days; I think we could have survived another 10 or 15 days.

Hodak: Where did they take you once you were aboard ship?

Zamperini: Well, we were still prisoners, and they didn't treat us kindly. They pulled the raft aboard because they couldn't believe the holes in it. Then we were tied back-to-back to the post, and they came around and hit my pilot across the jaw with the pistol and knocked him out. They came around in front of me, and I had my head forward . . . I had a trick up my sleeve. As soon as he swung forward with the pistol I threw my head

back. He missed me, but I knocked myself out on the mast.

So then they took us to Maloelop, and there they weighed us in at . . . I think it was about 59 or 60 pounds. We were there for three days, then they put us aboard a ship. Now, they were pretty nice to us there. The commander would come in and talk to us. He said, "Tomorrow you will be placed on an island called Kwajalein. But he said, "I cannot guarantee your safety after you leave this ship." The commander of this ship, a big freighter, had been into Seattle many times, and he spoke pretty good English. He'd come down every day to see us in our hole and tell us the Japanese have got to win this war because they're a poor nation. He was trying to get sympathy from us to side with the Japanese. We were then given food. It was the first generous portions we had had. Shortly after eating I had to go up on the deck and throw up. The Japanese were holding onto me to keep me from falling into the ocean, and I was so sick I was hoping they'd let me go. Finally, we ended up at Kwajalein, and we spent 43 days there in solitary confinement.

Hodak: What was the commander suggesting when he said that he couldn't guarantee your safety?

Zamperini: This we will find out on Kwajalein. He knew that no prisoners left Kwajalein alive. They were all executed by decapitation. But we didn't know that. We get to Kwajalein and were put in our cells separately, we were not allowed to talk to each other. The cell is 2 feet 3 inches wide and 6 feet long and 7 feet deep, and that's your bathroom, bedroom and kitchen. You talk about maggots And we have a little hole in the door about so big, just with latticed bars. Our food was their leftovers that was being taken to the hogs. On the way they just threw in a riceball or whatever they had. It would break up on the dirt floor and we'd have to scramble for every grain. Then a native came in. It's amazing, this native was born and

raised on Kwajalein. He got special permission to see me, because he was a Trojan fan and he followed 'SC football and track, and he knew all the records. Well, he also told me that they kill all prisoners on Kwajalein. He said, "I'm glad to meet you." (laughter) Then the guards also told us all, "Before you, there were Marines. They were also killed." Sure enough, on the wall of my cell I found engraved the names of nine Marines, and the statement above said, "Nine Marines marooned on Makin Island, August 12, 1942." A date I well knew, just as well as I knew the day of the Doolittle Raiders over Tokyo. These were the two morale boosters for the combat men in the Pacific. This particular incident was when two American submarines approached the island of Makin at midnight and James Roosevelt and the Marine commando raiders were secretly let ashore in life rafts and killed every Japanese on the island. But, evidently, nine Marines got confused in their timing and didn't get back to their beachhead on time, and thus back to the safety of the submarines. The submarines took off right on schedule and left these Marines, thinking perhaps they were killed or injured. These nine Marines were later captured by the Japanese and placed in the same cell that we were in. And I memorized the names to bring back as evidence that they were executed.

Well, every morning—you can imagine the stress we were under—we thought, today is it. Finally they called us out and said they were going to experiment with us. We were laid on a wooden porch where they injected us with a kind of milky solution. They said, "We inject this in you, and you tell us when you get dizzy." They had a doctor there with a pencil, paper and stopwatch who was timing everything. You'd tell him when you started to get dizzy, and you'd get dizzier and dizzier. I got itchy spots all over my body, and they wrote that down. They brought us out the next day and did it again. We suspected that we were being used as guinea pigs.

A new guard came on duty, and he looked in at me and said,

"You Christian, me Christian." I thought I was a Christian, and I said "Yeah, me Christian." (laughter) As far as I can remember, his name was Kawamura. Another guard was giving me trouble. He was throwing rocks at me, jabbing me with sticks, bringing blood. And I told Kawamura, and he actually beat the guy up for me. They were both off duty for two days, doing punishment, and then he came back on duty. He opened the door and let me look over to see the other guard with a bandage on his head.

In the meantime, we were being interviewed constantly before a panel of officers in white uniforms who often teased us with food and drink they had on the table just in front of us. They're trying to get information out of us, and we were not giving them the information. They'd blow smoke in our face—they knew we wanted a cigarette—and they had these drinks: "Would you like a drink?" "Okay." (They figured if they gave us a drink we might say something.) So they gave us a drink. One of those officers was an 'SC man. I never knew him, he went to 'SC before I did. But he didn't help me.

Finally, on the 42nd day, an officer said, "Tomorrow you'll be put aboard a ship and go to the island of Truk, and from there on to Yokohama as prisoners of war. I thought, "God, we're going to live through this." So we're put aboard ship and we're off to Truk. We spent about a week in the harbor. Every time I went to the restroom, I looked out the window to count the ships, so that in case I was able to escape I'd have some information about this big naval base. From there, we're taken to Yokohama, and on the way we have a submarine scare. Now, I'm locked in a room upstairs; we were in separate rooms and not allowed to talk. Alert bells are ringing, and you know something is about to happen. I thought, "Boy, we've had it now. The Navy is out there and they're going to let these nips have it—and we're a part of it." (laughter) We were frightened yet thrilled at the same time. But the scare didn't

materialize into combat. There was no explosion of any kind.

Finally we ended up at Yokohama. We're taken off a ship and blindfolded. I remember looking out of the bottom of my blindfold, and I saw a hubcap that said Chevrolet. The Chevrolet was one of those super long ones that had jump seats, and with my long legs, I can't get my legs in, so this officer gets mad, pulls me around and cracks me across the nose with a flashlight and breaks my nose. We're taken to a place called Ofuna, which is just out of Tokyo, in the hills. And then I'm told there: "When you enter the room there will be a man sitting behind the desk. You enter, you bow, and stand at attention and wait for orders." So I go in there, the room is dark, and I bow and I stand up straight. Then a light goes up bright, I look behind the desk, and there was a guy that I knew as well as I knew my own brother, James Sasaki, from USC. He says, "You know me?" I said, "Sure, four years at USC, why wouldn't I know you?" Here was James Sasaki. He had gone to Harvard, Yale, Princeton and USC, in less than ten years, graduated from all, and had lectured to Japanese communities to keep them loyal to Japan. And that's why I feel there was some justification in putting all the Japanese in camps, at least until they were screened. He encouraged the Japanese families to send foil back to Japan. In those days, they wrapped gum and cigarettes in lead foil. The Japanese would salvage the foil and wrap them in 20-pound balls, then ship them back to Japan prior to the Pearl Harbor attack. So here he was, another Trojan. Then I was kept in this unregistered secret camp for 11 months, almost total solitary confinement.

Hodak: In Yokohama?

Zamperini: Ofuna was just outside of Yokohama, in the hills. It was actually an unregistered camp—a highly secret place. I was called a special prisoner and therefore unknown to the world.

There were some civilian Norwegians and Italians from merchant ships they'd captured. Most prisoners here would come and go; but they kept me on and wouldn't announce that I was a prisoner of war. In the meantime, they knew of the news in America that I was missing and declared dead, and they wanted it left that way. When you read about some famous athlete who becomes a pilot and he crashes in the sea and he's killed, it kind of takes the sting out of wanting to go to war, you see. So anyway, the Japanese kept us a secret. Finally after about six months a new prisoner arrives, and it was [Gregory] "Pappy" Boyington. Some guy finally shot him down. So there's Pappy Boyington living in the shack next to me. There was shrapnel in his leg, he was almost a cripple. I used to massage his leg every morning to loosen it up so he could walk. We became pretty close friends. He did cause trouble in prison camp, like he caused all through his life, and especially for the Japanese air force, (laughter)

The treatment that we received could not be considered normal for prisoners of war—and certainly the rotten diet was far from adequate. We complained about not getting meat. They finally brought in some thawed out fish and dumped that in a cement trough where we'd wash our hands and feet. They told us to wash the fish, which was full of maggots. We couldn't get all the maggots out. This mess was then put into large tubs and cooked. Here you can see these maggots floating around in the soup and, listen, you ate it! If you didn't eat it they came up and put a bayonet behind your ear and said, "Eat"—and you ate it. Of course, as we found out later, maggots are high on protein, so it wasn't that bad after all. A whole lot more happened that I won't go into. Finally, I'm told that I'm going to the headquarters Red Cross camp in Omura, between Tokyo and Yokohama. In the meantime, a newspaper guy from the *Asahi Shinbun*, the world's largest newspaper, came up to camp with my file. There was a file on my entire running career, every record, pictures of every race. He says, "Oh, the Japanese follow sports closely. We have files on every athlete

in America." And that was really a surprise. Now, information got around Tokyo that they have an Olympic athlete here. So I arrive at headquarters camp, and here's where I met my nemesis, The Bird.

Now when we meet guys that we don't like, we give them names like you know what, the worst and dirtiest names we can think of. But this guy was so rotten we couldn't think of a word bad enough for him, so we just called him The Bird. The first day in that camp I'm knocked flat on my butt. I get up, I'm knocked down again. What evidently had happened was that this guy had washed out of officers' candidate school, and he hated *officers* most of all; he only punished officers. Secondly, his assistant said that we knew there was an Olympic athlete that was coming here, and The Bird says, "He gets no special treatment." So he had it in for me before I even got there. He didn't wait to see if I was tolerable. He just assumed that I wasn't going to get any special treatment. I was beaten up rather severely for the first ten days and I thought, "What kind of place is this? I can't survive this." But you didn't complain. The Red Cross came in one day. And we were told by other prisoners of war, "Don't say a word about the mistreatment, because when they leave, there's no protection and you'll get a double dose." So we didn't complain: "Oh well, everything is not bad considering wartime conditions," stuff like that. But it was really terrible. We were off on a little man-made island offshore. The sewer was a big pothole all around the compound. So we were constantly inundated by flies. This was called Camp Omura, and it was worse than Ofuna—which we thought was extremely bad. There were constant beatings, punishments and torture, especially when bombers came over. The first time we heard about a B-29 was from a new prisoner. He said, "We have a new plane, a B-29." And he bragged about it up and down. Then we saw written on the wall, the Japanese kids had written, *B-Niju-ku*, which meant B-29. Then, one day we looked up and here's this big

beautiful white ghost in the sky, 35,000 feet up—what a thrill! The guy said, "Okay fellows, you're looking at a B-29." It came over Tokyo, photographed, and flew away. The Zeroes couldn't get to him at over 30,000 feet. We saw the English paper printed in Japan, and it said the B-29 had flown over Tokyo, but when the Zeroes came after them they fled in consternation. I'll never forget that headline: "They Fled In Consternation."

Then I was asked to go in to make a broadcast. They said, "You want your folks to know you're alive? You come into Radio Tokyo and make a broadcast. You write down what you want to say."

Hodak: You hadn't been allowed to communicate with your family?

Zamperini: No. But they had an ulterior motive. You write what you want to say—very nice. I had a free will choice. So I wrote what I wanted to and made a few personal remarks so that my family would know it was me. I went into Radio Tokyo, made my broadcast, and came back. A few weeks later, they came to me and said, "Oh"—they pump you up, you know—"you have a beautiful radio voice." And I know I don't have a good speaking voice. "Oh, you did such a good job we are going to let you do it again." I go in again and I prepare another speech, then they say, "Oh no, we have speech for you." And it was propaganda. I said, "I don't think I can broadcast that, it doesn't sound like me." Then they took me into Radio Tokyo itself, with beautiful red-carpet treatment. They took me in and showed me around and said, "If you make a broadcast for us, we'll put you in a hotel room. Instead of sleeping on a wooden floor with bugs, you'll sleep in clean sheets every night." Then they took me into the cafeteria for lunch, and it was like a cafeteria in America, delicious food: "You'll get this." They showed me a room and said, "You'll get this." Then they said, "We want you to meet some fellows." So I met a couple of Australians and a couple of Americans that were

making broadcasts. I went up to shake their hands, and they all looked down at the floor; they couldn't look me in the eye. And I said, "No, this isn't for me, I can't make the broadcast." It was wintertime and I had a big overcoat on, and I reached through the slit of the pocket and stole a copy of that propaganda, which I gave to the War Crimes Commission after the war. They said, "You must make broadcast." I said, "I can't do it." "Okay, I think you go to punishment camp." I thought, "It can't be any worse punishment than being with The Bird." I was willing to go to the punishment camp, which is forced labor. So I go back to Omura.

In the meantime, these propaganda experts at Radio Tokyo know of my association with The Bird. They know that he's been giving me a hard time, they know I hate his guts. And so they still have plans for me. I go back, and within a few days The Bird is transferred. I thought, "Oh no, now I'd like to stay here." Then, a week later, they pull several of us out of the ranks. We were put on a train and sent way north, to the Alps of Japan, on the northern Honshu. We come into this big valley surrounded by snowcapped peaks, and the train stops in a little village just off from the ocean. The snow was 12 feet deep. We were walking in over the roofs of homes. People were tunneling down to get into their houses. We come into the prison compound and we're told to stand at attention and face the commander's shack. While we're standing there, the door opens up, and who do you think steps out? *The Bird*. So, they had this all planned in advance. This was the kiss of death. They wouldn't let me away from The Bird. They were still on my case. And this is the first time in my life that I ever experienced what I'd heard about—knees buckling. My knees buckled, and I went down to the point of where I had to put one hand on the ground to keep myself from falling prone. This was the final blow.

And this was really a punishment camp for what they called dangerous prisoners. I mean, it was forced labor. One-third

of my camp buddies, over the next few months, died from a combination of forced labor, malnutrition and brutality. That's one out of three. You never knew when they were going to go or you would go. They didn't seem ill, they'd just come home from work . . . and I'm talking about work: emptying big 10,000-ton ships of coal by hand, shoveling it into nets, putting it on barges, taking the barges up the river and unloading it into wicker baskets on your back, up to 150 pounds, and carrying that up to half-cars where you unloaded. It drained us of all energy—and then with malnutrition and suffering brutalities on top of that. We had the same thing three times a day, barley and seaweed. They pulled the seaweed out of the ocean. You couldn't digest it. Guys would say, "Well, wake me up when dinner comes. Let me know what we're having for dinner." There was that kind of humor and kidding. And then they just wouldn't get up. They'd just lay there dead. And it was usually due to pneumonia.

So, this was during the final days of the war. Going back to Camp Omura, between the time they offered me this fancy living in Tokyo to make the broadcast, there was a raid on Tokyo from carrier ships. We ran out of our barracks—they told us to stay in—and climbed on the fence, and here comes a Navy Hellcat chasing a Zero. It was a beautiful sight. We could see the pilots' faces as they flew by. They were just so close I could have hit them with a rock. What a sight! And the Zero finally veered over Tokyo, where he knew he had protection, and the Navy pilot turned right and went back out over the ocean. But that was the first real taste of the victory. And then, just before that, they had over 400 B-29 planes raid Tokyo. We had a ring-side seat. We're in the bay. I mean, you talk about a spectacular sight. This is realism and we can't believe it. We see Zeroes popping out of the sky like little firecrackers. Then we saw one B-29 that was shot down just outside of our prison camp. The fellows all bailed out and

two Zeroes took it upon themselves to strafe these nine men all the way down to the water—that was really a sickening sight.

But now here we are in the last months of the war. And just north of us is Niigata. Niigata was bombed during the night by American bombers. They called all of the Americans out. They didn't call the Australians or the New Zealanders or the Black Dutch, they only called the Americans out, and we were punished because those were American bombers. And finally . . . we always heard rumors: "The war is over, the war is over," but we never believed the rumors. And all of a sudden they said, "There's no work today, today you go swimming in the river. But before you go swimming in the river you must write PW on roof." We thought, "Maybe there's something to this." Then a plane flew over and turned around and left. Evidently, it was an American observer with the Japanese to spot the camp to register them. We're in the water swimming and all of a sudden a TBF, a Navy torpedo bomber, comes over from a naval ship, and they have a red light on both sides of the plane and they are sending morse code. We had a couple of radiomen in the water with us. They said, "Hey, it reads the war is over." Before he left, he dropped a red ribbon. Tied on the end was a candy bar with a bite taken out of it and a pack of cigarettes with two missing. The candy and cigarettes had to be divided among 300 men. We did it by cutting the candy in little slivers, wetting our figure, and picking it up. And for the cigarettes, we formed circles, we'd light the cigarettes, take one puff, and then passed it around.

After a couple of hours the TBF came back and dropped what looked like a body. It turned out to be a pair of Navy pants stuffed with goodies. It was really sad because when we opened up the pants, we found cartons of cigarettes and cartons of candy, but we also found a magazine . . . and there was a silence in camp for a half-hour. It was a front-page picture of the explosion of the atomic bomb. We had heard that

on a certain date cholera had broken out in Hiroshima. That's what the guards told us, but they didn't know the truth. And here, the same date, was when the bomb was dropped and they closed Hiroshima to public travel and communication. We are told that parachute drops will be made so we wrote in lime: "Drop in rice paddy," and we drew an arrow to where the rice paddy was. The next day I'm the duty officer, and I'm the only guy outside the compound and I'm waiting for this plane to drop, and it turns out to be a B-29. And once they see our sign, they made another circle and then dropped this big parachute with a container of food in the rice paddy. Then the pilot flies around once more and this time he comes down real low and wings over; and because I'm the only prisoner outside, I'm waving my shirt. As he comes lower with flaps down, as slow as he can, I look up and I see these two faces going by. And that was my fondest dream. I said, "Oh God, I'd love to meet the pilots of that plane." They were the only two I could really see. I had no idea that they were saying the same thing.

So years later, after the war is over, I'm on a TV show with Ted Malone. In the meantime, the pilot of the ship is telling his wife and her sister, "Here we were trained for combat, trained to kill, and the only mission we had was dropping food on a POW camp, at a place nobody had ever heard of called Naoetsu. The sister never forgot that name. Well, a couple of months later she heard me on the "Ted Malone Show." I don't know why I mentioned Naoetsu, because nobody would ever know it. I just said, "I ended up in a camp called Camp 4-B, at a place called Naoetsu." She picked that up, called her brother-in-law, then he called Ted Malone, and Ted Malone got us in touch. He was out here two years ago to see me and we had our picture taken at the church. His name was Byron Kinney. We finally got to meet each other.

But anyway, we knew the war was over and we were told to

hold tight for one week. They were evacuating the camps near Tokyo and Yokohama. We were given our commands back and we became a military unit again. We were each assigned specific jobs; I was in charge of sanitation. Then more and more food was dropped. We picked up weight fast. We ate a can of concentrated pea soup; you're supposed to mix it with water, but we'd eat it straight. We had to be careful not to overdo it though. I grabbed the first parachute and that was my bed. From then on, I slept wrapped up in my parachute.

Finally, we had preparations for The Bird. On the third floor of our barracks, which was a three-story building, we had taken about an 80-pound rock up next to a window facing the river; and the day the war was over we were going to drag him up to the third floor, tie him to the rock and throw both in the river. Now, this was our plan and we were determined to do it. But the night before—he knew the war was over before we did—he disappeared, he evaporated completely.

Hodak: He never resurfaced?

Zamperini: He never resurfaced. There was a reward on his head, but they never caught him. During the war crimes trial it was believed he committed hari kari. I didn't believe he did—he was somewhat of a coward. Others said he might have gone to North Korea and became an officer—he always wanted to be an officer—and that's what I think.

The rest of the guards, the ones that were beating us up, had a book on boxing they captured from Wake Island. They'd call us out by the numbers and they'd practice hitting us. The Japanese usually hit with the inside of the hand; they didn't know about knuckle punching. Here they were, looking at the book and using us as guinea pigs to practice on. They'd practice their shinto sticks. They'd call us out by the numbers and whack us on the head like we were animals, it was totally dehumanizing to be called out by a number and just stand there

while some insignificant Japanese guard hit you over the head. Nobody could take more than two blows, and then you went out like a light. And you could imagine our anger and our thought of revenge on that final day, but here now they came whimpering and crying. So what we did, instead of all of this revenge, we ended up giving the guards candy and food to take home to their families.

Then we finally got our train ride back to Yokohama. We're getting off the train and there's a fellow standing out there hollering: "Who's got a great story, who's got a great story?" A POW buddy of mine, named Frank Tinker, a graduate of Juilliard School of Music, had also been a pilot. He said, "This guy's got a good story," and points to me. Now, we're to get our first coffee, our first coke, and our first donuts in all those years in prison camp, (laughter) Everybody is tearing for the big building at the station to get these dreamed of treats. They told us, "The nurses and the Red Cross girls are in there ready to serve you." This guy grabs me and says, "I understand you've got a great story." I said, "I've got to get—" and he says, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. What's your name?" "My name is Louis Zamperini." "Louis Zamperini is dead." I said, "Well, I'm Louis Zamperini." "You got any proof? I can't print a story without proof." I said, "Well, I got my wallet back from the Japanese," and all that was in there was my silver Trojan life pass to the Coliseum. That was the only thing the Japanese let me keep, but I had a hidden compartment where I had eight dollars in Hawaiian money—American money with Hawaii written on it—and they never did find that, but they took everything else. He saw it and said, "I can't believe it, you're supposed to be dead. My name is Robert Trumbell." He was with the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine. He said, "I did the book called *The Raft* for the Navy guys that spent 35 days on the raft." So he got me cornered. He put up a block in front of me, and he had two guys watching me there. And I said, "Well, I've got to

have coffee and coke and donuts." He said, "Go get something for him." I never did get a donut, a taste of coke or coffee. Then he interviewed me, every detail, and finally, as we are about to leave to go to the airfield, I rush out to get my donuts and coffee and coke and they were all out! (laughter) And he apologized, but his men didn't come through for me. So finally we arrive at the field. There was a table in front of the quartermaster's window stacked with K-rations. I just ran over and grabbed all I could hold and shoved them in my shirt. They said, "Don't worry about food. Lieutenant, you'll get all the food you want where you're going." I said, "I'm taking no chances," and I shoved more K-rations in my shirt. Finally, they flew us from Yokohama to Okinawa. I got off the plane and the first thing I saw was the Red Cross with a mobile cafeteria full of donuts, coffee and coke, (laughter) I ran up and finally got my fill.

All POWs were put up together in temporary shelters. While awaiting to be flown out to Guam, we American POWs went to the Red Cross facility to pick up a snack. In the meantime, POWs from other countries were being flown out to their destinations. We returned from the Red Cross only to find our belongings pilfered. All we had was the clothes on our backs. So we returned to the Red Cross. Finally, this fellow comes in and we're having a conversation, and he says, "Hey, I read about you. Come with me, I want you to meet the commander." So in the meantime, my plane, which was a B-24 by the way, was flying to Guam. So I missed that plane. I finally met the commander of the island, and he says, "Do you want to go home right away?" I said, "No, I don't want my family to see me like this." I'd gained a few pounds but not enough. He said okay and he called a Dr. Eli Lippman, a doctor from New York who was the head doctor there on the island. He said, "I want to put Dr. Eli Lippman in charge of you and your health." So Eli Lippman took care of me in his underground hospital.

Then, you remember the Okinawa typhoon? Well, I was in it, and what a mess! I remember the tent was roped down, plus they had a rope that went from the tent to the outhouse. Well, I grabbed that rope, went out, and just barely got to the outhouse. I was still suffering from internal problems, diarrhea. I got to the outhouse and had just sat down when the outhouse went up in the air; I went over the side of the hill, it was a muddy hill, and I came crawling back on my hands and knees. The next day, what devastation—ships turned over, planes turned upside down on top of other planes. We couldn't find a place to eat. We finally found one dining room that was operating, but while we were trying to eat, water was coming through the roof dripping on our food. Finally things cleared up. Dr. Lippman said, "Well, Louie, I found out that your outfit's here, the nth Bomb Group." So he took me to the nth Bomb Group headquarters and, man, was I glad to see them! I saw some of my old buddies who were now flying B-29s. Then they threw a party for me. They said, "Well, we don't have any liquor." So Dr. Eli Lippman said, "Don't worry about the liquor." In his hospital, he had five-gallon cans of pure alcohol. He had a way of making bourbon by using Coke syrup and distilled water, etc. My outfit was at this beautiful place up on a hill, just like a country club. And then the nurses on the island threw me a party, so I thought, "Why go home?" (laughter)

In the meantime, they were having a football game at the Coliseum, USC and, I think, the Navy, and they wanted me home to speak during the half. So a special order came from General Hap Arnold. It was always General Arnold, and I found out later why. He wanted me to come home for the game, and the only person who could rescind his order was a doctor. Dr. Eli Lippman said, "Do you want to go?" I said, "No. I want to get back to my normal weight before I go back." Of course, I was having a ball instead. (laughter) But I was gaining weight. He sent orders that I was too ill to

travel at this time. But that scared my mother. I hadn't thought of that.

Then, finally, I was put aboard—again—the wrong ship; instead of going to Guam and straight home, I ended up in Manila. I was in the B-24 again. I really shuddered. The B-24 was fitted with a plywood deck. We were packed in like cattle, and the plane was loaded to capacity. We were to fly to Manila but were ordered not to land because of a storm. So now our orders are to land at a place called Laoag, Northern Luzon. We landed during a storm anyway and stayed there a few days. Finally, we took off, believe it or not, downwind. There's only one way to take off from Laoag; you can't take off towards the mountains. So with no alternative, we took off downwind. I was privileged to sit between the pilot and copilot as we headed towards the open sea. With everything against us, we naturally used up the entire runway, and just when we thought we had had it, we hit a mound and bounced into the air. But then the heavily loaded plane began to settle down towards the water until whitecaps were spraying the men through the bomb bay doors. With throttles still full forward, we barely claimed enough air speed to very gradually become truly airborne.

After arriving in Manila, I was put in a compound for processing of prisoners. And I still had no ID, and I was never registered as a prisoner of war because of being declared dead. With no ID to get food or clothing, I am not allowed into the military compound: "I'm sorry, you've got to have an ID." So, again, I go in to the Red Cross to get a candy bar. And I said, "I don't know what to do. I can't get any clothes to wear, I can't get any food to eat." Finally, the man in charge said, "Well, just a minute." He called this fellow over and he said, "I want you to meet Joe Laitin, from Reuters," and Joe Laitin said, "Hello, can I help you?" I said, "My name is Louie Zamperini." "Zamperini? You're dead. Are you Zamperini?"

I said, "Yeah," and he said, "Do you have any proof?" I said, "Here's my USC life pass." I showed him that and he said, "Come with me." He got on the phone and, boy, within 15 minutes I was picked up in an Army vehicle along with Joe Laitin. He made sure that I was completely outfitted, and finally got me a meal ticket. I was really taken care of by Reuters' Joe Laitin.

Then he invited me to make a broadcast, Joe Laitin's broadcast from Manila. Then I couldn't get out of Manila. The ATC [Army Transport Command] there had a big racket going. You had to have a bottle of whiskey, and that's what I had been told—and I had some that was given to me on Okinawa, but someone ripped that off. (laughter) Someone was always ripping something off. So, I lost my bottle of whiskey, so I couldn't get a plane out. Joe took me into a military building in Manila, and he says, "We'll make out an application for a flight out of here." He made out an application and gave it to the head officer and then we left. Joe took me out and showed me Manila. Then, the next day we went back and Joe wanted to know why I wasn't on a flight. They said, "Well, there are a lot of high ranking officers that want to get back too." And it seemed like it took a bottle of whiskey, because these ATC guys would take it to some remote island and sell it for more than it was worth. Joe got real mad and went to the desk where those papers were, defied the officer and went through the papers. He took my paper off the bottom and put it on the top. He said, "He goes out next." So he had a lot of authority as a war correspondent, and boy, nobody, but nobody, said a word. Joe Laitin made sure I was next out of Manila. Good ol' Joe Laitin.

So I was on the next flight out, not in a B-24 but a new C-54 Transport. The crew knew about me and again I was invited to fly up in the cockpit. I told them about my sad existence on Kwajalein and my stay at Truk and other islands. We landed on Guam for a few hours, refueled, then we took off and

landed on another island. We get out of the plane and the pilot says, "How do you like this island?" I said, "Well, there's not much here." He says, "This is where you spent 43 days. This is Kwajalein." I said, "Where are all the trees?" He said, "They were leveled by devastating naval gun fire. There's only one tree on the island." I was taken to see the solitary tree. That was Kwajalein.

And now to Hawaii, where they put me in the hospital. The treatment was so great I didn't want to leave. They were wining and dining us, and my friend Duke Kahanamoku made me a life member of the Outrigger Canoe Club. Obviously, I was in no hurry to go home. Finally I got a red-letter order; I guess General Arnold figured I was goofing off in Hawaii. My plan had worked well. Instead of staying in a hotel, I kept my bed in the hospital so they couldn't hurry me back to the States. But finally a red-letter order came: "Get your butt back here," and that was it. I went from Hawaii to San Francisco, Letterman Hospital; and, again, I was given a physical. And then General Arnold had a private Army B-25 fly me directly to my hometown of Torrance and to my family. But General Arnold took good care of me, though I never met him. And then I found out he was a close friend of "Pop" Guthrie, head of the location department at Warner Brothers Studios, and that they had been in touch all the time about me. So that's how I got the VIP treatment.

The Army Air Force sent an invitation to all Air Force personnel who were POWs to spend two weeks of recuperation at one of four resorts. My selection was Miami Beach. I was allowed one guest, so I took my USC Kappa Sigma fraternity brother, Harry Read. The Air Force provided an activities calendar for each day, but we wanted to do something on our own. We decided to sneak into an exclusive beach club. This was a snap for two college boys who spent many weekends crashing private weddings and social functions. While on the beach we met two girls, one was Ambassador Harriman's niece

and the other was Cynthia Applewhite. Harry was telling the girls of my athletic experiences. Cynthia remembered, as an 11-year-old, the newsreel of the winner of the NCAA mile race. "How could I forget it," she said, "seeing a runner sitting on a table with four large bandages on his leg." I was, of course, deliberately chopped up in the race, and it showed.

It turned out that Cynthia is a debutante and comes from a prominent family out of St. Louis. She was educated in an exclusive girls' school called Bennett College. She majored in world history and English literature. Cynthia's popularity slowed me down a bit, but I finally got a date. Ten days later I proposed to her and she accepted. A few months later we surprised her family by getting married in Los Angeles. Acting on advice given by Academy Award winner Victor McLaglen and world champion boxer Jim Jeffries, that if you want to be sure your bride loves you, take her into the wilderness for a couple of weeks alone. And if she still loves you after that, she will always love you. We did just that—on a river in northwestern California, isolated from the world. Neither of us tired of this life. That was 43 years ago. The advice was valid.

Well, after returning from the war, I had gone to the Patriotic Hall along with Dockweiler and Will Rogers to receive a special presentation of the Purple Heart. Within a year after that, Will called me to invite me to be on his radio show. He invited two people to be interviewed about the Bill of Rights—Ronald Reagan and myself. In the meantime, a couple of big oilmen in the area were grooming me for the state legislature. I found out later they were only interested in getting my cooperation and votes when it came to the oil drilling business. They wanted to buy themselves a politician. Anyway, so I met Ronald Reagan during this radio show. He was a "B" actor at the time. He said to me, "It's interesting that you're going into politics. I was born for politics." At the time, my wife and I couldn't understand his remarks because he was just an actor then.

I met Ronald Reagan again while I was riding a horse named Kickapu for Yvonne DeCarlo. You see, she had this mean horse that kicked all the time and I would ride him and keep him exercised. I taught riding and would ride the horse up in Griffith Park and in the trotting ring. Well, there was another rider there—Ronald Reagan. So we chatted again. In the meantime, I had found out about this crooked political situation and I told Ronald Reagan that I was not going to run for office. I told him I was suspicious of how all legislators had lots of money, even though their government salaries were quite low. I told him, "I wasn't cut out for politics." And again Ronald Reagan said, "I was born for politics." This was interesting because it was well before he became a politician. He was just another "B" actor at that time. Later I was listening to a radio show and was very impressed with the presentation. The commentator was very articulate and a smooth talker. After the presentation the announcer said it was Ronald Reagan. That was just about the time he started to get involved in politics.

Well, after being declared dead and finding that we'd crashed and survived the 47 day drift and nearly 2,000 miles, you get quite a bit of publicity. It seemed like there was nowhere I could go where people didn't recognize me. The nightclubs in Hollywood . . . there was the famous Earl Carroll's Restaurant and the Florentine Gardens, and Beverly Hills and all. So I had an open invitation to all these clubs and Hollywood parties. Of course, I took advantage of this new life because I didn't know how long this would go on. But I still had my sights on the next Olympics in 1948. I was still young enough. I began to train and I got in pretty good shape, not world-class competition shape. And then things began to happen. The injuries that I received in prison camp began to expose themselves; a bad ankle, a badly sprained knee and a muscle explosion in my calf, which I had ripped when I was carrying about 125 pounds of coal and was knocked off a platform, as

I think I mentioned before. That tore up my leg quite a bit, but the pain didn't really reveal itself until I was put under pressure, and that pressure was when I began to get in top form, and then it was just one thing after the other. So I knew that running was a thing of the past for me, and I became somewhat depressed. So the postwar adjustment was really a challenge for me. As a matter of fact, it was a challenge I didn't seem to be able to cope with, especially in view of my running; I could no longer perform and, yet, was young enough. So I began to take advantage of these parties and I began to overdrink. I got married, I had a little girl and I continued to drink and continued to party, and my wife refused to go with me. Pretty soon I found myself fading away, to the point where I realized that I was in serious need of help. Help finally arrived in the form of the Word of Cod through Billy Graham.

My wife was already in the process of getting a divorce when she was persuaded into going down to hear Billy Graham, and then after her conversion she came home and decided not to get a divorce, hoping that this same thing might happen to me. She and her new Christian friends began to work on me. It took them a whole week to get me down there. I'll have to admit that they somewhat tricked me into attending the meeting, which was held in a tent at Washington and Hill Street. I always resented religious tent meetings, since I was a youngster. But I was surprised that everything was under control inside the tent, so I sat down. I got my next surprise when they introduced this evangelist called Billy Graham. And I had already pictured in my mind what an evangelist looked like. But here was this tall, handsome, clean-cut athletic type. I got my next surprise when he began to speak. I remember he had a Bible in his hand and all he talked about was one person, and that person was Jesus Christ. And I'll never forget the Scriptures he read: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and there is not a righteous man

that doeth good and sinneth not." Well, I knew I was a sinner, but I didn't like the idea of someone reminding me so I got mad, and that gave me a good excuse to get out of there. I pulled my wife on home and said, "Don't ever take me to a place like that again." But the next day she was all over me. After about three hours of argument, I finally said, "Okay, I'll go back, but under one condition: When that fellow says every head bowed and every eye closed, we're getting out of there," and she agreed. So back we went and, again, he's quoting the Scripture: "If thou should confess with thou mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead thou shall be saved."

Well, I think like most American kids, I always believed that Christ was the son of God, especially around Christmastime—so you might say I was a believer in a sense. But this verse says, "If thou confess with thou mouth and believe in thine heart," and I knew I hadn't really believed in my heart because *I knew if* I had, somehow my life would have been different, my life would have changed. So I got mad again and I grabbed my wife and said, "We're getting out of here." We started out, but at the same time I knew what I should do. I began to reflect back to the life raft and the prayers around the clock for 47 days, the around-the-clock prayer in the dungeon for 43 days, around-the-clock prayer in prison camp for two-and-a-half years, and making thousands of promises—then returning home and turning my back on the promises. Why? Because there was no longer the constant and incessant bobbing up and down in the Pacific, there was no longer the hunger and thirst and the lonesomeness. Life had changed. Life took on a new picture, so I was quick to forget the promises. But I began to think about it as I started out of that tent. Then I thought to myself, even if I went forward and made the commitment of my faith in Christ, I knew I couldn't live a Christian life. So this would make me a big hypocrite. And then Billy Graham said something that made

sense. He said, "A lot of people reject Christ because they feel they can't live a Christian life. But no one can live a Christian life without help, and the Lord has promised to uphold you with the right hand of His righteousness." And he had also said, "Cast all your cares on me for I care for you." I said, "Well, if I can get that kind of help, there might be a chance for me." So I went forward to the prayer room and first of all I asked God to forgive me for not having kept not even one of the thousands of promises I made Him on the life raft. I then acknowledged to God that I was a sinner and then invited Christ into my life. And then the most remarkable thing that ever happened took place. True to His promise. He came into my heart and into my life. I might even say it was the most realistic thing that ever happened to me because of this change; not because there was any kind of emotional experience, I did not have that. God simply made a statement: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." I took Him at His word and I believed.

The main thing was that my life began to change from that day on. For many years I had tried to read the Bible and found it to be a mystery to me—and now it was an open book. It made sense, it was beautiful, it was like opening a treasure each day. So finally, after I'd hit the skids and reached rock bottom, I was put back on my feet and I had new values, I had a whole new purpose in life. And I said to Billy Graham when I met him, "One thing they'll never do is get *me* on a platform and preach like you do." A week later, Billy Graham sent me to Modesto to Cliff Burroughs' father's church, and I found myself on the platform, (laughter) So I've been on platforms ever since. I felt I just couldn't get up like Billy does and talk openly about the Gospel. But I've gone everywhere—to schools throughout the United States, Canada, Hawaii, and Japan, to factories and businessmen's groups, to Cuba, Jamaica, and so on.

Then in 1952—and I never thought this would happen, because

I had once made the statement that I'd rather be dead than to ever return to Japan, a country of such unpleasant memories. Anyway, there was a big convention in Winona Lake, Indiana. Billy Graham was there along with missionaries and evangelists from all over the world. Then I heard a fellow from World Vision speaking on the Orient, he had just gotten back from Japan. They were forming 100 teams at Winona Lake to go back to Europe and none to Japan—and this bothered him. As he spoke about the need in Japan, I sat there and had this tremendous burden in my heart to go back to Japan and, yet, I didn't want to. The last thing in the world that I would have chosen to do was return to that country. So I left the meeting early.

I decided to go to my room. And in the meantime, I met some buddies and they wanted to have a prayer meeting. When it came my time to pray, I said, "Lord, I know this burden is burning in my heart, but I'm a new Christian and I have to have a real strong indication as to your will." Well, within the next 24 hours the teams were going to Europe, and I was part of the team. Then I thought that I'd better go to my room and go to bed early, so nothing would happen to indicate that I should go back to Japan, (laughter) So I left early and went to the hotel. I got to the lobby and a door opened and a bunch of ministers were coming out of a prayer meeting. A young minister from Arizona came up and started talking to me and said, "Did you hear that challenge on Japan?" I said, "I sure did." And he said, "My name is Reverend Eric Folsom and it really thrilled my heart to hear that message." I said, "Well, I've got to leave." I figured, "Well, I've got to cut my chances down of anything happening." I started to leave and he said, "Just a minute, Louie." I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "As we've been talking, God has burdened my heart to give you \$500 to start you on your way back to Japan." Now, he didn't have the money; I found out later that he went back to Arizona and sold his car, and then sent that to me. Well, that was a pretty strong indication—that was a lot of money.

Then, before I went to sleep that night, a singing group came in, knocked on my door and said, "Well, we heard that challenge on Japan and you're the logical person to go back there, and we want to give you our tithe money." So, there was the double indication that there was no backing out now. So I pulled back from the team and returned to California. I needed a lot of money to get a round-trip plane ticket and just live in Japan. Money was forthcoming through the speaking engagements, and I got my round-trip plane ticket and found myself in the country that I swore I'd never go back to. And, to tell you the truth, all the way over the Pacific Ocean I was resentful, even when I arrived in Japan. This was God's will and I knew it. *God* doesn't say we have to be happy in His will. He just says that we should be obedient to His will and joy will follow. So I was being obedient.

But when I got to Tokyo, things began to happen that overwhelmed me. They had me booked solid everywhere to speak. I spoke to all the universities, high schools, factories all over the main island, and then down to Matsuyama on the island of Shikoku. I even spoke at Waseda University the day after they had a big riot there; a radical Japanese movement had had a bloody riot on campus. Whether it was because of our coming there with a Christian message, I don't know, but 1,000 policemen and 1,000 students had a battle, and there were many injuries. They canceled my talk. We called them back and they said, "Okay, if you insist on coming, you come at your own risk." As we were on the stage preparing for the assembly, students began to arrive. I would say the stage was five feet off the main floor. I looked down and saw a lot of students with bandages on, so I knew those were the radical students. And that was a bit frightening. I didn't hold any punches, I told about my tortures in Japan and what the Japanese had done to me. Then when I finished, I gave an invitation to become a Christian. And I saw a vast number of Japanese students come forward, a lot of them with bandages

on, which I knew to be the radicals. I became suspicious that they weren't coming forward to become Christians, they were coming forward to give me trouble. I turned to the interpreter and said, "Ask them what they want." He bent over and asked them and then he said, "They want to become Christians." Out of all the students who had made the decision to become Christians, there must have been 50 to 60 students with bandages on that were the radicals. You talk about excitement! It was just one thrill after another as I traveled all over Japan and spoke to different groups. It was one of the highlights of my life.

Now, I knew when I became a Christian I had forgiven my Japanese tormentors. But I often wondered if I saw them face-to-face, and looked into those same eyes that tortured us, what my reaction would be. I know my number one desire when I went back to Japan was to get into Sugamo Prison, where all Japanese war criminals were held. But when I got there I found Sugamo Prison a restricted area. I met a newsman from *Life* magazine who had been there for about three weeks trying to get into Sugamo Prison. Then I was told by the GHQ chaplain to call the Strategic Air Command headquarters where MacArthur was and ask for General MacArthur. I said, "That's kind of ridiculous, isn't it?" He says, "Well he's the one that asked for 10,000,000 Bibles and for 2,500 missionaries." That was published in the American papers. I said, "Yes, that's true." He said, "Well, give him a ring." So I called SAC headquarters and within a minute or two I was talking to General MacArthur. He said, "Tomorrow morning you will gain entrance to Sugamo Prison at ten a.m." And sure enough, we got into Sugamo Prison. There were 850 war criminals there. I was allowed to speak to them openly and didn't hold back. The colonel in charge said, "Your guards are here and the overseers of your prison camps are here." I let them know how badly I was treated. And when I was finished, I sat down and the colonel in charge of the compound

came over to me and said, "Aren't you going to give them a chance to become Christians?" (which I had forgotten to do.) I gave them an invitation and I'd say over half responded. Then I said, "This will in no way shorten your sentence, becoming Christians. I am not a part of the Army and not part of SAC headquarters. It will not help you in the least." Then I re-asked for hands, and about half of the hands went up.

Then the colonel said, "There are those of you who were Louie's guards and heads of his prison camps. He'd like you up here in this room on the right. So step out of your seats right now." And they did. I looked out and saw them coming down the aisle and, of course, I recognized each one of them vividly. I didn't even think of my reaction—I jumped off the stage, ran down and threw my arm around them, and they withdrew from me. They couldn't understand the forgiveness. We went in the room and there, of course, I continued to press the issue of Christianity, you see. And all but one made a decision for Christ. That one was what we called a quack, he was like a medical aid. He did patch up little things there in prison camp, but he also took over the disciplinary job of the camp and almost beat some men to death. General Harris was in charge of all Marine air corps, and his son was a big 6-foot-10 Marine in prison camp with me. He became a close buddy of mine, and he was beaten until he was unconscious, then the quack jumped on him for another five minutes, kicking him. He was a fanatic Buddhist and stayed a Buddhist. One of those men was the interrogator, James Sasaki, who attended USC with me. He just turned to me and said, "Louie, I can't see how you can come back and forgive us after what we've done to you." I said, "Well, Mr. Sasaki, the greatest story of forgiveness the world's ever known was the Cross." When Christ was crucified He said, "Forgive them Father, they know not what they do." And I said, "It is only through the Cross that I can come back here and say this, but I do forgive you." Then he responded to the invitation to become a Christian.

Now, they had built this new civic auditorium after the war to seat 16,000 people, right in the heart of Tokyo, and [was booked there to speak on a certain night. They had 18,000 jammed inside, and another 5,000 outside in a heavy downpour. So we had to do a double program; I'd speak inside, then go outside and speak again. But inside, when I finished speaking, a little old Japanese lady came up, gave me a bow and said, "I'm a Christian. The reason your life was spared on the island of Kwajalein was because my son was an officer in authority there, and it was through his words that your lives were spared." Then she hesitated and said that he was a USC Trojan, (laughter) Then she told me he was the manager of a department store, something like May Company. I looked him up and had some pictures taken with him, and as we chatted out in front of the building I said, "How come I didn't meet you on the Island of Kwajalein?" He said, "I was a Trojan; if I had come forward and showed any kind of friendship at all, then my words wouldn't have carried so much weight to have you sent to Japan." I can certainly understand the logic in that. First of all, my life was spared because of a Trojan ring on my finger, and then my life was saved again on the island of Kwajalein by a former Trojan who happened to be Japanese. I think that somewhat climaxes the story with a very dramatic ending.

Hodak: So you returned to the United States?

Zamperini: Well, I came back to America after that. I wanted to serve the Lord as I had promised on the raft. I had promised that I would seek Him and serve Him if I lived through the war. As a result of my conversion, I'm put back on my feet. Now, my thoughts were to serve Him. I found myself invited to speak in youth camps, and prisons. And I found that I had a wonderful rapport with kids and prisoners, especially when I told them about prison life in Japan. They would come up and say, "Hey, after listening to your story, I can do my five years

standing on my head." Because prison life is soft and they have so many benefits. They were surprised to find out what prison life was like in Japan. Then I was put in charge of Lifeline camps on the West Coast, ranging from Seattle to San Diego. I had to bounce from camp to camp, and these were young kids, 8 to 12 years old. Then I was asked to go out to speak to a State Youth Authority detention home at Whittier. These were the older kids, 16-20, in for major crimes, including homicide. And I found that I had an excellent rapport with them. I'd start my talk by admitting I was a problem kid too. I had the same problems they have now. So then my desire was to open up a camp for these older, rough kids—and that's just what I did. So I established the Victory Boys Camp and used two other Olympians as counselors. We took about 35 kids a week into the Sierras for a real wilderness experience, which included fishing, camping in the wilds, rappelling over cliffs, mountaineering, skiing, anything adventurous. I think we probably established the first Outward Bound-type program, back in 1953.

And then in 1954, when "This Is Your Life" was at its peak, the longest show on TV, friends would say, "Louie, with your story they should have you on that show." I said, "No way, I've watched the show so long, I know every angle, every trick, there's no way they could ever fool me." But, sure enough, they really fooled me and I've got film to prove it.

Hodak: How is it that they fooled you? How did you end up in the studio?

Zamperini: When I crashed during the war I handled that pretty cool. I was beaten almost daily in prison camp and took that in stride. But when I was deceived, I was struck with such astonishment I was unable to function properly. (laughter) Well, I had been on a number of shows, so when a member of sportscaster Elmer Peterson's office said that he would like to have me on

his show for an interview, I thought nothing of it. I was told to bring any pictures or brochures I had. A man picked me up at my home and took me to the studio. We went up to Elmer Peterson's door and it was locked. He said, "Well, we'll have to wait until Elmer Peterson gets here, I guess." And he was just biding time. We were standing just outside a great huge soundproof door at the El Capitan Theater. I was getting a little fidgety so I said, "Are you sure you have the right time?" He said, "Oh yeah, he should be here any minute." Then an orderly came by and the man said, "Would you go get the keys to the office?" He was still trying to kill time. So the kid said, "Sure," and he left and didn't return. I don't think Elmer Peterson was even in town, (laughter) All of a sudden, I hear these great big soundproof doors sliding away. And I see a bright light shining towards me and I backed away. I thought I must be in the way of a production. The light was blinding—I couldn't see a thing. Then, all of a sudden I hear a voice saying, "Louie Zamperini!" two or three times. Then my eyes just went wide open and I just stood there in stunned silence. I recognized Ralph Edwards' face as he was calling me to come in, and I still wouldn't go in; the fellow that brought me there had to shove me. It was an explosive situation and I was just so chagrined to think that they could fool me. I sat down on the guest couch just shaking my head.

Then voices came from behind the curtain I was asked to recognize. One was my old buddy Jesse Owens, who said some complimentary things and verified the swastika incident. He called it a boyhood prank and what you'd expect of a kid that age. Then they had my coach Dean Cromwell there, and my pilot from the Pacific, and my family. It was a great moment. Then they gave me a projector and a copy of the film from the show, they gave me a beautiful gold wristwatch, plus an over-and-under Bell and Howell camera. Then he pulled a set of keys out of his pocket and said, "And now I present you the keys to a brand new 1954 Mercury station wagon." As I

understand, it was probably the largest TV giveaway up to that time. That gave me a nice boost in the camp program and, besides that, I got \$1,000 cash. That was one of the most stimulating events of my life since the war. Being on Ralph Edwards¹ show was great!

Hodak: And you also decided to work on an autobiography?

Zamperini: Well, as a result of the show I got calls from various publishers. My wife was a writer and a great reader, and she liked Dutton Publishing in New York. So I decided to sign up with Dutton and did a book called *Devil At My Heels*.

I had gotten a call from a major Hollywood studio to buy the book, and was told that Tony Curtis wanted to play the part and asked them to buy the book. We negotiated and they purchased the rights to a movie. Then Tony Curtis went to Europe to make *Spartacus* and came back, went to South America to make another film, and so on. Columbia Pictures tried to buy the story from the other studio but they wanted too much money, and that was it. Independent producers have come by, but evidently they didn't have enough backing. To do a movie like this would require an awful lot of action. It would take big money to do justice to the story. I have been approached by other publishers—since I now have the rights to the book, I'm no longer obligated to Dutton—to rewrite the book, and to make it a bigger book and to incorporate some thrilling episodes that were eliminated. It would actually give the book better continuity, I believe.

Hodak: And you recently came across your war diary?

Zamperini: My war diary has been around since World War II, but spent many years in the bottom of my World War II footlocker. I recently found it and began reading the day-by-day life in combat. I realized I'd forgotten so many things. The more I read it, the more exciting it was, and I began to relive that

period of time. And, naturally, if I redo the book, I would have to incorporate the diary in it. The diary ends on the day of our fatal mission. Before take-off I had written about our volunteer search mission and then locked the diary up in my footlocker. The diary was blank after that for obvious reasons.

So the diary tells about the day-by-day episodes of Army life, it talks about being out on a mission all shot up, and the next day having a big steak dinner, or being at the officers' club having a beer with the boys. But that's the way it was; you'd lose your closest friend—but what could you do? You couldn't just stay at the barracks and mope and groan, you had to do something. So you went out and played tennis, or you went into the officers' club and you danced and had a few drinks. You had to keep yourself busy to keep from thinking about buddies you had lost. You lost them, not so much in combat, but just on these search missions. Some planes exploded right on the island of Hawaii, or they malfunctioned. So many things happened that you thought, "It could well happen to me today." The liquor content of your footlocker was your will to the others in your barracks. The liquor was either hard-to-come-by whiskey or what was called Five Island Gin. This stuff was made on the islands and our ration came in whatever bottles were available at the time. We got it in ketchup bottles, mayonnaise jars, etc. Before you took off on a mission, you left a note on the footlocker: "If I'm not back in ten days after being missing, share the liquor and have a party."

Hodak: And the airport at Torrance is now named Zamperini Field?

Zamperini: In 1944, of course, I was still a prisoner of war. And I was officially declared dead. A death certificate was sent to my mother and the life insurance company paid off on my policy. At the same time, in 1944, the city of Torrance had an airstrip

that was built by the Army. So during the war, while it was still an Army strip, it was named Zamperini Field. They published a map at that time, which I have. The war is over and I come home alive; and of course the airfield is no longer Zamperini Memorial Field. But they decided to rename it Zamperini Field, without the Memorial, in 1946. They had Academy Award actresses down from Warner Brothers. They had generals fly in from Washington and officers from March Field, and they had a big lunch on the field. They built a big platform and ceremonies took place to name the field officially. And then that was gradually forgotten.

Then in 1973, a new teacher came to Torrance High School named Armstrong. He was a history teacher and he naturally wanted to learn about Torrance. And as he read the history of the city, he read about my family and myself, my having made the Olympic team and so forth, having been declared dead during the war, and having the field named after me. Yet, he checked and found the officials had neglected the original proclamation and failed to put the name on the field. He felt this was an injustice, so he had three 16-year-old girls in his class that he selected specifically to work as a team to get all the evidence they could, make an appointment with the Torrance City Council, present their case to the council, and get this field named, once and for all, Zamperini Field. So the girls called me and said, "We heard there was a map of Torrance printed in 1944 that clearly shows Zamperini Field printed alongside the airstrip." I vaguely remembered such a map but wasn't sure I had one. I went through my footlocker and found the map right on the bottom. That was the other evidence. And, of course, in a fast growing city like Torrance, you've got new people coming in all the time, they've never heard of you, they become members of the council and they say, "Who the heck is Zamperini?" I did get all the paperwork, all the evidence together and I gave it to the girls. They established their case, called the council, and the council

tried to discourage them. But those girls were very determined. They were like three attorneys—they insisted on a hearing. They got in on the hearing, brought all the material, and they won the battle. Then the city council called me down for a meeting with the mayor and had the girls present as he formally recognized the action of the city council and officially designated the Torrance municipal airport as Zamperini Field. Of course, this time it was binding. They had all the legal papers there, signed, pictures taken, plaques made, newspapers printed on the front page. So there could be no mistake now, it was definitely Zamperini Field. Temporary signs were put up on the field. I was just really thrilled and flabbergasted that teenagers, three teenagers, did it, under the supervision of Armstrong who later, by the way, became the mayor of the city.

And then in 1987, the students at Torrance High decided that Torrance Stadium should be renamed Zamperini Stadium. They went to the mayor and the council and got petitions signed that the students wanted that field renamed, so they did. They called me down during the first football game, and during the half they had me down on the field. They had a beautiful 40-50 pound brass plaque which said Zamperini Stadium, and I believe on the bottom it said, "Louie Zamperini, the Greatest Tartar of them all." That's what we're called, the Torrance Tartars. I almost cried, it was so beautiful. And these were the kids. I owe everything to the younger generation. They're the ones that pitched in and got things done.

Recently, the Del Amo Flyers, a fun-loving group of men and women, called me down to speak. The next day they called and said, "Louie, we love you, we want to make you an honorary member of the Del Amo Flyers." And that was a thrill. Then there was a student from USC, a young lady who came down to interview me for the Trojan paper. She also lives in Torrance, on the Palos Verdes Hills. She went to her dad and said.

"This Trojan here has a real unusual story." So she gave her father the name and he said, "Zamperini Field, that's where I keep my plane." He has a hangar full of vintage airplanes and another hangar full of vintage race cars. Well, in November of 1987, during Torrance's 75th anniversary, we had a flyover and this man, Mr. Art Valdez, provided all the vintage airplanes for the flyover. I was to be in the lead plane, which was 60 years old. it was called Cloud Boy, a prototype of the Steerman used in World War II, and there are only two in the world. We had just made a pass over the parade and the celebration, we were circling making a second pass, and then we had motor trouble. The oil pressure had dropped to zero and the motor was vibrating badly and about ready to stop. All we could see was the freeway and a bunch of houses. So the pilot forced the engine to run until it burned out, and that gave us a little more altitude so we were just able to clear telephone lines, and then made a forced landing in a toxic waste dump. I remember the pilot got out, he was a Navy jet pilot named Lance, and he started to laugh and said, "Well, Louie, this is my fourth time down. How many have you had?" I said, "Let's see now, this is my fourth time; I had two plane crashes and two forced landings." (laughter) So that's the story of the Torrance air field.

Hodak: And you also were honored by the City of Los Angeles, when Mayor Bradley declared October 6, 1988, as Zamperini Day.

Zamperini: It all started with the *Olympian* magazine prior to the Seoul Games, the March issue to be exact, where I was given three pages. There's one picture of me in 1938 in my USC running suit and another picture ski jumping at Mammoth recently, and on the third page a picture of me skateboarding down the church ramp, daughter) So they saw that and decided to honor me before I did myself in.

The Zamperini Day proclamation at City Hall was followed by a

banquet at the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood. This was headed up by Mr. and Mrs. Don Clinton of Clifton Cafeterias, and Mr. Harry Wammack. I really didn't know what was taking place—all I knew was that about half of those present were Trojans, a lot of my USC buddies, plus Olympians, my family and friends from out of state. I was given a proclamation from the City of Los Angeles, the City of Torrance, Los Angeles County, the state legislature, Governor George Deukmejian, and finally a well-timed telegram from the President of the United States, Ronald Reagan. I was then roasted by my brother Pete, and finally, I thought, presented with a new skateboard. But then I was shocked with a sizable check given to me with specific orders to take my wife on a Caribbean cruise, and we did just that. I am indeed fortunate that I am blessed with a loving family and so many caring friends.

Hodak: Your life has been full of adventure and experiences. Have you had any outstanding experiences in your Christian ministry?

Zamperini: I was asked to speak at an Easter Sunrise service in Van Nuys. After the message I invited people who had a need to come forward. Among those walking down the aisle was Susan Hayward, who had recently won an Academy Award for best actress of the year. Miss Hayward had problems that were sometimes revealed by the news media. We dealt with her particular problem at that time and she then made a decision for Christ. Some time later, I was driving to my youth camp early in the morning and I heard a news flash that Susan Hayward attempted suicide and was rushed to Cedars-Sinai Hospital. It was also announced that she was under tight security, meaning that no one was allowed to see her—not the press, nor the head of the studio, not even her agent. It seemed futile for me to drive an hour back to Hollywood, but somehow I knew I had to.

First I went home to ask my wife her opinion and she said, "By all means, you should try to see her." I went to the hospital and found the lobby full of reporters and the news media in general. I quietly walked up to the nurse and said, "I am here to see Susan Hayward." She said, "So is everyone else, but she is seeing no one." I thought she must be in serious condition. I then said, "Look, I have driven a long way to see her, so until I have word that she will not see me, I am staying here all day. Please, just call her room, give her my name and if she says no, then I will leave."

The nurse was kind enough to call Susan's room and the response was, "Send him right up." The news media was not aware of what was happening and as of today they still do not know that I saw her that morning. I was ushered into her room expecting to see a pale and sickly patient, but instead she was the epitome of health. Smiling radiantly she invited me to sit alongside her bed. She immediately sat up in her bed, revealing her bust through a transparent negligee. This seemed to be a deliberate act on her part, but I wouldn't know why.

After the usual formalities, I got right to the point. "Why the attempted suicide?" I asked. Her answer was circuitous and vague. I came to the conclusion that she had not really tried to commit suicide. She didn't look like she had and she certainly didn't talk like she had. When I first entered her room she appeared carefree, jubilant and glad to see me. I finally pinned her down on the sincerity of her Easter commitment. Her answer was so ambiguous I came to the conclusion that her decision was not from the heart. She asked questions about the Bible. I went over some Scriptures with her. I remember telling her God said of Christians, "Ask what ye will and it shall be given unto you." I tried for the last time to get her to put her trust in Christ. She politely refused. I prayed for her and started to leave and she said.

"Don't feel too bad about my salvation, at least you taught me something—that I can ask God for whatever I need." That was the last I saw of Susan Hayward. Several years later she was to die from brain cancer.

On another occasion I was speaking at a church in Santa Barbara. In the meantime a young man was informed that his wife was staying in a motel with a male acquaintance. He got a pistol and was heading for the motel when he saw a poster outside the church: "Lou Zamperini Here Tonight." He was a track fan so he decided to take a quick peek inside. I had just started speaking when I saw the young man enter. He stood for awhile, then became interested enough to sit down. At the invitation, he came forward and gave himself to Christ. He told us of his plan to shoot both his wife and her lover. Now with Christ and this church behind him, he was able to work out his problem to a happy conclusion.

Hodak: Now I'd like you to talk about your work with the First Presbyterian Church of Hollywood.

Zamperini: Well, I had my own youth camp program and was doing a lot of public speaking, plus flying all over the country. The church had a large youth department and needed help. The youth director, Jim Ferguson, asked if I'd come down to help him on Sunday mornings during the high school services. I accepted this invitation and began to work with the kids. The more I connected with them the closer we got; and the closer we got the more they wanted me to participate in their various activities. Pretty soon, I found myself getting so involved that my own work was suffering. Then the church decided to employ me on a part-time basis, and we used my camp to augment the growing program with problem kids in the Hollywood area. I taught a Bible class, mountaineering and skiing. We did a lot of skiing locally and at Mammoth. I would even go with other church groups like Donn Moomaw's church.

the Bel-Air Presbyterian Church. Finally, the youth director, my buddy, died of a heart attack, and I took over the high school department temporarily until they were able to find a new director. I think they considered me too old to be a youth director. (laughter) That was 16 years ago, and I'm still working with youth.

Then they started this program for retired citizens under the Older American's Act of 1973, and this church was designated as the proposed site for a nutritional program for seniors. I went down to the city of Los Angeles for an interview. And before I got home, they had called my wife and said, "Tell Louie he's got the job." And so now my work involved the very young and the very old. The work with the senior citizens entails a lot more than nutrition. It involves creating the proper atmosphere here at the lunch program to reduce loneliness, and to help find housing and find all the different resources to meet the needs that they have. Then, of course, you become very close to them and after a course of time some of them die. And it does take a lot out of you. You have to learn to cope with that. If you don't learn how to deal with this kind of stress, it can have a devastating affect on you. So I have taken classes at USC, reading books on stress and burnout . . . and when I found out that burnout is a response to chronic unreleased stress, I knew, the issue and how to deal with it. I'm still in the youth program, I skateboard and am still skiing at Mammoth. I took several groups this winter, and I'm still skiing the steep stuff on the mountain, at age 72. Dave McCoy, the owner of Mammoth Mountain, has always provided free lift tickets and equipment to the youngsters in my Victory Boys Camp program.

Hodak: Your injuries don't limit your ability to ski or skateboard?

Zamperini: Well, the pain is always there. You have to learn to adapt. You can't give up. My bad knee is painful and a bad ankle

and back as well. So, what am I supposed to do? Pull in my wings and be grounded? You have to use unrelenting determination and exercise a positive attitude. I had to learn to ski with a certain style that eliminates the pressure on the knee. I found that skiing the steepest stuff at Mammoth is less painful on my knee than skiing on the bunny slopes below. So I prefer to ski the hazardous slopes. And then, of course, I skateboard every day to keep myself tuned up and sharpened for skiing, because skiing is not a year-round sport. I think my skateboarding shakes up a few people, especially some of the old-timers in the church. I know when I go down Cower Street, making a run down around the mailbox, I've seen people stop their cars and look back to be sure their eyes aren't deceiving them. They see this grey-haired old buzzard weaving down the street, (laughter) I guess it is kind of a shock to them. It doesn't bother me, I just think of myself as a kid. I treat myself as a youngster. I kind of ignore the aches and the pains—I have to.

Hodak: Tell me a bit about your family. You mentioned you have a daughter. You have other children?

Zamperini: I have a daughter, Cynthia, who is married to Mick Carris. He was the story editor for Spielberg on the "Amazing Stories" series for TV and he also makes movies. He did a cute TV movie for kids called *Fuzz Bucket* for Disney. He won the Edgar Award for the best mystery story of the year, and he just finished two horror movies. He is a writer and a director who is in demand. He's just a real sweet, lovable, easygoing fellow—success hasn't turned his head a bit. I can't see anything but success for him. My daughter Cynthia is a very accomplished dancer. She started ballet lessons when she was ~~14~~ and fell in love with it. She eventually danced with Rudolf Nureyev and Margo Fontaine, not long after Nureyev defected. She also danced with the Leningrad Kirov Ballet. Cynthia's goal was to be in the New York Ballet, but she was told she

was too tall. She then became an aerobics instructor and only recently quit that. However, she did have a following and is now giving private instruction at her home. Cynthia is very, very talented, and I'm real proud of her.

I have one son, Luke. When Luke was in grade school he was selected to be interviewed by the L.A. Board of Education. They were conducting a citywide aptitude survey, you might say, to determine what fields various students might be intellectually suited for later. Well, after a three-hour interview, they concluded that Luke was intellectually geared for the fields of science and medicine. So we had high hopes for him in those fields. But then the Beatles came to town, and everybody wanted to be a Beatle and make a million dollars overnight. So Luke went the rock 'n roll route. He played with different groups, traveled around the world, and finally ended up with the group called the Electric Light Orchestra.

Then Merv Griffin had a show which covered the practice of reverse-masking that different groups do with their albums. And this show was a shocker—I couldn't believe it. When they reversed the music, it was all anti-Christian. I heard several of them and thought, "Thank goodness my son is with a group like ELO." Then Merv Griffin said, "Now we're going to play you a recording from the group ELO." And when they reversed the record, it said, "Satan is God, Satan is God." Well, my son was home with us at that time and I said, "Did you know this?" He said, "Yeah, it's got me to thinking." Sure enough, in a month he said, "I'm fed up with this rock 'n roll. I want to go up to the cabin and spend a month there alone to think things out. I want to meditate. I want to read the Bible through." And at that time he was a smoker and drinker, but he said, "Drinking will be no problem dad. I can quit that. But when I go up to the cabin, smoking is going to be hard to quit." The first weekend I went up to see him, I said, "How are things coming?" "Oh great, I've read all these

chapters in the Bible." I said, "How's your smoking?" He said, "My smoking—oh, I'd forgot!" He had quit when he started reading the Bible. A whole week had gone by and he hadn't realized that he had quit. So that was no problem for him. And he's never smoked since.

He went through the Bible and he read all my other books in the cabin, he came down after a month and he just prayed that he'd meet a Christian girl. Well, in two weeks he met a girl named Lisa, and within another week they knew they were going to get married. They're married and now they have . . well, as a grandparent would say, the most fantastic blue-eyed blond kid you'd ever imagine to have for a grandchild, and his name is Clay. I never thought I'd flip over a grandchild. I came back from the mountains when they had the boy and I didn't even ask about him. I knew they'd had it. My wife said, "Aren't you going to go see your grandchild?" I thought, "Oh well, another baby." But once I saw him and held him—that was it. And now we're completely and totally hooked on Clay.

So I can be really thankful and grateful to God for having such a loving family, a great son-in-law and a great daughter-in-law. We all have our health, so what else could you want? I'm happy in my job, I look forward to coming to work every day. If I weren't happy in it, I'd quit. I enjoy working with kids and seniors. I enjoy seeing the change. It's like an artist who perfects a vase or oil painting. It's work. In the final analysis, when you look at the results, it's worth it all.

Hodak: When you talk with kids today, what things do you try to impart? What things are you trying to instill in the children?

Zamperini: First of all, you can't fool these kids. You've got to be really sincere and take a genuine interest in them. I have no ulterior motives, since I don't get paid. This is strictly volunteer

work. Secondly, I must find out what their problem is. Here I am 72, but I've been through the same thing. Fortunately, I received proper direction from my brother Pete through sports and that changed the course of my life. I find that by just letting the kids talk, they reveal their souls. They should talk to somebody. It's a relief. It's hard to hold something to yourself that's monumental. When you reveal a problem you have in your heart and soul to another person, it lightens the load. We know this to be true. So I allow the kids to talk. I don't try to make decisions for them. That would be wrong. All I do is listen and give them some kind of direction. I almost invariably end up by bringing the issue to a point when they say, "Yeah, this is what I should do," and they do it. It doesn't stop there, you have to stick with them to make sure they're not slacking off. I just can't say "Well, now you should do this and do that," and then drop them. That's like giving a person an aspirin to kill pain, when the cure for the pain is better. Then they say, "I've always been a dummy and I can't get a degree." I say, "Hey, you can make good money without a degree." In fact, a lot of fellows that don't have degrees are making more money than guys with degrees. I have a series of films on various jobs, like sheet metal working, metal plating and antique glass. I'll just start showing them films and all of a sudden someone will say, "Boy, that's what I'd like to do." They don't realize that they can do jobs that don't demand a college degree and that the job can be not only lucrative but interesting. I say, "Now, you shouldn't go into this work unless you're happy in it. The main thing is to like what you're doing. Of course, all of this work with kids is supplemented by a vigorous outdoor program.

Hodak: Do you talk much of sports or other activities as a positive direction to look into?

Zamperini: Usually, when I first meet a kid I'll just ask if they're interested in sports. That's why I maintain versatility in so many sports. If they like ice skating, I go ice skating with

them; if they like skateboarding, I skateboard with them. And if they like football, of course I get them focused on USC. I worked recently with a broken family of five kids. To get their minds off of the divorce, I took them down to USC. Ted Tollner, the football coach, was thrilled to death. He said, "Louie, I'll do anything to help you. Every workout, the gate is closed to outsiders, but you're allowed to bring your kids in anytime, even before the UCLA game." Even the new coach, Larry Smith, has been equally helpful. So when those kids went on campus, met all those players, well, you can imagine, they became dyed-in-the-wool Trojans. So this creates an indelible interest. And they're following the sport religiously. When 'SC is losing, they're shedding tears. I say, "Hey, it's only football and Trojans don't cry." But getting them this deeply interested in Trojan football takes their minds off divorce situations. And, boy, it works like a miracle. I say interest is the first thing you instill when you get a broken family. First of all, I taught them to ski, and that created one interest, along with being a Trojan supporter and getting them involved in other things like ice skating, tennis and other sports.

And USC has been great. I've taken kids down there when there were no coaches around. I'd go in the USC Women's Athletic Department and Barbara Hedges, athletic director for the women, comes out there and gives them a big hug, and they love and respect her, as they also do Jacques Connolly, the events coordinator. So the Women's Athletic Department has been very gracious, and they help a lot just by acknowledging the kids being there and making them feel at home on the Trojan campus. I use other more unusual sports and activities. We do a lot of skiing, cycling, trail-bike riding, rockhounding. We just create a lot of adventures.

Hodak: I'd like to shift to some summary thoughts on your own experiences.

I

Zamperini: Well, you might start at why I became an athlete. And that was because of my delinquent ways, then directed into running, and then recognition. Everybody starts from the same motive—recognition. Today, however, they have more than one motive.

Hodak: What are some of these motives you're referring to?

Zamperini: First is the recognition . . . that's important to everybody. Then the reward of knowing you did your best. But today it's this, plus money. We know why we don't have great downhill skiers—in Europe there's money in it; here there's no money in it. The money has drawn potential skiers, we'll say, into other sports that are more lucrative. The name of the game today is money . . . even in politics and some religions. Money is the common denominator for almost everything, because money is power. There are very few people in the world that do things for the love of doing, for the love of wanting to help, for the love of sport. I shouldn't say very few, but certainly not enough.

In my case, I was a problem kid at 15. My brother, the coach and the chief of police got me into sports. Then, in my first race, as I passed a runner on the homestretch I could hear the students hollering, "Come on Lou!" Well, that's what got me motivated—the recognition. I think that's the trigger that sparks the flame of motivation. So I quit my wayward ways and dedicated my life to becoming an athlete. I don't mean partially dedicated, I mean totally, 100 percent committed. And then as a result of the recognition, I began to enjoy the camaraderie of the athletes here and abroad. And certainly being able to travel was a motive to train. Associating with foreign athletes had a way of bridging the gap between nations. So sports took on an even broader meaning to me. Then the love of the sport eventually took over. I certainly wasn't in love with running when I started—I was suffering. Those are

the things that motivated us in the early days. Today, you have one more additional motive, and that's money. I've talked to athletes in sports they hated, but they excelled at it and they're making a fortune at it. It was more like a job than a fun thing. In my day, I don't think I ever met an athlete that said they hated their sport. They were in it because they loved it and enjoyed the recognition from it. It's entirely different today. There's so much big money. When I was running, a track star was lucky to get his expense money equal to what the AAU allowed. Today, we're talking about track athletes making millions.

Prior to World War II there was no such thing as advertisement of sports equipment. In those days, there were only a few companies making equipment. Today, there are many companies in competition and they want their name on your hat, your shirt, your trunks or your shoes; and it's paying great dividends to the athletes. I'm not saying they don't deserve it, but I think they've gone overboard on it. Take the big fight tonight, we're going in excess of \$70 million. And one boxer, I think he quit school, never did get an education, is going to get \$25 million tonight. And here a man will turn around, a scientist, and develop a cure for AIDS, and he will get very little, like the man that developed the serum for polio. These fellows are written down in history, but it's the entertainer who's financially prominent now. And you have to consider athletics today as entertainment.

Well, of course, I see things in two different views. I'm a product of, I like to say, two different worlds. Before World War II there was one world, and there's been a radical change since World War II to the present time. Before World War II, there wasn't a lake or stream in the High Sierras that you couldn't drink out of. Today, you have to treat the water. The world has become polluted from the ocean up the streams to the lakes, and right up into the sky. So we're living in an entirely different world. Before World War II, we were in a

Depression, People in stores were extremely courteous. We were all in the same boat, so naturally we pulled together and cooperated and helped each other. Maybe we need another Depression to bring people closer together. We were in the same melting pot. We were all suffering the same needs. But our parents made ends meet. There was always the possibility we could live off the land; there were always the rabbits, the wild radishes, ducks in the swamps and so forth. We never went hungry; we just didn't have a lot of money. A dime for a pound of hamburger, a dime for a gallon of gasoline; you'd work hard for a week, for 50 cents, and that was your spending money as a kid. Then in athletics in those days, there was no chance of making big money. I think we mentioned before that the drawing card was the mile run. And, naturally, there was some small change handed around there; not to be compared to present day athletics and advertisements. I really can't blame the athletes for getting all they can. We're in that kind of world today where money is the god of most people. The Bible says you can't serve Cod and mammon both. And I don't think I'd want a lot of money. I would not like my happy life-style to be altered. Regardless of wealth, the most successful people in the world are those who are truly happy, especially in doing what they like best. Even today, I do the things that make sense to me. And the things that are fun for me are the relatively free things, like sports, reading, climbing a peak, rockhounding, classical music, riding my bicycle. I don't need a lot of money to have fun, and I have the time of my life doing these things.

But the picture has changed. Some athletes today are set up like prima donnas by the news media. I can vividly recall the greatest runners in the world when I was competing; they'd finish running their race and they'd get right off the track. They were somewhat shy and would be embarrassed to parade on the track. Today, I see athletes run a race and, even if they get second or third, they strut around the track, holding up the other events, raising their arms or shaking their fists

in the air. They like more than their share of glamour and accolades from the spectators. I don't know what could cause this change. Is it the self-love syndrome, the you're-worth-it philosophy, or what? I really don't know. All I know is it's there and I don't particularly like it. When I think of the gigantic sums of money that are allotted athletes . . . you win a gold medal and you already know you're going to be a millionaire. I don't know, it blows my mind. I can't seem to adjust to it. (laughter)

Hodak: Well, I'd like to have you to conclude with any final remarks you'd offer in the form of advice. You've certainly offered quite a bit already.

Zamperini: What I'd say, especially to young people, is that you're not going to be anything in life . . . you're not going to be a great athlete, you're not going to be great in any profession unless you learn to commit your life to that. You have to reach deep within yourself to see if you are willing to make the sacrifices. And even when you commit your life to whatever that desire is, you're going to run into problems. But I was taught years ago that you don't accept anything as a problem but, rather, as a challenge. As I mentioned earlier, the first great challenge of my life was when I was a kid making my transition from an errant teenager to a dedicated athlete. And then the challenge after the plane crash in the Pacific to stay alive for 17 days and the challenge to stay alive in prison camp. Those are all challenges I had to meet, and the best way to meet any challenge is to be prepared for it. But even if you're not prepared for it, use common sense, for the last thing in life you want to do is give up on anything. You set your goals, work on your objectives to achieve those goals, and no matter how great the problems are, just accept that problem as a challenge and go for it. You're not always going to have your dreams come true. You can't set your life goal on one thing. Suppose you don't have what it takes to be a great

athlete. I think you should have an alternative in case your dreams burst on you.

I believe the same is true of making a living today; you should have a primary objective in making a living, you should have a vocation, but you should also have an alternative. I've seen this happen so many times. I remember when thousands of engineers lost their jobs and, as a result, some lost their homes while others took menial jobs to support their families. But then there were those who were trained in other fields and made the transition smoothly. I had a kid right here in this

church that became an accountant. Well, his hobby was photography. After a few years he found out he hated accounting. He came back, we talked it over, and he decided to go to photography school. And now he's working for *National Geographic*. If he had not stopped accounting, which he hated, he'd have been miserable for the rest of his life. You must be satisfied in what you are doing. So don't ever be totally disappointed in not reaching your goal, because that goal may not be meant for you. If you don't reach your goal, your dream is busted, don't become despondent, don't give up—find an alternative. And it's better if you have this alternative in mind all along. In the old days, they used to say a jack-of-all-trades and a master of none; but today, in this world of competition, high finances, high salaries and big money in sports, I'd say that you have to be an expert in more than one field. And don't be afraid to make mistakes, for we are told they are the stepping stones to success.

In conclusion, this is a guideline I put together in the hopes of helping young people with aspirations of excellence in sports or in whatever they choose to pursue:

EXCELLENCE: Many athletes are good and some even reach the threshold of greatness, but only that athlete who is disciplined with continual self-analysis

for improvement of both the physical and mental aspect of his or her being will ever take a step beyond that threshold into the outer limits of human achievement to taste of excellence and glory.

Hodak: I think that is good advice for any number of people. I want to thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences, Mr. Zamperini. It's been a pleasure to have met you. I am very appreciative of your being so forthright with your opinions and in the recounting of your experiences. This has been interesting for me, and I'm sure others will gain from reading it as well.

Zamperini: I'm thrilled to dedicate the time to a good cause like this.

Hodak: Well, I thank you again, as does the Amateur Athletic Foundation.

