

**O**n April 18, 1942, 80 brave men flew 16 B-25 bombers off the deck of the aircraft carrier USS *Hornet* deep in the western Pacific. Led by Lt. Col. James H. “Jimmy” Doolittle, their mission was to avenge Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor less than five months before and raise American morale by bombing the Japanese homeland.

They accomplished that and more. Though they inflicted but modest damage, their raid deeply embarrassed Japanese military leaders.

The raid also contributed to Japan’s decision to attack the Midway islands atoll, where a stunning US victory changed the course of World War II.

Last Nov. 9, three of the four living Doolittle Raiders gave a last salute to their fallen comrades at the National Museum of the US Air Force at Wright-Patterson AFB, Ohio. This ceremony was the continuation—and the culmination—of a tradition Doolittle and his men began decades ago to commemorate their comradeship in action. The reunions took place each year with some exceptions.

The Raiders’ final toast was a poignant and moving occasion, said attendees. It honored men who helped win the war in the Pacific and in doing so changed the history of airpower.

First came the reading of the Raiders’ roll. The few voices answering “here” in the museum’s hall made clear the passage of the years. Retired Lt. Col. Richard E. Cole, Doolittle’s copilot on crew No. 1, announced his presence at the event in a strong voice.

When the roll ended, he rose to open a bottle of 1896-vintage Hennessy cognac. He had to work at it. Eventually, the cork came out with a soft “pop.”

Air Force Academy cadets poured a measure for Cole and the other two Raiders gathered for the toast: retired Lt. Col. Edward J. Saylor, engineer of crew No. 15, and former SSgt. David J. Thatcher, engineer-gunner of crew No. 7.

Retired Lt. Col. Robert L. Hite, copilot of crew No. 16, could not attend due to health issues.

Cole raised his goblet, one of the specially engraved silver drinking vessels the Raiders have long used for their toasts, in front of the invitation-only crowd of Raider family, friends, and

# MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

By Peter Grier



USAF photo by Desiree N. Palacios

supporters. "Gentlemen, I propose a toast to those we lost on the mission and those who have passed away since," he said. "Thank you very much, and may they rest in peace."

The veterans drank. The crowd applauded. A lone bugler played "Taps." It was over. The Raiders would never repeat this ritual, since Cole and his fellows had decided that the 2013 Veterans Day goblet ceremony would be their last.

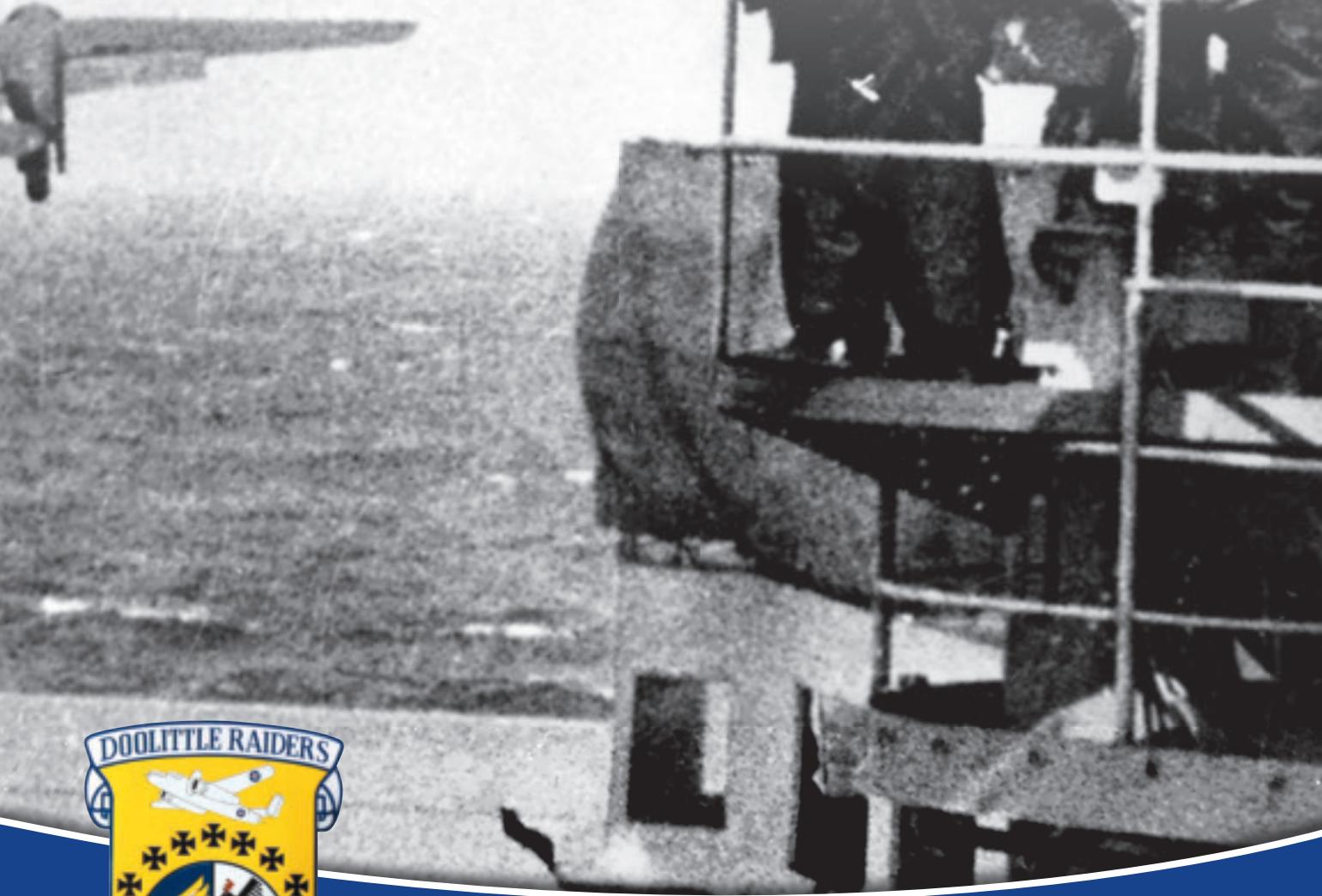
In remarks at the event, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III said one of the first books he read as a boy was *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, a firsthand account of the Doolittle mission by then-Capt. Ted W. Lawson. Welsh's father, a World War II veteran, gave the book to him and told him to look at it closely because the story it told was what America is all about.

The Doolittle raid pioneered the concept of global strike, the idea that no target on Earth is safe from US airpower, said Welsh. "Jimmy Doolittle and his Raiders are truly American heroes. They are also Air Force heroes," he said.

Jimmy Doolittle was a founder of the Air Force Association. Following his retirement from Active Duty at the end of World

*Below left, l-r: Edward Saylor, Richard Cole, and David Thatcher in front of the wooden case built to preserve and transport the Doolittle Raiders' personalized silver goblets. Robert Hite, the fourth Doolittle Raider still alive, was unable to attend this final commemoration, but raised his toast from home via a videotape made earlier in the week. Here: A B-25 lifts off from the flight deck of USS Hornet on its way to Japan. Below: The Doolittle Raiders' patch features the motto "Ever into Danger."*

US Navy photo



**In November, three of the four surviving Doolittle Raiders raised their goblets, one last time, to honor their fallen comrades.**

*Sixteen B-25s lined the flight deck of USS Hornet as it crossed the Pacific toward Japan. Hornet was accompanied by alert escort ships to help protect the lethal cargo. US guns sank a Japanese patrol boat 800 miles off the coast of the island nation, but not soon enough. The Japanese were warned, and to maintain the critical element of surprise, Doolittle decided to launch the raid much farther away from the target than planned.*

War II, he joined a group of other prominent airpower advocates to create a nonprofit organization dedicated to the promotion of national defense and a separate Air Force. Doolittle was elected the group's first National President. A statue of him is prominently placed at AFA's headquarters in Arlington, Va.

"He was essentially the first elected leader of the organization," says retired Col. Joseph E. Sutter, a former AFA Chairman of the Board.

In 2009, AFA honored the Doolittle Raiders with a Lifetime Achievement Award, presented at the annual Air & Space Conference and Technology Exposition. Cole was among the Raiders who attended the event.

At one point, Sutter fell into conversation with Doolittle's copilot and asked him several obvious questions: What was he thinking? What was going through his mind as he sat in his B-25 on the wind-whipped deck of USS *Hornet*, engines roaring, just before a mission that had every chance of ending in his own demise?

Sutter thought the answer would be something like, "Hope I live through this," or "Can we make it to our landing fields in China?"

But it wasn't. "All I know is, I'm sitting next to the greatest pilot in the world," was what Cole said his thoughts were at that moment.

In January 1942, the United States had been at war with Japan for more than a month. To that point, the conflict was going badly. Pearl Harbor had been bombed and much of the Pacific Fleet wrecked. Japanese airpower had sunk the British warships HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse* off the coast of Malaya. The Philippines were under

heavy attack as Japan's armed forces swept through the Far East.

### **Making It Happen**

"There was dire need of a stimulus to morale," wrote Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate in the first volume of *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, the official history of the war.

A chance observation sowed the seeds for the operation. An aide to Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Ernest J. King saw Army bombers at Norfolk Va., take off within the painted outline of an aircraft carrier. Was it possible these big airplanes could take off at sea while carrying munitions and a full load of fuel?

King and Army Air Forces leader Gen. Henry H. "Hap" Arnold embraced the idea and assigned famed aviator Doolittle to organize a suitable air group. Tests showed the North American Aviation B-25B Mitchell was capable of launching from a carrier with a useful bomb load and enough fuel to reach Japan from the western Pacific and continue on to airfields in China.

Doolittle recruited volunteer crews from the 17th Bomb Group (Medium) for an unspecified dangerous mission. They trained in short-distance takeoffs at Eglin Field, Fla., while a group of B-25s was stripped of excess equipment and modified with extra fuel tanks to give the bombers as much range as possible.

The new carrier USS *Hornet* was assigned to the mission. Its captain had no idea what that mission was until April 1, 1942, when 16 B-25s were lifted aboard his flight deck at Alameda Naval Air Station in San Francisco Bay. The next day, *Hornet* and supporting ships steamed under



USAF photo



the Golden Gate Bridge toward the open sea and toward history.

Doolittle hoped to reach a point 450 miles off Japan before launching. That was not to be. In the early hours of April 18, the *Hornet* task force encountered a Japanese patrol boat. US guns sunk the vessel, but commanders had to assume the mission's secrecy had been compromised. The fleet was still 800 miles from the B-25's targets.

"This contingency had been foreseen and it had been agreed that rather than endanger the carriers, the planes would be sent off despite the remote chance that they could reach China from such a distance," wrote Craven and Cate.

Vice Adm. William F. Halsey Jr. ordered that the strike begin at 8 a.m. local time, some 10 hours earlier than planned. Doolittle roared off first into the teeth of a 40-knot gale. The 16th and last bomber lifted off at 9:21 a.m. All had gone without a hitch.

The patrol boat had indeed radioed a warning, but Japanese authorities thought any attack from that distance would not arrive until the next day. Thus, the Raiders faced little opposition as they swept in low over the coast. Doolittle reached Tokyo at 12:15 p.m. and unloaded his 500-pound and incendiary bombs. B-25 after B-25 followed him over Japan's largest city, aiming for oil stores, factory areas, and military installations. Other B-25s hit Kobe, Yokohama, and Nagoya. One lucky bomb

scored a hit on a Japanese carrier in dry dock at the Yokosuka naval base. Anti-aircraft fire hit one B-25, but caused little damage.

"The successful bombing of Tokyo indicated that, provided the element of surprise is possible, an extremely successful raid can be carried out at low altitudes with great damage and high security to equipment and personnel," wrote Doolittle in his July 1942 report to Army Air Forces headquarters on the mission.

In truth, the actual harm the B-25s inflicted was moderate. Some bombs missed the mark. And once the 16 bombers cleared Japan's islands, they remained in great danger. Their enemies were not bullets, but weather and time.

A fortunate tailwind pushed them toward China. They were aiming for Chongqing (Chungking), wartime capital of Nationalist Chinese forces, where officials were supposed to be expecting their arrival. But clouds thickened as they crossed the East China Sea and they approached the coast in darkness, rain, and wind. Pilots and navigators realized they would not be able to reach their intended airfields. To make matters worse, no one had informed their Chinese allies they would arrive earlier than previously planned.

Some B-25s ended up crash-landing in rice paddies or along narrow stretches of beach. Many crews bailed out, including Doolittle and his men. There was

*The Raiders (Doolittle is standing, left) pose with a 500-pound bomb and Navy Capt. Marc Mitscher (right), commanding officer of USS Hornet, en route to the launching point. They would be forced to fly almost twice the distance planned.*

one exception: the B-25 flown by Capt. Edward York was especially low on fuel and diverted to Vladivostok in the USSR. The Soviets confiscated the bomber and interned the crew members, who managed to escape after 13 months and made their way home via Iran.

In China, one Raider, Cpl. Leland D. Faktor, died as a result of a parachute accident. Two, SSgt. William J. Dieter and Sgt. Donald E. Fitzmaurice, drowned after water landings. The rest survived, and over the next several weeks, most made their way to Chongqing and friendly territory. Many ordinary Chinese helped the Raiders immeasurably, since Japanese forces controlled much of eastern China.

These civilians bore the brunt of Japan's anger. Japanese authorities sent 53 battalions to what was then called Chekiang province, where most Raiders landed. These troops engaged in a three-month search and reprisal campaign that leveled entire villages and left some 250,000 Chinese dead.

The Japanese captured eight Raiders. They tried each and sentenced them to death, ultimately executing three: two pilots—Lt. William G. Farrow and Lt. Dean E. Hallmark—and one engineer/gunner, Sgt. Harold A. Spatz. The remaining five—Lt. George Barr, Lt. Robert Hite, Lt. Robert Meder, Lt. Chase J. Nelson, and SSgt. Jacob D. Deshazer—became POWs.

The Doolittle Raid shocked Japanese citizens, who had been told their island nation was untouchable. But it was too small to depress national morale for long. What it did do was help tip the balance in an ongoing debate within the Japanese military. Army and Navy leaders were weighing whether to further extend their

defensive perimeter. The ease with which the B-25s had penetrated to Tokyo argued for pushing the perimeter out, perhaps as far as Midway, New Caledonia, or even the Aleutians.

### A Secret Base in Shangri-La

In June 1942, Japanese forces tried to seize Midway, an atoll that, as its name suggests, is roughly midway between North America and Japan. They suffered a defeat widely considered today to be the turning point in the Pacific theater of the war.

"Finally, the Tokyo raid was a hypodermic to the morale of the United States, which had suffered the worst series of military reverses in its history," states *The Army Air Forces in World War II*.

In the immediate aftermath of the raid, Doolittle thought he would be court-martialed. He had lost all the B-25s under his command, after all. But news of the successful blow against Japan hit the United States like a thunderclap. The public was ecstatic. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was so pleased with the result that he joked at an April 21 press conference that the bombers had come from "our new secret base at Shangri-La," the hidden Tibetan valley at the center of the then-popular novel *Lost Horizon*.

Within days of the raid, the AAF promoted Doolittle to the rank of brigadier general, bypassing the rank of colonel. He received the Medal of Honor at a White House ceremony on May 19. Army Chief of Staff Gen. George C. Marshall read the citation and FDR himself pinned the medal on Doolittle's uniform.

"With the apparent certainty of being forced to land in enemy territory or perish at sea, General Doolittle personally led a

squadron of Army bombers, manned by volunteer crews, in a highly destructive raid on the Japanese mainland," reads the citation in part.

Doolittle eventually commanded Eighth Air Force in Europe as a lieutenant general. But as World War II ended, he still had one unfinished piece of business pertaining to the Raiders.

On the deck of *Hornet*, the day before mission takeoff, Doolittle had promised his men that "when we get to Chungking, I'll throw you fellows the biggest party you've ever seen." The fortunes of war had prevented him from fulfilling that promise. So he invited all the surviving Raiders to a hotel in Miami to help celebrate his birthday on Dec. 14, 1945.

It was a celebration that those who were there would never forget. Most Raiders attended. The tone of the event is caught by the memo written to hotel management by the night watchman.

"The Doolittle boys added some gray hairs to my head," wrote the watchman. "Fifteen of them with girls went swimming in the hotel pool at 1 a.m.," he complained. He told them there was no swimming at night, then went up twice more to try and stop them, with no result. They were noisy until 5 a.m. "Yes, it was a rough night," according to the watchman.

Presented with this report, the hotel manager took it straight to Doolittle himself, according to retired Col. C. V. Glines, historian and author of several books on the attack and an honorary Doolittle Raider. The manager told Doolittle that his men had earned the right to make all the noise they wanted. "Then he asked them to autograph the report, which they did," said Glines at the Nov. 9 gathering at the Air Force Museum.

A tradition was born. Since then, the Doolittle Raiders have held reunions most years, spread at sites all across the country. Their 17th reunion took place in Tucson, Ariz., in 1959. Before the gathering, a



USAF photo by Desiree N. Palacios

*Saylor, Cole, and Thatcher (behind Cole) drink a toast to their fallen comrades. Hite is seen via video.*

group of Tucson civic boosters decided to present the Raiders with a special gift of 80 silver goblets, each one engraved with the name of a Raider. In fact, each goblet had the name engraved twice: once right side up and once right side down. That ensured the name would still be legible if the goblet is turned over.

They were designed to serve as a "last man" memento. At each reunion, the Raiders would toast their fellowship. Those who had died since the previous meeting would have their goblets turned over. When only two Raiders remained, they were to open a special bottle of vintage 1896 Hennessy cognac presented to Doolittle on his 60th birthday. That toast would be the group's last.

For years, the goblets were on display at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. Since 2006, they've been on show at the Air Force Museum. The Raiders have ensured that the goblets are flown in their special wooden traveling case to each reunion site. The toast has been a solemn ritual for the men involved, with even waiters asked to leave the room at the crucial moment.

Over the years, more and more of the goblets have been turned over. Doolittle himself died in 1993 at the age of 96. In 2013, due to advancing age, the remaining Raiders decided it was time to end the tradition. Four survive, but Hite is not able to travel. Cole is 98. Saylor is 93, and Thatcher 92.

In April 2013, Cole, Saylor, and Thatcher held their last public reunion in Fort Walton Beach, Fla. Then, on Veterans Day weekend, they came together at the Air Force Museum for their last toast.

The festivities began on the Friday of that weekend with a family dinner at the museum for the three Raiders and family members of deceased Raiders. At the dinner, Jas Hennessy & Co., the primary sponsor of the weekend events, presented each of the survivors with a special aged bottle of cognac in a wooden case. Inside the case was a quote attributed to Doolittle:

"There's nothing stronger than the heart of a volunteer." In 1942,

all the Raiders had raised their hand and volunteered for a hazardous mission of which they knew few details.

### They Gave Us Hope

Early Saturday afternoon of the weekend, the museum hosted a public arrival ceremony. Hundreds of people waving flags lined streets of Wright-Patterson near the museum and cheered as the three Raiders and family members of deceased Raiders drove in with police escort.

The Raiders and family members then took part in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Doolittle Raiders Memorial in the museum's outdoor memorial park.

"We all shared the same risk and had no realization of the positive effect ... on the morale of Americans at a time of great national peril," said Cole at the wreath-laying. "We are grateful we had the opportunity to serve and are mindful that our nation benefited from our service. Thank you for joining us today." A flyover of B-25s in "missing man" formation capped the wreath-laying while bagpipes played "Amazing Grace."

The final toast itself was in a hangar-like area of the museum itself. Some 250 attended. All were friends and family or invited guests.

AFA was one of the event's sponsors. Former AFA Board Chairman Sutter attended, as did the AFA President, retired Gen. Craig R. McKinley. "AFA is honored to have had the opportunity to be a part of this monumental moment in airpower history," said McKinley in a statement. "The men on stage were part of an extraordinary mission in the darkest days following Pearl Harbor when US morale was at its lowest. They took the battle to the enemy

and gave us hope. They are indeed part of the greatest generation and we owe them our deepest gratitude."

The last toasting ceremony took about 45 minutes. Those who were there say it was a moving event and that the survivors handled their role with aplomb.

"I was just blown away by the turnout and the reception for them and how these guys reacted to it," said retired Lt. Col. Wes Stowers, chairman of Stowers Machinery Corp., another event sponsor.

Stowers himself has a connection to the proceedings. As a young Air Force Academy cadet in the mid-1970s, he was standing in front of the Doolittle goblets when he met a young woman from Colorado College who had come to the academy for a lecture. They've now been married 36 years.

At the academy, "Jimmy Doolittle himself would speak to us every year. We all put these guys on a pedestal," said Stowers.

When the final toast activities came to a close, the audience rose to give the three surviving Raiders a standing ovation. They likely will never gather in public again. Author and honorary Raider Glines had the last word. "This concludes the ceremony and also completes a mission," he said. ■

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*Peter Grier, a Washington, D.C., editor for the Christian Science Monitor, is a longtime defense correspondent and a contributor to Air Force Magazine. His most recent articles, "Finding Luc Gruenther" and "AFJROTC in a Holding Pattern," appeared in the January issue.*

**L-r: Acting Secretary of the Air Force Eric Fanning, USAF Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Welsh III, and Betty Welsh applaud after the last Doolittle Raiders toast at the National Museum of the US Air Force.**



USAF photo by Desiree N. Palacios