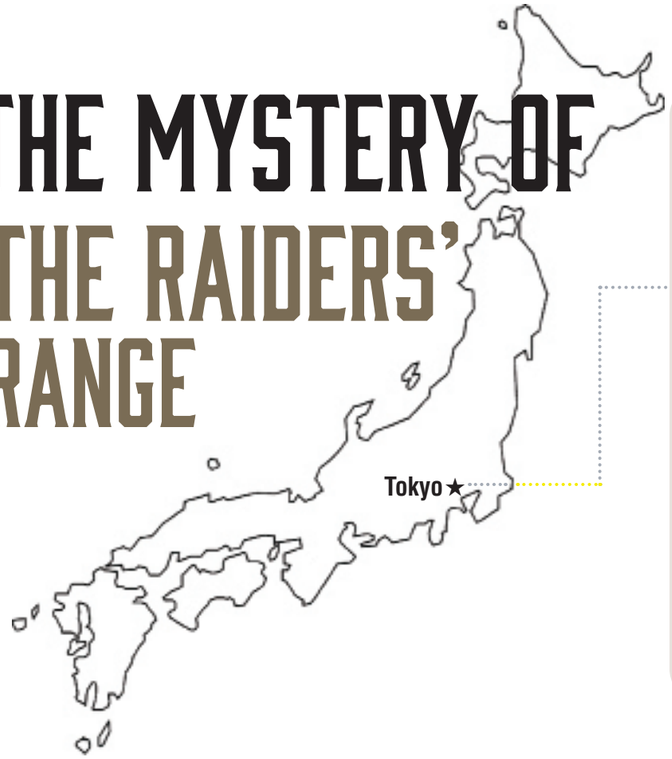
By Gideon Grudo, Digital Platforms Editor

THE MYSTERY OF THE RAIDERS' RANGE



The exact distance of the April 18, 1942, Doolittle raid from the carrier Hornet to the targets in Tokyo has always been a matter of debate.

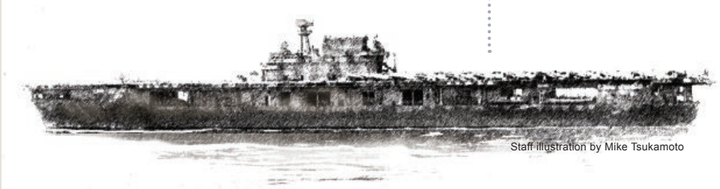
There are numerous contradictory but seemingly authoritative distances stated. Using sources ranging from Lt. Col. James H. "Jimmy" Doolittle's autobiography to after-action reports and even messages from Japanese ships, one finds estimates ranging from 600 miles to 824 miles. This is no rounding error.

Why the discrepancies? For one, some sources look at the distance from the carrier to Japan, some from Hornet to Tokyo, and others from the carrier to the intended targets.

Units of measurement also posed problems. In 1990's The Doolittle Raid, Carroll V. Glines quotes a memo Doolittle wrote to Gen. Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, commander of US Army Air Forces during World War II. In it, Doolittle emphasized that "all distances will be in statute miles."

Statute miles are those measured on ground. In navigation, however, it is common to use nautical miles, which are 15 percent longer than statute miles. In other words, 700 statute miles is the same distance as 608 nautical miles, but sources frequently failed to specify what miles they were using. When former Air Force Magazine Editor in Chief John T. Correll researched the raid he found 16 different sources presenting the distance in some sort of miles.

Below, we visualize the distances in generic miles. How far did these men—"truly American heroes," in the words of recently retired Chief of Staff Gen. Mark A. Welsh III—actually travel to their destination? We will probably never know.



Staff illustration by Mike Tsukamoto

600
- Duane Schultz's *The Doolittle Raid*

645
- 1st Lt. Kenneth Reddy, copilot, aircraft 11

650
- Adm. Chester Nimitz's after-action report
- 1st Lt. Thomas Griffin, navigator, aircraft 9
- Robert Kane's "The Doolittle Raid: A 65-Year Retrospective," *Air & Space Power Journal,* spring 2007
- National Museum of the US Air Force
- C. V. Glines' "An American Hero," *Air Force Magazine,* November 1993

768
- Gen. Hap Arnold's memo

770
- *Air Force Magazine* calculation, 2008

800
- April 20, 1943, War Department announcement
- Ted Lawson's *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*
- Wesley Craven and James Cate's *The Army Air Forces in World War II, Volume 1*

810
- 1st Lt. Edgar McElroy, pilot, aircraft 13

811
- Message from Japanese picket boat (Schultz's *The Doolittle Raid*)

824
- Doolittle's after-action report
- Doolittle's autobiography, *I Could Never Be So Lucky Again*

[miles]