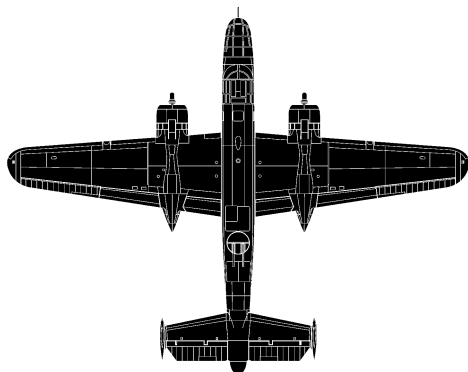


# Airpower Classics

Artwork by Zaur Eylanbekov

## B-25 Mitchell



On April 18, 1942, Army Air Forces Lt. Col. James H. “Jimmy” Doolittle, leading a force of 16 B-25B medium bombers and crews, took off from the aircraft carrier USS *Hornet* and bombed Tokyo and other targets. It was the first time US aircraft had struck at Japan, and the raid immortalized both Doolittle and the B-25 Mitchell. The North American Aviation bomber went on to become a workhorse in every theater of World War II.

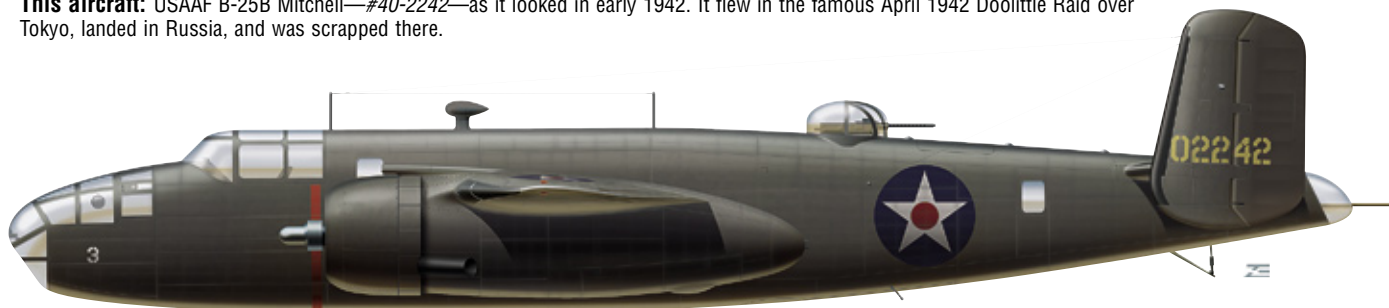
North American proposed the new Model NA-62, derived from a series of earlier prototypes, in a 1939 competition. The Army bought it right off the drawing board, ordering 184 of the airplanes. The clean, lean lines of the B-25 delivered good performance and facilitated both mass production and maintenance. Built in 10 major models, with numerous variants, the B-25 was particularly adaptable to field modifications. These included installation of heavy armament such as Paul I.

“Pappy” Gunn’s fabled 75 mm cannon. The Mitchell was never the fastest, most maneuverable, or best-looking medium bomber. However, it grew to be the most heavily armed and was more versatile than any—even the German Junkers Ju 88.

Noted for its excellent handling characteristics, the B-25 performed remarkably well in many roles, including medium- and low-altitude bomber, close air support, photo reconnaissance, anti-submarine warfare, patrol, and—when occasion demanded—tactical fighter. Later it was used as a pilot and navigator trainer, and became much beloved in that role. In peacetime, it served as an executive transport, firefighter, camera airplane, test vehicle, and crop duster. The last B-25 trainers remained in service at Reese AFB, Tex., until finally retiring in January 1959—nearly 17 years after the bomber’s most famous mission.

—Walter J. Boyne

**This aircraft:** USAAF B-25B Mitchell—#40-2242—as it looked in early 1942. It flew in the famous April 1942 Doolittle Raid over Tokyo, landed in Russia, and was scrapped there.



### In Brief

Designed, built by North American Aviation ★ first flight Aug. 19, 1940 ★ crew of five or six (pilot, copilot, plus three or four of bombardier, radio operator, nav, bombardier, gunners) ★ two Wright R-2600 engines ★ number built 9,816 ★ **Specific to B-25J:** max speed 275 mph ★ cruise speed 230 mph ★ max range 1,275 miles (loaded) ★ armament (attack version) 16 .50 cal machine guns in nose, side, waist, top turret, tail turret ★ bomb load, up to 4,000 lb ★ weight (max) 41,800 lb ★ span 67 ft 7 in ★ length 53 ft 6 in ★ height 16 ft 4 in.

### Famous Fliers

**Medal of Honor:** Ralph Cheli, James Doolittle, Raymond Wilkins.  
**Other notables:** 79 Doolittle Raiders (other than James Doolittle), H. H. Arnold, William Benn, Dwight Eisenhower, Thomas Gerrity, Paul Gunn, John Henebry, Joe Jackson (MOH in Vietnam), George Kenney, Robert Ruegg.

### Interesting Facts

Named after airpower pioneer Billy Mitchell ★ built in numbers exceeding any other US medium bomber ★ used in World War II by Navy and Marine Corps as well as Australia, Britain, Canada, China, France, Holland, Soviet Union ★ pioneered thermal de-icing ★ crashed into cloud-shrouded Empire State building on July 28, 1945 ★ featured in films such as “Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo” (1944), “Catch-22” (1970), “Hanover Street” (1979), “Forever Young” (1992).



*The B-25 became a true workhorse.*