

EAST OREGONIAN

LIFESTYLES

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"The first lesson is that you can't lose a war if you have command of the air, and you can't win a war if you haven't."

— Lt. Col. James Doolittle



A B-25 Mitchell bomber sits on display outside of the Oregon National Guard hangar at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport. The B-25 was the aircraft used by the Doolittle Raiders to bomb Tokyo in 1942.

Staff photo by E.J. Harris



A bust of Lt. Col. James Doolittle is on display at the Oregon National Guard facility in Pendleton.

Doolittle and the raid on Tokyo

Pendleton airbase was training ground for many of the crewmen in assault 73 years ago

East Oregonian and Associated Press

The world shrunk on December 7, 1941, when the Japanese military attacked Pearl Harbor. The United States' concept of a safe distance from the war that was stretching across Europe, Africa and Asia was obliterated as hun-

dreds of warplanes rained bombs and bullets on the naval base in Hawaii, sinking a dozen ships and killing 2,403 Americans.

As the smoke cleared and the United States planned its response, the airbase in Pendleton was poised to play a major role on the world's stage.

Pendleton Field had been constructed earlier in 1941 as the U.S. realized it would likely play a role in World War II. The Corps of Engineers expanded the existing airport with new runways, hangars and housing to support 2,500 personnel who would train to fly.

In June the Army Air Force 17th Bombardment Group moved into the base and soon after the Pearl Harbor attack began flying anti-submarine patrols off the Pacific coastline. They were also among the best prepared for a counter-strike against Japan.

A mere five months after the Pearl Harbor attack, the U.S. hit back on Japan in the Doolittle Tokyo Raid, a bombing mission to show both Japanese and Americans that the Pacific Ocean was not too great of an obstacle for troops to overcome. It was named after Lt. Col. James Doolittle, who led the attack.

The attack consisted of 16 B-25 bombers with five crewmen each, launched from a Navy aircraft carrier deep in the Pacific. They each bombed military targets in Japan and were to land in China, because a return to the carrier wasn't possible. Of the 80 crewmen who took off, three died during the mission and eight were captured in China by the Japanese Army. None of the planes returned to the U.S.

ed by Congress earlier in the week, arrived in a ceremonial B-25 flight.

"We proudly hand over our Congressional Gold Medal to (museum director retired Lt. Gen.) Jack Hudson, who we trust will respectfully guard it and have it securely displayed ... for the world to see and appreciate," said Cole, who was Doolittle's co-pilot on the mission.

Retired Staff Sgt. David Thatcher, 93, came from Missoula, Montana, for the event, and said the medal was for all 80 men.

Cole recalled wryly Saturday that on the evening of April 18, 1942, Thatcher was on a beach in China helping save his crew after a crash-landing, "And I was hanging in my parachute in a tree."

Cole flew with Doolittle in plane No. 1 of the 16 launched from an aircraft carrier. Thatcher was engineer-gunner aboard the seventh plane, nicknamed "The Ruptured Duck," whose crew's crash-landing and evasion of Japanese troops in China was depicted in the movie "Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo."

Thatcher, who was played by Robert Walker in the movie while Spencer Tracy portrayed Doolittle, chuckled as he recounted how the Raiders had given little thought at the time of the raid about earning a place in history.

"We figured it was just another bombing mission," he said in a recent phone interview from his home.

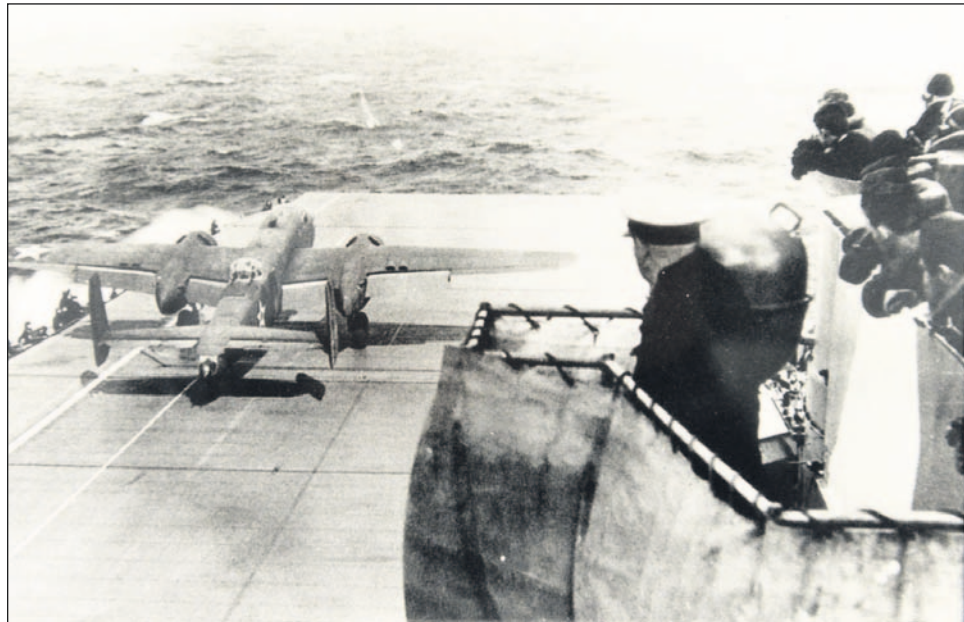
In the years afterward, though, he said, they realized: "It was an important event in World War II."

Three Raiders have died since their 70th anniversary reunion at the museum in Ohio, two of them this year.

The latest to fall was Lt. Col. Robert Hite, who died March 29 at age 95 at a Nashville, Tennessee, nursing facility. Hite was also the last of the eight Raiders who were captured by Japanese soldiers. Three were executed and a fourth died in captivity. Three other Raiders were killed soon after the bombing run, as most crash-landed or had to bail out.

Thatcher joined Cole and Lt. Col. Edward Saylor at the museum less than two years ago for a public "Final Toast" in which they lifted specially engraved silver goblets for the traditional toast of their reunions to those who have gone. He and Cole planned to do so again this weekend at a private gathering, now saluting Hite and Saylor, who died in January at 94.

Their medal will join the museum's diorama about their raid. Hudson has pledged their inspirational story "will live on."



A B-25 bomber from the 17th Bombardment Group takes off from the deck of the USS Hornet on April 18, 1942, on its way to bomb the city of Tokyo, Japan. Sixteen bombers took off from the carrier on the raid that was led by Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle.



After learning that most of the Doolittle Raiders were members of the 17th Bombardment Group stationed in Pendleton, then Mayor C.L. Lieuallen marked the occasion with a parade and community event on May 19, 1942.

The Congressional Medal

April 18 marked the 73rd anniversary of the attack, and the last two surviving Doolittle Raiders presented the Congressional Gold Medal to the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force.

The members of the raid were given the medal because of legislation co-sponsored by U.S. Rep. Greg Walden.

"The Doolittle Tokyo Raiders were 80 brave Americans with a special connection to Eastern Oregon," Walden said. "Seventy-three years after the mission, it was a true honor to recognize the Raiders this week with a Congressional Gold Medal."

Retired Lt. Col. Richard "Dick" Cole, 99, gave the medal to the Dayton, Ohio museum's director in a ceremony at the museum, attended by military and political officials and relatives of the original 80 Raiders. The medal, award-



AP photo by Gary Landers

The two remaining members of the Doolittle Tokyo Raiders, Staff Sgt. David Thatcher, front left, and Lt. Col. Richard "Dick" Cole, right, pose for photos after the Congressional Gold Medal to the Doolittle Tokyo Raiders was presented to the National Museum of the United States Air Force Saturday, April 18 at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.