

"Doolittle Raids"

Major Tom Griffin
Lieutenant Colonel Dick Cole
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Mr. Glines: Ladies and gentlemen, it is a personal pleasure for me to be here today and tell you about the epic mission led by one of the men who helped found the Air Force Association and was its first president. You know who he is, and my purpose today is to review that mission briefly and to honor the men who flew it with him.

Two of those men are with us today and you will have the rare opportunity to ask them any questions about that day that they made history and their personal aftermath after the raid.

e're all familiar with the surprise attack by Japanese forces on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 and you will recall that more than 2300 Americans had been killed and a large number of American ships had been sunk or damaged. As the country was trying to recover from the shock of those losses even more devastating and humiliating defeats were suffered in the following weeks. Wake Island fell, Guam was taken, American troops in the Philippines were being defeated on Battan, and surrender of our remaining forces on Corregedor would soon follow. Japanese troops invaded the Dutch East Indies and Burma and were headed toward Australia. They had invaded Chinese coastal areas five years before and were then pushing farther inland to attack the bases where the Flying Tigers were fighting for China.

Never before had American morale ever been so low. We desperately needed some good news to counter the bad. Known to only a few a strategy began to develop after President Roosevelt appealed to his top military leaders to find some way to strike back. Some thought that American bombers might be based in China or Midway or in the Aleutians to make retaliatory strikes. Another possibility came from Navy Captain Frances S. Lowe, a submariner on the staff of the Chief of Naval Operations. He had seen some Army bombers taking off on a practice field near Norfolk, Virginia and wondered if there were any Army bombers that might be able to take off from an air craft carrier and strike Japan from the sea.

The question was passed to General Hap Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Forces who called Lieutenant Colonel James H. Doolittle to determine if such an attack might be possible. If so, he was to make arrangements with the Navy with the utmost secrecy.

Doolittle determined that the air craft selected had to be able to take off in the short distance of a carrier deck and fly 2,000 miles with a 2,000 pound bomb load. Doolittle decided that the B-25 Mitchell medium bomber could meet those specs, provided it could carry additional fuel. He was given the task of having the planes modified, training the crews, and transferring them to the West Coast for loading on board the carrier Hornet on April 1, 1942.

Meanwhile the Navy formed a 16 ship task force to get the bombers within striking distance of the Japanese home islands. So it was on April 18th that the news would flash around the world Tokyo and four other major Japanese cities had been bombed by American planes. Everyone, especially the Japanese wondered where they had come from. With one bold strike, a sudden surprise attack by American bombers had proved that it was possible to strike back.

I have a short video here that illustrates the unprecedented task that Colonel Jimmy Doolittle and his 79 volunteers took on the day they made history over 67 years ago.

[Video shown.]

There you have it by the man himself telling the story of the raid.

To summarize the mission the 16 bombers had to take off earlier than planned. Each dropped their bombs, 15 of them were able to reach the China coast as you learned. It was getting dark and the weather had deteriorated. They were to hone in on a radio beacon that was supposed to have been located on an airport near Chuchau but no beacon had been installed. Each pilot had to make a command decision, continue on instruments and hope they could find a break in the clouds or ditch close to shore or bail out when their fuel tanks were nearly empty. Eleven pilots including Doolittle elected to have their crews bail out over the mountains in the rainy darkness. The other four planes ditched off shore, crash landed near the beach. Of the 80 men in those 15 planes, two drowned and one died on the bail-out that day. Eight men on two of the planes were captured by the Japanese.

The sixteenth plane landed and the pilot elected to land on a field near Vladivostok, Russia rather than make a certain ditching in the China Sea because he was so low on fuel. He hoped the Russians would let them gas up and proceed to China but since Russia had declared its neutrality for Japan the men in the plane were promptly interned. The five men were placed under house arrest but escaped into Iran fourteen months later.

Meanwhile, the other crews in China had made their way to safety with the help of the grateful Chinese. Many of whom later paid with their lives for helping the Americans evade the Japanese. A quarter of a million Chinese men, women and children were slaughtered by Japanese troops when they found any evidence that the Americans had passed through their villages. This total was in addition to the many thousands murdered by Japanese troops after the invasion in China in 1937 in a Holocaust we never hear much about it but is well documented.

Of the eight Americans captured by the Japanese, three were sentenced to death and were executed by a firing squad after a mock trial that was held in the Japanese language. A fourth raider died a year later of Beriberi and malnutrition. Four others were sentenced to life imprisonment and barely survived 40 months of starvation, torture, beatings and solitary confinement until they were finally released in August 1945.

Now while all the B-25s were lost, the Doolittle raid accomplished one of its main missions and purposes which was to shock the Japanese psychologically. They had suddenly found that their homeland was vulnerable from the air despite what they had been told. The raid had been a complete surprise and it had been launched from an aircraft carrier just as they had done at Pearl Harbor. Their military leaders were greatly humiliated and the sudden intrusion onto their air space caused them to change their strategy in the Pacific. They decided to attack Midway in order to extend their frontier closer to Hawaii and the United States. They sent an armada to the area in June 1942 and in the ensuing battle lost four aircraft carriers with their planes and hundreds of personnel.

After these embarrassing losses the Japanese remained vengeful about the daring Doolittle raid throughout the rest of the war. In desperation they manufactured nine thousand bomb-carrying balloons and launched more than a thousand of them in 1944-1945 that the high altitude winds carried across the Pacific to North America. Two hundred and eighty five of them landed in the continental United States, North

America. Five children and their teacher were killed by one of those balloon bombs in Oregon in May, 1945. They were the only American war casualties in the 48 contiguous states during the war.

Sixty eight of the Doolittle raiders survived World War II. The majority of them stayed in the Air Force after the war and five including their leader became General Officers. Nine raiders survive today and two of them you will meet today.

I will give you a little background on both of them and have you ask any questions you care to about the raid and their later service during WWII.

So let me introduce the man who flew co-pilot for General Doolittle, then Lieutenant Colonel Doolittle, his name is Lieutenant Colonel Richard E. Cole from Comfort, Texas. [Applause].

Dick was born in Dayton, Ohio in 1915. He completed two years at Ohio University before enlisting as a flying cadet in November 1940. After the raid he remained in China and India flying B-25 mission and cargo aircraft over the hump until he returned to the States in June, 1943. Three months later he returned to the China, Burma, India theatre and volunteered again to fly with the First Air Commandos in Burma towing gliders loaded with construction equipment and personnel in C-47s to bases 200 miles behind the Japanese lines. He also dropped spies and made food drops in Southern Burma. These missions were under the co-leadership of Colonel Phillip Cochrane and AFA's own Colonel, later General, Johnny Allison.

Is General Allison here now? That's too bad. If you haven't met Johnny Allison he has a story to tell that I would like to tell myself someday.

This was the second top secret operation for Dick which he volunteered for without knowing any of the dangerous details until he reported for duty. In addition to the DFC he received for the Tokyo raid he received two more DFCs, three Air Medals, a Bronze Star, and three Commendation Medals for his 250 combat missions. Dick had later peacetime service at several stateside bases including an interesting experience as a test pilot at a modification center at Tulsa, Oklahoma. If you care to ask him about it, I think he'll tell you. He had a tour in Japan and later served four years as an air operations officer in Venezuela and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel, January of 1967.

The other raider who is here with us today of the nine that are still living is Thomas C. Griffin, a navigator. Tom lives in Cincinnati, Ohio. Tom? [Applause].

Tom was born in Green Bay, Wisconsin in 1917, graduated from the University of Alabama with a B.A. in Political Science in 1939. He was commissioned from Army ROTC, entered active duty that year in the Coast Artillery, but later requested relief from active duty to enlist as a flying cadet. He graduated from navigator training and was re-commissioned in July, 1940.

Tom's crew were able to fly far inland before they bailed out and were rounded up by Chinese soldiers. They were identified as Americans by missionaries, evaded the Japanese during the next three weeks, and were eventually flown to Chungking.

Tom returned to the States and was assigned to a B-26 group in Louisiana. He flew with the group to North Africa to perform low altitude skip bombing missions against enemy supply ships -- an especially dangerous, unhealthy enterprise. During his third mission his B-26 was hit and had to be ditched. Two men were wounded but all were rescued. After this Tom's group participated in Operation Torch, bombing enemy supply lines in preparation for the invasion of Sicily. On July 4, 1943 his plane was attacked by German fighters and hit by flack. Tom made the second bail out of his life and was captured. He was united with his crew in Naples and all were taken to Stalag Luft 3, a POW camp, where he remained for 22 months. Tom was eventually joined by three other Raiders who had also been shot down and captured by the Germans. The camp was liberated in April, 1945 and Tom returned to the States to be separated as a Major. In addition to the DFC for the Tokyo raid he was awarded the Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters. He returned to civilian life, became a CPA and established his own accounting firm which he operated until retirement.

Ladies and gentlemen you've been introduced by two men who voluntarily participated in one of the most significant and memorable missions of World War II. You have honored all of Doolittle's Tokyo Raiders by your presence here today. Now I would like you to take the opportunity to ask these men any questions you care to about the Tokyo raid or their experiences after. They have agreed to answer any kind of question that you ask. We have cards.

How did you select targets? It just so happens that Major Griffin can tell you about obtaining the maps for the missions.

Major Griffin: I didn't hear the question.

Qq: How did you select targets? But I want you to tell how you got the maps.

Major Griffin: It just happened that when we got down to South Carolina then Colonel Doolittle sent two of us, a fellow name Davey Jones and me up to Washington, D.C. to work with Air Force Intelligence. Now this planning for this mission had to be so secret that the two men assigned to work with us from Air Force Intelligence were just told to cooperate and get whatever we asked for. And of course what we asked for were maps and charts of the Japanese Islands and of China and of the locations of military or industrial plants that would be targets of a bombing raid. And we spent, Davey Jones and I spent about eight or nine days altogether in Washington, D.C. getting all this information together.

And of course later when we got on the carriers heading out to Japan we got out this information that we had and each crew was assigned a specific target in the Japanese Islands. That was part of the initial work that we did and it as they say had to be very secret because no indication of what we were planning to do should get out anywhere, either in our country or in Japan.

Qq: Good question. Good answer.

Are there no more cards? I am amazed that this group of blue suiters don't have questions. She's coming with some. I'll ask one of Dick.

Dick, what were your thoughts when you lined up for take off with the greatest pilot in the world in the left seat? What were you thinking looking at the end of that deck going up and down as you got the signal to go?

Llieutenant Colonel Cole: In our training we had taken off from a dry runway in maybe a ten knot wind out at Diego and had gotten off successfully after we were trained by Hank Miller who was the Navy representative from Pensacola. And we did it several times and I guess that gave us, gave me personally a little bit of confidence. And to put the icing on the cake it happened that I was flying with the best pilot so I didn't have much worry about worrying.

Qq: Alright another question. Did you find and hit your targets? Tom were you able to see where your bombs hit on the ground?

Major Griffin: Well I'll tell you what we did. Our target assigned to our plane was a factory in the southern part of Tokyo just above Tokyo Bay which was making tanks. And we got down to the southern part of the city of Tokyo that day, we ran through a lot of flak incidentally, by the time plane #9 got over Tokyo they were well aware of what was happening and all their anti-aircraft guns were shooting at us.

We reached our initial point and started on our run for our target and it was a factory making tanks. And I pointed out the factory well up ahead and the two boys in the cockpit and I couldn't see what our bombs did but our top turret gunner and our bombardier said that we had really flattened that target. It wasn't until several years after the war in the Japanese archives where they had the results of our raid that day where each one of our planes dropped their bombs. We found out that plane #9 did not hit its target, it hit the immediate neighbor and flattened the Tokyo Gas and Electric Company instead, which is a pretty good swap. [Laughter].

Qq: Thank you Tom. Dick did you see where your bombs hit from the co-pilot seat?

Lieutenant Colonel Cole: No. Our target was Northwest Tokyo and the reason for that was the original launch date was the 19th of April and the lead airplane was to take off at dusk and fly to Japan and drop four 500 pound incendiary bombs to light up Tokyo for a couple of reasons, one was to burn up Tokyo, the other was to give the following airplanes some sort of reference on the way to their targets. As it happened we were over Tokyo at high noon practically, but we did hit the target which was very easy with the incendiary bombs. I don't know how much damage we did but we did set Tokyo on fire.

Qq: Thank you. What was the discussion like before take-off after learning that you were 400-500 miles short of your intended take off point in the Pacific? Tom were you fully aware of how far off you were from your target?

Major Griffin: Yes we were. We didn't have much time for discussion. [Laughter]. We went out of the ready room and they handed out our position and told us to get to our airplanes and get off as quick as we could. Does that answer the question? [Laughter].

Qq: Were you fully aware that you might not have enough fuel to get you to China?

Major Griffin: Well I knew it was going to be awful close but you didn't worry about that on the way in. You were thinking about what you were going to do, where your target was, how to get to it and things like that. After the raid we went back out to sea, right on the deck again. We flew into Japan right on the deck so their radar couldn't pick us up very well and then when we finished our bombs each one of our planes flew back out to sea about 50 miles and then turned right and paralleled the Japanese Islands for the rest of that day. And in the course of that flight the Japanese had been, of course they knew this task force was coming and they knew the range of P-40 airplanes or whatever they thought was on the carriers and they knew that the task force had to come another 24 hours to get close enough for the planes that they thought were on the carrier deck to get there. So they were preparing, getting naval units ready.

And on the way down to the south end of the Japanese Islands that day we ran across three Japanese cruisers steaming at full speed up towards the northern part of the islands. And they opened up on us, we were right down on the deck and we flew through columns of water for what seemed like an eternity. We thought we'd never get out of there but we were very lucky and made it.

So we proceeded down to the end of the Japanese Islands, turned right and flew due west over the China Sea for the remaining hours of our flight.

Qq: Dick did you have any discussions with the boss about making it to China or not?

Lieutenant Colonel Cole: No, he didn't confide in me, so I don't know. [Laughter].

Qq: Did you realize you were short on fuel?

Lieutenant Colonel Cole: The only thing I can say is when he launched I was going to launch too. [Laughter].

Qq: Were you fully aware of the fact that you might not make China?

Lieutenant Colonel Cole: No I wasn't. I hadn't had a chance to talk to Hank but I knew we were having to leave early and it was probably going to be a problem.

Qq: Dick did you have any practice takeoffs yourself with General Doolittle, Colonel Doolittle, practicing with the other aircraft at Eglin? Did you have any practice takeoffs with General Doolittle?

Lieutenant Colonel Cole: Yes, we practiced at Eglin Field when he came, I guess he came from Wright Field. Wwe had three practices there and then when we flew to California and ended up at McClellan, one day Colonel Doolittle and Hank Miller and myself flew up to Marysville which is a little town north of Sacramento and we made a couple of takeoffs there.

Qq: How did the Navy crews treat you once they found out where you were going?

Major Griffin: When we got on the carrier there in San Francisco Bay they weren't very happy to see us. [Laughter]. They thought that their wonderful new carrier was going to be used as a transport ship to transport a bunch of B-25 bombers probably to Hawaii and they weren't very happy about it, didn't have much happy conversations with us.

The next morning when we got about an hour out of San Francisco Bay the loudspeaker came on and Captain Mitcher said this task force is going to Japan and the Army bombers are going to bomb Tokyo. A great cheer went up and the Navy boys became our good friends from that time. [Laughter]. They were such good friends they let us get in on their poker games -- [Laughter] -- and most of the Doolittle Raiders took off 18 days later flat broke. [Laughter].

Qq: Dick did you have any different kind of treatment when you got on board the carrier from the Navy?

Lieutenant Colonel Cole: I thought the Navy treated us very well. Like Tom said they were unhappy mainly because we upset their routine and all our B-25s were on the flight deck and their equipment was down in the lower deck. Another thing is that we cluttered up a lot of their companion ways with our beds that they set up for us while we were on the ship.

On the happy side of it I wasn't a poker player but some of the guys got in a game with the Navy guys and the Navy guys cleaned their rear end. [Laughter].

Qq: When you flew from Japan to China did you navigate as the weather closed in on you, were you able to navigate at all as the weather closed in and you neared China?

Major Griffin: Well it became mostly dead reckoning. Let's see we flew, it was sunny weather from Japan until we got down to the southern tip of the Japanese Islands and started flying due west across the China Sea and then we could see a huge storm building up way up ahead and we took what you call a wind drift and discovered to our great delight that this storm situation up ahead of us was presenting us with a wind out of the west, a tail wind and that made all the difference. If we had had about six hours across the China Sea heading for China with a head wind like that we never would have made it. But this weather situation was a wonderful break for us because we had a strong tail wind all the way across the China Sea. We found out that we had that by taking what we call a wind drift and realized that we had this strong tail wind, we didn't know how strong it was but from the action of the wind on the surface waters which you use somehow, these are all crude navigational aides we had in those days. I don't think the modern boys do that so much.

But we realized that we had a good strong tail wind across the China Sea and that made all the difference. All of our planes at least reached the China coast before they ran out of gas. Some of us pulled up into the storm and flew until we ran out of gas. How many planes bailed out? I guess about 12 plane loads of us pulled up into the storm and flew until we ran out of gas and then we just bailed out. That solves that.

Qq: Dick, did Colonel Doolittle give you any special briefing before, when it looked like you might have to land, have to ditch?

Lieutenant Colonel Cole: After we left Japan, we were on a dead reckoning heading toward China and Hank Potter plotted a course, he did a very good job. Well into the flight Hank passed a note up that we were going to end up 188 miles short of the Chinese coast. So at that time we went through our ditching procedure and Colonel Doolittle got on the interphone and briefed us. He said if we have to ditch we will attempt to ditch by a friendly vessel and they will take us aboard and we can get to a friendly port. If we have to ditch by an enemy vessel they will take us aboard and we will attempt to take over that vessel and get to a friendly port. Fortunately -- none of us were happy about ditching and we didn't have to.

Qq: Quick question, how many ships were there in the task force? I can answer that. There were 16 ships in the task force. What did you carry for survival gear and was it useful?

Lieutenant Colonel Cole: Well we had life vests and parachutes of course, and that's about it I guess.
[Laughter].

Qq: It's too bad we can't get into their post war or their post raid experiences, with Dick in the Commandos and Tom in a POW camp. There was one question about POW camp Tom, what was life like in German Prison camp? Was Stalag Luft 3 anything like Hogan's Heroes? [Laughter].

Major Griffin: I watched one addition of that and I could never look at it again it was so different than what actually happened over there as a prisoner of the Nazis.

However for the first, I was a prisoner for 22 months of the Germans and for the first 18 months before the Great Escape the Luftwaffe were in charge of us and they followed the rules of the Geneva Convention for the handling or treatment of prisoners of war pretty closely. But after the Great Escape the Gestapo came in and they ran the Luftwaffe out and they started running the camp. Things were very touch and go then; you had to be very careful because all they wanted was an excuse to shoot you. That went on for 18 months and when the Nazis were coming, not the Nazis, the Russians were coming, the Germans got us out of there. It happened to be late January of 1945 and we got out of that camp and wouldn't you know it was zero weather and we marched for three days. We rested in the ice for part of that time. After three days they put us on the old box cars, the old 40 and 8 box cars made to handle 8 horses or 40 men and they stuffed 60 of us in each box car and we were in there for three days getting down into Bavaria where we ended up the last few months of the war until Patton's men freed us in late April I guess it was of 1945. Does that answer that question?

Qq: I think it does.

One more question. Dick, do you care to tell your experience testing a B-24 out of Tulsa, a certain experience in your life, a life changing experience that you had?

Lieutenant Colonel Cole: I think this is going to be kind of boring for you all but I'll tell you anyway. While I was at Tulsa they had modified the B-24 by putting a APQ13 radar in the nose and it had to be pressurized and to test

the pressurization we were supposed to take it up to 30,000 feet and see if it operated correctly.

I went out to the airplane and made the walk around and a young lady came riding up on a bicycle. She was a Douglas employee and she said I want to fly in a big airplane. I said, well this is a test op and by regulations we can't take passengers anyway. So I got in the airplane and the co-pilot came and the crew chief and we went through the procedures and took off.

Well about 12,000 feet here comes the young lady up into the cockpit area. [Laughter]. Of course we had to scrub the mission. When we got down on the ground the co-pilot had an eye for a pretty girl and he took a match cover out of his pocket and he said write your phone number on it, and she did. Then she turned around and gave it to me. [Laughter and applause]. I didn't have enough nerve to call her for a week, but I did and two weeks later we were married. [Laughter and applause]. She was a member of the WAF taking flying lessons at Spartan Aircraft across the field. That's why she wanted to fly in a big airplane.

Qq: And the rest is history. [Laughter]. You have a son at the Air Force Academy now?

Lieutenant Colonel Cole: He is graduated and he is a C-135 pilot. His brother is trying to go to the Air Force Academy and he's a senior in high school.

Qq: A true Air Force family. Ladies and gentlemen as I said you've been introduced to two men who flew voluntarily one of the most significant and memorable missions of World War II. You've honored all of Doolittle's Tokyo Raiders by your presence here today. The gentle ticking of our clocks reminds that their generation is winding down and we must continue to show our gratitude by remembering what the Doolittle Raiders did for our national morale 67 years ago. And they were willing to serve their country regardless of the possible consequences in war and peace. May it always be so.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.

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