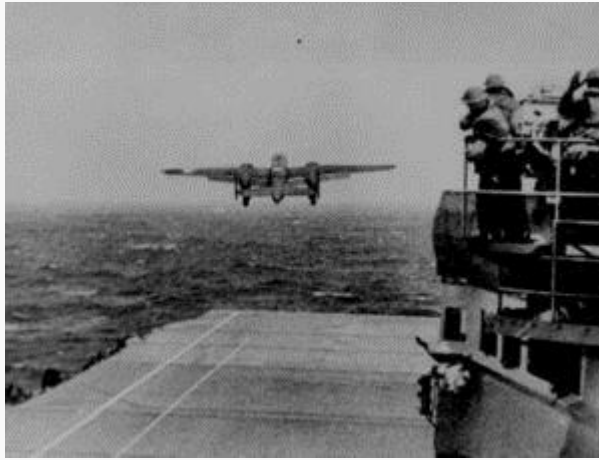


Doolittle Raid

Doolittle Raid

Part of [World War II](#), [Pacific War](#)



A [B-25](#) taking off from [Hornet](#) for the raid

Date	18 April 1942
Location	Tokyo, Japan
Result	U.S. morale victory minimal destruction First attack on Japanese Home Islands Tactically Indecisive

Combatants

[United States](#)

[Japan](#)

Commanders

[James H. Doolittle](#)

[Hideki Tojo](#)

Strength

16 [B-25 Mitchells](#)

Unknown number of troops and homeland defense

Casualties

3 dead,
8 [POWs](#) (4 died in captivity);
5 interned in USSR
all 16 B-25s

About 50 dead, 400 injured

Pacific campaigns 1941-42

[French Indochina](#) – [Pearl Harbor](#) – [Thailand](#) – [Malaya](#) – [Hong Kong](#) – [Philippines](#) – [Guam](#) – [Wake](#) – [Dutch East Indies](#) – [New Guinea](#) – [Singapore](#) – [Australia](#) – [Indian Ocean](#) – [Doolittle Raid](#) – [Solomons](#) – [Coral Sea](#) – [Midway](#)



Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle (second from right) and his crew pose in front of a B-25 on the deck of the USS *Hornet*



Lt. Col. Doolittle wires a Japanese medal to a bomb, for "return" to its originators.



Lt. Col. James H. Doolittle (center) with members of his flight crew and Chinese officials in China after the attack.

The **Doolittle Raid**, [18 April 1942](#) was the first [air raid](#) by the [United States](#) to strike the [Japanese](#) home islands during [World War II](#). The mission was notable since it was the only time in U.S. military history that [United States Army Air Forces](#) bombers were launched from a [U.S. Navy aircraft carrier](#) on a combat mission. The Doolittle Raid demonstrated that the Japanese home islands were vulnerable to [Allied](#) air attack, and it provided an expedient means for U.S. retaliation for Japan's [attack on Pearl Harbor](#) on [7 December 1941](#).

The raid was planned and led by [Lieutenant Colonel Jimmy Doolittle](#), already a famous civilian [aviator](#) and [aeronautical engineer](#) before the war. The raid, however, had its roots in the mind of Navy

Captain Francis Low, who early in the war predicted that, under the right conditions, twin-engined Army bombers could be successfully launched from an aircraft carrier.

Requirements for the aircraft were for a cruising range of 2,400 miles with a 2,000 pound bomb load. The [B-26 Marauder](#) and [B-23 Dragon](#) were considered, but the former had questionable takeoff characteristics from a carrier deck, and the latter's wingspan was nearly 50% greater than the B-25's, reducing the number that could be taken aboard a carrier and posing risks to the ship's [island](#). Subsequent tests with three [North American B-25B Mitchells](#) at [Norfolk](#) indicated it could be launched from a carrier, hit military targets in Japan, and fly on to land in [China](#). Negotiations with the [Soviet Union](#) to land in [Siberia](#), shortening the flight by 600 miles, were fruitless.^[1]

Training

After the raid was approved, 24 operational B-25B medium bombers were detached from the 17th Bomb Group (Medium), based at [Lexington County Army Air Base, Columbia, South Carolina](#), and sent to the [Mid-Continent Airlines](#) modification center in [Minneapolis, Minnesota](#), for installation of additional fuel tanks. The aircraft were modified by:

- Removal of the lower gun turret
- Installation of de-icers and anti-icers
- Steel blast plates mounted on the fuselage around the upper turret
- Removal of the liaison radio set
- Installation of three additional fuel tanks and support mounts in the bomb bay, crawl way and lower turret area to increase fuel capacity from 646 to 1,141 [U.S. gallons](#)
- Mock gun barrels installed in the tail cone, and
- Replacement of their [Norden bombsight](#) with a makeshift aiming sight.

Two bombers also had cameras mounted to record the results of bombing.^[1]

Volunteer crews for an unspecified "extremely hazardous" mission were also solicited from the 17th BG. The 24 crews selected picked up the modified bombers in Minneapolis and flew them to [Eglin Field, Florida](#), beginning [1 March 1942](#). There the crews received intensive training for three weeks in carrier deck takeoffs, low-level and night flying, low altitude bombing, and over water navigation. General Doolittle stated in his after action report that an operational level of training was reached despite several days when flying was not possible because of rain and fog. One aircraft was heavily damaged in a takeoff accident and another taken off the mission because of a nose wheel shimmy that could not be repaired in time.^[1]

On [25 March](#), the 22 remaining B-25s took off from Eglin for [McClellan Field, California](#). They arrived on [27 March](#) for final modifications at the Sacramento Air Depot. A total of 16 B-25s were subsequently flown to [Alameda, California](#), on [31 March](#). Fifteen raiders would be the mission force and a 16th aircraft, by last minute agreement with the Navy, would be squeezed onto the deck to be flown off shortly after departure from San Francisco to provide feedback to the Army pilots about takeoff characteristics. (The 16th bomber was made part of the mission force instead.)

Flying the Raid

On [1 April](#), the 16 modified bombers, their five-man crews and Army maintenance personnel were loaded onto the [USS Hornet](#) at Alameda. Each aircraft carried four specially-constructed 500-pound bombs (three high-explosive and one incendiary) and reduced armament, consisting of two [.50-caliber machine guns](#) in an upper turret and a [.30-caliber machine gun](#) in the nose. The two wooden

gun barrels mounted in the tail cones were intended to discourage Japanese air attacks from that direction, cited afterward by Doolittle as being particularly effective.^[1] The aircraft were clustered closely and tied down on the *Hornet's* flight deck in the order of their expected launch.

The *Hornet* and Task Force 18 left the port of Alameda at 10:00 on [2 April](#) in a thick fog and a few days later rendezvoused with Task Force 16, the carrier [USS Enterprise](#) and its escort of [cruisers](#) and [destroyers](#) in the mid-[Pacific Ocean](#) north of [Hawaii](#). The *Enterprise's* fighters and scout planes would provide protection for the entire task force in the event of a Japanese air attack, since the *Hornet's* fighters were stowed below decks to allow the B-25s to use the flight deck. The combined force, two carriers, three heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, eight destroyers, and two fleet oilers, then proceeded in radio silence towards their intended launch point in enemy-controlled waters east of Japan.

On the morning of [18 April](#), at a distance of about 650 miles (1,050 km) from Japan, the task force was sighted by a Japanese picket boat which radioed an attack warning to Japan. Although the boat was quickly destroyed by gunfire from the cruiser [USS Nashville](#), Doolittle and *Hornet* skipper Captain [Marc Mitscher](#) decided to launch the B-25s immediately—ten hours early and 170 miles (320 km) farther from Japan than planned. After respotting to allow for engine start and run-ups, Doolittle's aircraft had 467 feet of takeoff distance. Despite the fact that none of the B-25 pilots, including Doolittle, had ever taken off from a carrier before, all 16 aircraft launched safely between 08:20 and 09:19.

They then flew single-file towards Japan at wavetop level to avoid detection. The aircraft began arriving over Japan about noon (Tokyo time; six hours after launch) and bombed ten military and industrial targets in [Tokyo](#), two in [Yokohama](#), and one each in [Yokosuka](#), [Nagoya](#), [Kobe](#) and [Osaka](#). Although some B-25s encountered light anti-aircraft fire and a few enemy fighters over Japan, no bomber was shot down or severely damaged. Fifteen of the 16 aircraft then proceeded southwest along the southern coast of Japan and across the [East China Sea](#) towards eastern China, where recovery bases supposedly awaited them. One B-25, extremely low on fuel, headed instead for the closer land mass of Russia.

The raiders faced several unforeseen challenges during their flight to China: night was approaching, the aircraft were running low on fuel, and the weather was rapidly deteriorating. As a result of these problems, the crews realized they would probably not be able to reach their intended bases in China, leaving them the option of either bailing out over eastern China or crash landing along the Chinese coast. Fifteen aircraft reached the China coast after 13 hours of flight and crash landed or bailed out; the crew who flew to Russia landed 40 miles beyond [Vladivostok](#), where their B-25 was confiscated and the crew interned until they managed to escape through [Iran](#) in 1943. It was the longest combat mission ever flown by the [B-25 Mitchell](#) medium bomber, averaging approximately 2,250 miles.

Doolittle and his crew, after safely parachuting into China, received assistance from [John Birch](#), an American [missionary](#) in China. As did the others who participated in the mission, Doolittle had to bail out but fortunately landed in a heap of dung (saving a previously injured ankle from breaking) in a rice paddy in China near Chaozhou. Doolittle thought that the raid had been a terrible failure, and that he would be court-martialed upon his return. Doolittle subsequently recommended Birch for intelligence work with General Chennault's Flying Tigers.

Aftermath

Following the Doolittle Raid, most of the B-25 crews that came down in China eventually made it to safety with the help of Chinese civilians. The Chinese people that helped them, however, paid dearly for sheltering the Americans. The Japanese military began the [Zhejiang-Jiangxi Campaign](#) to intimidate the Chinese from helping downed American airmen. The Japanese killed an estimated 250,000 civilians while searching for Doolittle's men ^[2]. The crews of two aircraft (ten men in total) were unaccounted for; Hallmark's crew (sixth off) and Farrow's crew (last off). On [15 August 1942](#), the United States learned from the [Swiss Consulate General](#) in [Shanghai](#) that eight of the missing crew members were prisoners of the Japanese at Police Headquarters in that city (two crewmen had died in the crash landing of their aircraft). On [19 October 1942](#), the Japanese announced that they had tried the eight men and sentenced them to death, but that several of them had received commutation of their sentences to life imprisonment. No names or details were included in the broadcast. Japanese propaganda ridiculed the raid, calling it the "Do-nothing Raid", and boasted that several B-25s had been shot down. In fact, none had been lost to enemy action.

After the war, the complete story of the two missing crews was uncovered in a [war crimes](#) trial held in [Shanghai](#). The trial opened in February 1946 to try four Japanese officers for mistreatment of the eight captured crewmen. Two of the missing crewmen, Sgt. William J. Dieter and Cpl. Donald E. Fitzmaurice, had died when their B-25 crashed off the coast of China. The other eight, Lieutenants Dean E. Hallmark, [Robert J. Meder](#), Chase J. Nielsen, William G. Farrow, Robert L. Hite, and George Barr; and Corporals Harold A. Spatz and [Jacob DeShazer](#) were captured. In addition to being tortured and starved, these men contracted [dysentery](#) and [beriberi](#) as a result of the poor conditions under which they were confined. On [28 August 1942](#), pilot Hallmark, pilot Farrow, and gunner Spatz were given a [mock trial](#) by the Japanese, although the airmen were never told the charges against them. On [14 October 1942](#), these three crewmen were advised that they were to be executed the next day. At 16:30 on [15 October 1942](#), the three were taken by truck to Public Cemetery Number 1 outside of Shanghai and shot.

The other five captured airmen remained in military confinement on a starvation diet, their health rapidly deteriorating. In April 1943, they were moved to [Nanking](#) where, on [1 December 1943](#), Meder died. The remaining four men (Nielsen, Hite, Barr and DeShazer) eventually began receiving slightly better treatment from their captors and were even given a copy of the [Bible](#) and a few other books. They survived until they were freed by American troops in August 1945. The four Japanese officers who were tried for war crimes against the eight Doolittle Raiders were all found guilty. Three of them were sentenced to hard labor for five years and the fourth to a nine-year sentence. Survivor DeShazer eventually became a missionary and returned to Japan in 1948, where he served in that capacity for over 30 years.



Orders in hand, Navy Capt. Marc A. Mitscher, skipper of the USS *Hornet* chats with Lt. Col. James Doolittle.

One other Doolittle Raid crewman was lost on the mission. Corporal Leland D. Faktor was killed during his bailout attempt over China, the only man on his crew to be lost.

Immediately following the raid, Doolittle told his crew that he believed the loss of all 16 aircraft, coupled with the relatively minor damage the aircraft had inflicted on their targets, had rendered the attack a failure, and that he expected a [court martial](#) upon his return to the United States. Instead, the raid bolstered American morale to such an extent that Doolittle was awarded the [Medal of Honor](#) by [President Roosevelt](#), and was promoted two grades to [Brigadier General](#), skipping the rank of colonel. He went on to command the 12th Air Force in [North Africa](#), the 15th Air Force in the [Mediterranean](#), and the 8th Air Force in [England](#) during the next three years.

In addition to Doolittle's award of the Medal of Honor, Corporal Dave Thatcher (an engineer-gunner) and Lieutenant Thomas White (flight surgeon/gunner) each received the [Silver Star](#) for their brave efforts in helping several wounded crew members evade Japanese troops in China. All the remaining Raiders (including Thatcher and White) were awarded the [Distinguished Flying Cross](#) and those who were killed, wounded or injured as a result of the raid also received the [Purple Heart](#). In addition, every Doolittle Raider received a decoration from the Chinese government.

The Doolittle Raiders have held an annual reunion almost every year since the late 1940s. The high point of each reunion is a solemn, private ceremony in which the surviving Raiders perform a roll call, then toast their fellow Raiders who passed away during the previous year. Specially-engraved silver goblets, one for each of the 80 Raiders, are used for this toast. The goblets of those who have died are inverted. When only two Raiders remain alive, they will drink a final toast using the vintage 1896 bottle of [Hennessy cognac](#) which has accompanied the goblets to each Raider reunion since 1960. Only 14 Raiders are still alive, and only eight were able to attend the 64th anniversary reunion held in [Dayton, Ohio](#), in April 2006. Seven were able to attend the 65th anniversary in April 2007 in [San Antonio, Texas](#). The oldest Raider is now 95, and the youngest is 85. The bottle of cognac and the goblets had been maintained by the [United States Air Force Academy](#) on display in Arnold Hall, the cadet social center. On [19 April 2006](#), the memorabilia were transferred to the [National Museum of the United States Air Force](#)^[1].

Effect

Compared to the devastating [B-29 Superfortress](#) attacks against Japan later in the war, the Doolittle raid did little material damage. Nevertheless, when the news of the raid was released, American morale soared from the depths to which it had plunged following the Pearl Harbor attack and Japan's subsequent territorial gains. It was important for Americans to know that a military response had been undertaken.

The raid also had a strategic impact, in that it caused the Japanese to recall some fighter units back to the home islands for defense. They did not understand how American aircraft could attack from such a distance and assumed that America had developed a new, extremely long-range aircraft, when in reality, American forces knew it would essentially be a one-way trip. These reassignments subsequently weakened Japan's air capabilities against the Allies at the [Battle of Midway](#) and later [Pacific Theater](#) campaigns.

Legacy

The United States Navy named one of its aircraft carriers after the fictional location, [USS Shangri-La](#), as an obvious reference to the Doolittle Raid. The name referred to the recently lost [USS Hornet](#). President Roosevelt had answered a reporter's question by saying that the raid had come from "[Shangri-La](#)"^[2], which was the name of the place of perpetual youth in the [Himalayas](#) in the popular book and movie of the time, *Lost Horizon*.

Books and movies

The Doolittle Raid was the subject of two 1944 feature films. [Thirty Seconds over Tokyo](#) was based on a book of the same title by Doolittle Raider pilot Captain [Ted W. Lawson](#), who lost a leg and suffered other serious injuries as a result of his crash landing off the coast of China. [Spencer Tracy](#) played Doolittle and [Van Johnson](#) portrayed Lawson. [The Purple Heart](#), starring [Dana Andrews](#), was a largely fictional depiction of the trial of the captured Doolittle Raiders.

The 2001 film [Pearl Harbor](#) presented a heavily fictionalized version of the raid, with the attack portrayed as having destroyed an entire industrial area against withering anti-aircraft gunfire and with many other major technical inaccuracies.

A highly fictionalized film in 1943, [Destination Tokyo](#) starring [Cary Grant](#), tangentially involved the raid, concentrating on the fictional submarine [USS Copperfin](#). The submarine's mission is to enter [Tokyo Bay](#) undetected and place a landing party ashore to obtain weather information vital to the upcoming Doolittle raid. The film suggests the raid did not launch until up-to-the-minute data was received. However, all the after-action reports indicated the raid launched without time for weather briefings because of the encounter with the picket ships.^[1]

Many books were written about the Doolittle Raid after the war. *Doolittle's Tokyo Raiders*, by C.V. Glines, tells the complete story of the raid, including the unique experiences of each B-25 crew. *Guests of the Kremlin*, written by copilot Bob Emmens, describes his crew's adventures as internees in Russia after their landing in that country following the raid. *Four Came Home*, also by C.V. Glines, tells the story of Nielsen, Hite, Barr, and DeShazer, the Raiders who were held in [POW](#) camps for over three years. *The First Heroes*, by Craig Nelson, goes into great detail of the events leading up to the raid and the aftermath for all the pilots and their families.

A related VHS video with some excellent old clips of Doolittle and the flight preparations, and the B-25s launching, is *DeShazer*, the story of missionary Sergeant [Jake DeShazer](#) of B-25 #16 (the last to launch from the *Hornet*). The video is based on *"The Amazing Story of Sergeant Jacob De Shazer: The Doolittle Raider Who Turned Missionary"* by C. Hoyt Watson. At the end of both the video and the book, DeShazer after the end of the war meets [Mitsuo Fuchida](#), the commander and lead pilot of the Pearl Harbor raid.

Doolittle Raiders exhibit



[NMUSAF](#) Doolittle Raid exhibit

The most complete display of Doolittle Raid memorabilia can be seen at the [National Museum of the United States Air Force](#) (on [Wright-Patterson Air Force Base](#)) in [Dayton, Ohio](#). The centerpiece is a like-new [B-25](#), which is painted and marked as Doolittle's aircraft (although it is actually a B-25D). The bomber, which [North American Aviation](#) presented to the Raiders in 1958, rests on a reproduction of the USS *Hornet's* flight deck. The scene is made even more realistic through the use of several authentically-dressed mannequins surrounding the aircraft; these include representations of Doolittle,

USS *Hornet* skipper Captain [Marc Mitscher](#), and groups of Army and Navy personnel loading the aircraft's bombs and ammunition.



Raiders' goblets

Other highlights of the exhibit are the silver goblets used by the Raiders at each of their annual reunions; pieces of flight clothing and personal equipment; a parachute used by one of the Raiders in his bailout over China; and group photographs of all 16 crews. Many other interesting items are also included in this unique collection.

A fragment of the wreckage of one of the aircraft as well as the medals awarded to Doolittle are on display at the [Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum](#) in [Washington, D.C.](#)

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- [Profile image of Doolittle's airplane](#)
- [Official Doolittle Raiders site](#)
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- ["Animated History of Doolittle Raid"](#)
- [Naval Historical Center site](#)
- [After action report of Col. Doolittle](#)
- [doolittleraider.com](#)

- [MaritimeQuest Doolittle Raid Photo Gallery](#)
- [American Heritage article on the Doolittle Raid](#)
- www.doolittleraid.com - A reference, research, and news page on things related to the Doolittle Raid and the Raiders
- [Jimmy Doolittle and the Tokyo Raiders Strike Japan During World War II](#) article by Edward