Jimmy Doolittle

Born in Alameda CA, Dec 14, 1896. Died Sep 27, 1993.

James "Jimmie" Doolittle is today most famous for his audacious B-25 bombing raid on Tokyo in the opening months of America's entry into World War II, an attack featured in the 2001 movie Pearl Harbour. But Doolittle's aviation legacy is much greater than this military attack. Doolittle was a true renaissance man of aviation, a daredevil aviator and racing pilot, an aviation executive, a military commander, a scientist, and a presidential advisor. He was also an inspirational figure to many young people in the early days of aviation.

James Harold Doolittle was born in Alameda, California, on December 14, 1896. His father was a carpenter and set off to Alaska in search of gold. Doolittle's mother brought Jimmie with her to join his father in Nome, Alaska, when he was three-and-a-half years old. When he was 11, he moved with his mother to Los Angeles, California, where he developed an interest in flying. He became a professional boxer and entered the University of California's School of Mines in 1915. In 1917 he enlisted in the Army Signal Enlisted Reserve Corps to train as a pilot and was soon promoted to lieutenant. Doolittle served in the United States Army Air Corps from 1917 until 1930, when he became a major in the Army Air Corps Reserve, where he served for the next ten years.

After he learned to fly, Doolittle served as an instructor pilot and began engaging in acrobatics. He started thinking of breaking aviation records. In 1922 he made the first cross-continental crossing in less than 24 hours, taking 21 hours and 19 minutes to fly in his De Havilland DH-4 plane from Pablo Beach, Florida, to San Diego, California, with only one refuelling stop.

In 1923 Doolittle enrolled in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) to obtain a master's degree and then a Ph.D. in aeronautical engineering. When he received his degrees in June of 1925, fewer than 100 people in the world held comparable advanced degrees. In his doctoral dissertation, "Wind Velocity Gradient and Its Effect on Flying Characteristics," he combined laboratory data with test flight data to determine that a pilot needed visual aids or instruments to know the direction and speed of the wind and the direction in which the plane was flying. His dissertation countered the theory that many contemporary pilots held that they could "know" this information instinctually.

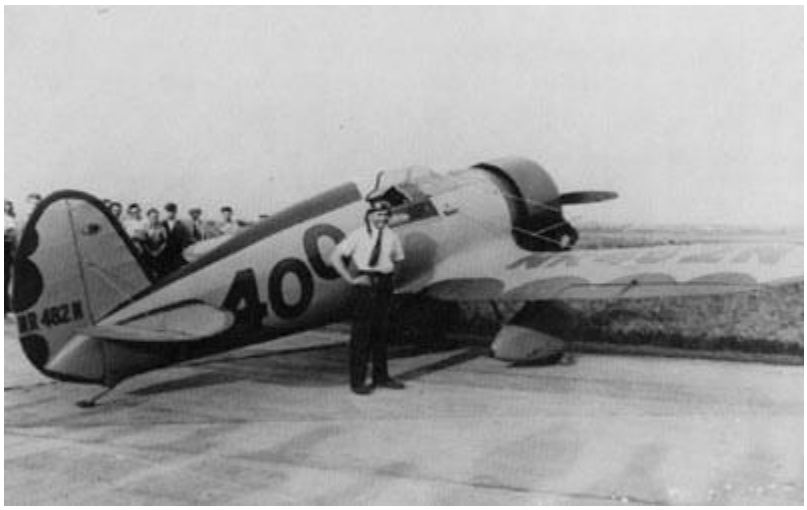
Over the next several years Doolittle continued his flying exploits. In 1927 he was the first person to execute an outside loop, where the cockpit (and pilot) remain on the outside of the loop (previously

thought to be a fatal manoeuvre because of the stresses encountered). Carried out in a Curtiss fighter at Wright Field in Ohio, Doolittle executed the dive from 10,000 feet (3,048 meters), reached 280 miles per hour (451 kilometres per hour), bottomed out upside down, then climbed and completed the loop.

Flying a Curtiss P-1B Hawk biplane, Jimmy Doolittle performs the first outside loop in 1927.

Doolittle was the first person to win all major aviation racing trophies. He won the Schneider Trophy in 1925 for flying a Curtiss Navy racer seaplane equipped with pontoons the fastest it had ever been flown, averaging 232 miles per hour (373 kilometres per hour). In 1931, after leaving the military and going to work for Shell Oil Corporation, he won the Bendix Trophy, flying from Burbank, California, to Cleveland, Ohio, and establishing a new record with his Laird "Super Solution." He crossed the country in 11 hours, 16 minutes, and 10 seconds, beating the record set earlier that year by 1 hour and 8 minutes.

Jimmie and the Curtiss Navy racer



Jimmie Doolittle with the Shell Oil Company's "400." a Travel Air Model R. In 1930, Doolittle called it "The finest airplane that I have ever flown." Travel Air Manufacturing Company was the predecessor company of Beechcraft

In 1932 he won the Thompson Trophy race at Cleveland in a Granville Gee Bee R-1 racer, averaging 252 miles per hour (406 miles per hour) and established the world landplane speed record. In the early 1930s, he also conducted tests for the Army.

His academic credentials, combined with his aviation exploits and military experience, enabled him to serve as a go-between for scientists and aviators and military officers. He also participated in numerous aviation design contests for youngsters and inspired many of them to pursue careers in aviation engineering. During this period, he worked with the Guggenheim Flight Laboratory in developing instruments for flight in poor weather. On September 24, 1929, he was the first person to take off, fly and land an airplane entirely by instruments. Also while at Shell, he urged the company to greatly increase its ability to manufacture high-octane aviation gas, which proved to be extremely important for high performance airplane engines.

In 1940, Doolittle returned to active duty as a major in the Army Air Corps. He was quickly promoted to lieutenant colonel. Soon after the bombing of Pearl Harbour in December 1941, Doolittle hatched a bold and dangerous plan to launch Army Air Corps B-25 twin-engine bombers from an aircraft carrier to bomb Japan.

General Jimmy Doolittle in 1944. The series of Doolittle raids on Tokyo in 1942 was a public vindication of his belief that long
range bombing was going to be a decisive factor in the war.

On April 18, 1942, the aircraft carrier USS Hornet sailed toward the Japanese coast. Doolittle's plan was to move to within 450 miles (724 kilometres) of the coast, but a radio-equipped Japanese fishing boat discovered the task force, forcing Doolittle and his men to launch earlier than planned. Shortly after noon, Tokyo time, Doolittle arrived over Tokyo and dropped his bombs. The other planes followed at staggered intervals and also dropped their bombs. Then they all headed individually for

China, but because they had been forced to launch early, they were low on fuel when they finally reached the mainland and were unable to find their designated airfields. One plane landed in Vladivostok, Russia, where its crew was arrested and held prisoner for 13 months. Four other planes crash-landed. The crews of the other eleven planes all parachuted out. Of the 80 men on the 16 planes, three had died, four were badly injured, and eight were captured by the Japanese, who later executed three of them and starved a fourth to death. Roosevelt promoted Doolittle from lieutenant colonel to brigadier general, skipping the rank of colonel, and presented him with the United States' highest military award, the Congressional Medal of Honour. He also received the Silver Star and the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Doolittle was soon promoted to major general and then lieutenant general. He was the commanding general of the Twelfth Air Force in North Africa, the Fifteenth Air Force in Italy, and then the Eighth Air Force in England and then again on Okinawa.

After the war, Doolittle returned to civilian life and became a vice president at Shell Oil, where he served from 1946 until 1958. He left to become director of the Space Technology Laboratories and then a director of TRW Inc. Doolittle also served as a director at Shell Oil until 1967.

Although Doolittle's Tokyo raid and his pre-war aviation exploits are well known, what is less widely known is his post-war service as an advisor to the Air Force, intelligence agencies like the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and presidents. From 1955 until 1958 he served as Chairman of the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board (SAB), advising the U.S. Air Force on future aviation and space technologies. From 1955 until 1965 he was a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, evaluating intelligence operations. In 1958 he was offered the position of first administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), which he declined. His scientific knowledge, combined with his military record, meant that he could bring together fellow scientists and military leaders to develop new aviation technology, and he had unique insights because of his work in both these communities.

At one point in the 1960s, while visiting a top-secret CIA facility, photo-interpreters showed Doolittle a spy satellite image taken over the Soviet Union that had been stumping them for quite a while. Doolittle took one look at the picture of the large, odd-looking seaplane and identified it as a "wing-in-ground effect" vehicle, a type of airplane that stayed close to the surface, riding on the cushion of air that built up between its wing and the ground. Doolittle's extensive aviation experience and scientific training had allowed him to recognize the unusual aircraft.

An avid sportsman, fisherman, and hiker, he went on frequent hiking trips with his fellow scientists. In 1985, although long retired from active duty, he was promoted to four-star general.

In June 1985, retired Lieutenant General James H. Doolittle became General James H. Doolittle when President Reagan and Senator Goldwater pinned on the same four-star insignia that General George Patton had given him on the occasion of Patton receiving his fourth star more than 40 years earlier.

Doolittle died in 1992. After his death, Howard W. Johnson, former chairman of the MIT Corporation, remembered: "Once when he was asked to sum up his philosophy, he said it was simply a matter of trying to leave the earth a better place than he found it. He certainly did that, and he did it with grace and good humour."