

The Doolittle Tokyo Raid

The Doolittle Tokyo raid was perhaps the most famous exploit of the B-25 Mitchell. It was carried out in an attempt to shore up morale on the home front during the early months of 1942, which was sagging as a result of suffering defeat after defeat in the Pacific.

Planning for a retaliatory raid on the Japanese home islands seems to have begun very soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Contrary to general knowledge, Lt. Col. James Doolittle was not the originator of the Tokyo raid concept. The basic idea of launching medium bombers from the deck of an aircraft carrier seems to have come from Navy Captain Francis Low, who was on Admiral King's staff. Low took the idea to Captain Duncan, Admiral King's air officer. Duncan concluded that the idea was technically feasible and passed it along to his boss. The Admiral was enthusiastic about it, and on his orders, Capt. Duncan passed the idea along to General Arnold. General Arnold then sent for his new special projects officer, Lt. Col. James H. Doolittle, who was already a famous aviator as a result of his exploits with racing aircraft. Doolittle was enthusiastic about the idea and immediately signed on.

A "Tokyo project" was quickly and secretly formed. Lt. Col. Doolittle and Captain Duncan were assigned project responsibilities for their respective services. Lt. Col. Doolittle would lead a picked crew of aviators who would launch an attack against the Japanese home islands from the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Hornet. Although it was believed that it was indeed feasible to launch medium bombers from the deck of an aircraft carrier, it was impossible for these types of planes to land back on the deck of the carrier once the raid was over. Consequently, plans were made for the planes to be recovered at prearranged airfields in eastern China at the end of the raid. From there, the bombers would continue on to Burma and enter service in General Stilwell's command.

The plan required an aircraft with an overall range of 2400 miles carrying a 2000-pound bombload and capable of taking off from the deck of an aircraft carrier. The only two possible candidates at the time were the Martin B-26 Marauder and the North American B-25 Mitchell. The B-25 was selected on the basis of its superior takeoff performance.

At that time, the only B-25s in service were with the 17th Bombardment Group. The 17th Bombardment Group comprised the 34th, 37th and 95th Squadrons, plus the attached 89th Reconnaissance Squadron. This group had been transferred from Oregon to South Carolina in order to meet the greater threat from German submarines operating off the East Coast. 24 B-25Bs were diverted from the 17th Bombardment Group, and volunteers were recruited, the crews being told only that this was going to be a secret and very dangerous mission against heavy odds.

Two Mitchells had been flown off the deck of the carrier, USS Hornet, on February 3, 1942, confirming that the basic concept was feasible. The volunteers moved to Eglin Field in Florida for training. Still not knowing what kind of mission they were training for, the crews practiced making takeoffs in as short a distance as possible. It was found that with a reasonable headwind, a B-25 could get airborne with a 450-foot run.

Certain modifications had to be made to the B-25Bs to make them suitable for the mission. Since the raid was going to be made at low level, the retractable ventral turret was removed, saving about 600 pounds of weight. More fuel was added to the plane, bringing the total fuel load to 1241 gallons -- 646 gallons in the wing tanks, 225 gallons in the bomb bay tank, 160 gallons in a collapsible tank carried in the crawlspace above the bomb bay, 160 gallons in the ventral turret space, and ten 5-gallon cans for

refills.

The still-secret Norden bombsight was removed, lest it fall into Japanese hands. It was replaced by a makeshift bombsight that proved more satisfactory for low level operations. The bomb load consisted of four 500-pound bombs. As a deterrent against Japanese fighters making stern attacks, a pair of dummy guns in the form of wooden sticks, painted black, were attached to the extreme rear fuselage, protruding out the back of the transparent tail cap. Takeoff weight was about 31,000 pounds.

Upon completion of training, the crews left Eglin Field for McClellan Field in California. On April 1, the crews departed McClellan for Alameda Naval Air Station near San Francisco. Sixteen B-25Bs were all that could be loaded onto the Hornet, although all of the crew members that trained for the mission embarked aboard the carrier in case back-ups were needed. The task force steamed off toward Japan on April 2.

A chance encounter with a Japanese picket boat forced the raid to be launched at a distance greater than the 400 miles offshore that had originally been planned and ten hours ahead of schedule in a rough sea. On April 18, 1942, Lt. Col. Doolittle's plane took off from the Hornet, followed by the 15 others. They headed for Japan, which was over 700 miles away.

The Mitchells successfully bombed targets in Kobe, Yokohama and Nagoya, as well as Tokyo. The bombing altitude was about 1500 feet. No aircraft were lost over the target. However, bad weather prevented the flyers from finding their prearranged landing fields in China, and eleven of the crews had to bail out while four others crash-landed. One B-25B (40-2242) was flown to Vladivostok, Russia where both the aircraft and crew were interned. [Click here for a detailed list of the Doolittle pilots and crew.](#)

All sixteen B-25s that took part in the mission were lost, seven men were injured and three were killed. Eight crew members were taken prisoner by the Japanese. Only four of those eight survived the war. The survivors who had landed in Japanese-controlled territory were sheltered and attended by courageous Chinese, and for this the Japanese occupying force in China wrought full vengeance on the local population.

Doolittle at first told his crews that he thought that the mission had been a total failure and that he expected a court martial upon his return to the USA. Although all the aircraft were lost and the damage inflicted during the raid was minimal, the operation provided an incalculable boost to American morale when just about everything else in the Pacific was going badly. It also pointed out the vulnerability of the Japanese homeland to bomber attack, and four first-line fighter groups were retained in Japan rather than being sent to the Solomon's where they were urgently needed. Instead of being court-martialed, Doolittle was promoted to Brigadier General, awarded the Medal of Honor, and assigned a new command with greater responsibility.

For the 25th anniversary of the Doolittle raid, B-25D-30, 43-3374 (a former F-10 reconnaissance ship) was converted into a replica of Lt. Col. Doolittle's B-25B 40-2344. This airplane is now on display at the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB in Dayton, Ohio.

Serials:

40-2229/2348 North American B-25B Mitchell
- 2242, 2247, 2249, 2250, 2261, 2267, 2268, 2270, 2278, 2282, 2283, 2292, 2297, 2298, 2302, 2344* were Doolittle Tokyo raiders. 2344 was Doolittle's plane.

OFFICERS AND ENLISTED MEN WHO RAIDED JAPAN - 18 APRIL 1942
LISTED BY PLANE CREWS IN ORDER OF TAKEOFF

Takeoff No.1 (BAIL OUT)

Crew from 34th Squadron, 17th Group

Pilot Lt. Col. James H. DooLittle

Co-pilot Lt. Richard E. Cole

Navigator Lt Henry A. Potter

Bombardier Sgt. Fred A. Braemer

*Gunner Sgt. Paul J. Leonard (Killed in bomb attack in Africa Jan. 5, 1943)

Takeoff No.2 (CRASH LANDING - China)

Crew from 37th Squadron, 17th Group

Pilot Lt. Travis Hoover

Co-pilot Lt. William N. Fitzhugh

Navigator Lt. Carl R. Wildner

*Bombardier Lt. Richard E. Miller (Killed in action in Africa Jan. 22, 1943)

Gunner Sgt. Douglas V. Radney

Takeoff No.3 (BAIL, OUT)

Crew from 95th Squadron, 17th Group

*Pilot Lt. Robert M. Gray (Killed in crash enroute to China from India Oct. 18, 1942)

*Co-pilot Lt. Jacob E. Manch (Killed bailing out of T-33, Las Vegas, Nevada, Mar. 24, 1958)

Navigator Lt. Charles J. Ozuk

Bombardier Sgt. Aden E. Jones

*Gunner Cpl. Leland D. Faktor (Killed bailing out in China after Tokyo Raid, April 18, 1942)

Takeoff No.4 (BAIL OUT)

Crew from 95th Squadron, 17th Group

Pilot Lt. Everett W. Holstrom

*Co-pilot Lt. Lucien N. Youngblood (Killed in crash Feb. 28, 1949)

Navigator Lt. Harry C. McCool

*Bombardier Sgt Robert J. Stephens (Died April 13, 1959)

Gunner Cpl. Bert M. Jordan

Takeoff No.5 (BAIL OUT)

Crew from 95th Squadron, 17th Group

Pilot Capt. David M. Jones (P.O.W. Germany 2 1/2 years)

*Co-pilot Lt. Rodney R. Wilder (Died June 6, 1964)

*Navigator Lt. Eugene F. McGurl (Killed in crash after raid In Burma, June 8, 1942)

*Bombardier Lt. Denver V. Trulove (Killed in action in Sicily April 5, 1943)

Gunner Sgt. Joseph W. Manske

Takeoff No.6 (DITCHED OFF CHINA COAST)

Crew from 95th Squadron, 17th Group

*Pilot Lt. Dean E. Hallmark (Executed by Japanese Oct. 15, 1942)

*Co-pilot Lt. Robert J. Meder (Died in Japanese P.O.W. Camp Dec. 1, 1943)

Navigator Lt. Chase J. Nielsen (P.O.W. Japanese 31/2 years)

*Bombardier Sgt. William J. Dieter (Drowned after ditching following raid April 18, 1942)

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*Gunner Sgt. Donald E. Fitzmaurice (Drowned after ditching following raid April 18, 1942)

Takeoff No.7 (CRASH LANDING CHINA COAST)

Crew from 95th Squadron, 17th Group

Pilot Lt. Ted W. Lawson

Co-pilot Lt. Dean Davenport

Navigator Lt. Charles L. McClure

*Bombardier Lt. Robert S. Clever (Killed in crash in U.S., Nov. 20, 1942)

Gunner Sgt. David J. Thatcher

Takeoff No.8 (LANDED IN RUSSIA) (INTERNEED)

Crew from 95th Squadron, 17th Group

Pilot Capt. Edward J. York

Co-pilot Lt. Robert G. Emmens

Navigator/Bombardier Lt. Nolan A. Herndon

Engineer S/Sgt. Theodore H. Laban

Gunner Sgt. David W. Pohl

Takeoff No. 9 (BAIL OUT)

Crew from 34th Squadron, 17th Group

Pilot Lt. Harold F. Watson

Co-pilot Lt. James N. Parker

Navigator Lt. Thomas C. Griffin (P.O.W. Germany 2 years)

Bombardier Sgt. Wayne M. Bissell

Gunner S/Sgt. Eldred V. Scott

Takeoff No.10 (BAIL OUT)

Crew from 89th Recon Squadron

Pilot Lt. Richard O. Joyce

Co-pilot Lt. J. Royden Stork

Navigator/Bombardier Lt. Horace E. Crouch

*Bombardier Sgt. George E. Larkin, Jr. (Killed in crash on flight to China from India Oct. 18, 1942)

Gunner S/Sgt. Edwin W. Horton, Jr.

Takeoff No.11 (BAIL OUT)

Crew from 89th Recon Squadron

*Pilot Capt. C. Ross Greening (P.O.W. Germany 2 years died March 29, 1957)

Co-pilot Lt. Kenneth E. Reddy (Killed in crash in U.S. Sept 3, 1942)

Navigator Lt. Frank A. Kappeler

Bombardier S/Sgt. William L. Birch

*Engineer Sgt. Melvin J. Gardner (Killed in crash in Burma June 3, 1942)

Takeoff No.12 (BAIL OUT)

Crew from 37th Squadron, 17th Group

Pilot Lt. William M. Bower

*Co-pilot Lt. Thadd H. Blanton (Died Sept. 26, 1961)

*Navigator Lt. William R. Pound (Died July 13, 1967)

Bombardier Sgt. Waldo J. Bither

*Gunner Sgt. Omer A. Duquette (Killed in crash in Burma June 3, 1942)

Takeoff No.13 (BAIL OUT)
Crew from 37th Squadron, 17th Group
Pilot Lt. Edgar E. McElroy
Co-pilot Lt. Richard A. Knobloch
Navigator Lt. Clayton J. Campbell
Bombardier Sgt. Robert C. Bourgeois
Gunner Sgt. Adam R. Williams

Takeoff No.14 (BAIL OUT)
Crew from 89th Recon. Squadron
Pilot Maj. John A. Hilger
Co-pilot Lt. Jack A. Sims
Navigator/Bombardier Lt. James H. Macia, Jr.
Engineer S/Sgt Jacob Eierman
*Gunner Sgt. Edwin V. Bain (Killed in action off Rome Italy, July 19, 1943)

Takeoff No.15 (CRASH LANDING - CHINA COAST)
Crew from 89th Recon. Squadron
*Pilot Lt. Donald G. Smith (Killed in crash in British Isles Nov. 12, 1942)
Co-pilot Lt. Griffith P. Williams (P.O.W. Germany 2 years)
Navigator/Bombardier Lt. Howard A. Sessler
Engineer Sgt. Edward J. Saylor
Gunner Lt. Thomas R. White (Medical Corps)

Takeoff No.16 (BAIL OUT)
Crew from 34th Squadron, 17th Group
*Pilot Lt. William G. Farrow (Executed by Japanese Oct. 15, 1942)
Co-pilot Lt. Robert L. Hite (Japanese P.O.W. 31/2 years)
Navigator Lt. George Barr (Japanese P.O.W. 31/2 years) (Died July 12, 1967)
Bombardier Cpl. Jacob D. DeShazer (Japanese P.O.W. 31/2 years)
*Engineer/Gunner Sgt. Harold A. Spatz (Executed by Japanese Oct. 15, 1942)

*Deceased

This material was compiled by <http://www.b25.net>

Partial list of Raider autographs

James Doolittle -	Pilot #1	Signed 8x10 color photo
James Doolittle -	Pilot #1	Signed postcard size B&W photo
Robert E. Cole	Co-Pilot #1	Signed FDC
Charles Ozuk	Navigator #3	Signed FDC
David Jones	Pilot #5	Signed FDC
Chase Neilson	Navigator #6	Signed FDC
David Thatcher	Gunner #7	Signed FDC
David Thatcher	Gunner #7	Signed 4" x 5" B&W photo of crew
David Pohl	Gunner #8	Signed 8" x 10" B&W photo of crew
Nolan Herndon	Bombadier #8	Signed FDC
Thomas Griffin	Navigator #9	Signed FDC
Ed Horton	Gunner #10	Signed FDC
J. Roydon Stork	Co-Pilot #10	Signed 8x10 B&W photo
William Burch	Bombadier #11	Signed 8x10 B&W photo of crew
William Burch	Bombadier #11	Signed 8x10 B*W photo of planes on deck
William Burch	Bombadier #11	Signed FDC
Frank Kappeler	Navigator #11	Signed FDC
William Bower	Pilot #12	Signed 8x10 B&W photo of crew
Edgar McElroy	Co-Pilot #13	Signed FDC
Robert Bourgeois	Bombadier #13	Signed Doolittle Raid sig card
Clayton Campbell	Navigator #13	Signed Doolittle Raid sig card
Edward Saylor	Engineer #15	Signed FDC
Griffith Williams	Co-Pilot #15	Signed B&W photo of crew
Robert Hite	Co-Pilot #16	Signed FDC
Jacob DeShazer	Bombadier #16	Signed FDC
Jacob DeShazer	Bombadier #16	Signed B&W photo of planes on deck

Signed FDCs are \$20 each

Signed Doolittle Raid sig cards are \$20 each

Except for Doolittle, the photos are \$30 each

Doolittle postcard size photo is \$49 and the color 8x10 is \$65.