



*Nebraska History* posts materials online for your personal use. Please remember that the contents of *Nebraska History* are copyrighted by the Nebraska State Historical Society (except for materials credited to other institutions). The NSHS retains its copyrights even to materials it posts on the web.

For permission to re-use materials or for photo ordering information, please see:

<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/magazine/permission.htm>

Nebraska State Historical Society members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* and four issues of *Nebraska History News* annually. For membership information, see:

<http://nebraskahistory.org/admin/members/index.htm>

Article Title: "You Bet I was Scared": A Doolittle Raider Remembers.

For more articles from this special World War II issue, [see the index to full text articles currently available.](#)

Full Citation: Richard O Joyce with Samuel Van Pelt, "You Bet I was Scared": A Doolittle Raider Remembers, Nebraska State Historical Society," *Nebraska History* 76 (1995): 54-65

Notes: Richard O Joyce of Lincoln provides his recollection of the circumstances surrounding the now-famous Doolittle Raid of April 18, 1942.

URL of Article: [http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/1995\\_War\\_01\\_Doolittle.pdf](http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/1995_War_01_Doolittle.pdf)

Photos: Richard O Joyce, 1980; Joyce and crew of plane #40-2250, Stork, Crouch, Larkin, Horton; Doolittle and Hornet commander Mitscher with Joyce and others in background; Watercolor by William D Schlaebitz; B-25 taking off from the Hornet April 18, 1942; a group of Doolittle raiders in China, including Joyce and Lt Richard Knobloch; Donald Fitzmaurice and others; Toky Raiders with Doolittle at Florida reunion in 1947

# *"You Bet I Was Scared"*

## A Doolittle Raider Remembers

*By Richard O. Joyce with Samuel Van Pelt*

### Introduction

Richard O. Joyce of Lincoln, Nebraska, had vivid memories of April 18, 1942. On that day he was at the controls of a B-25, dropping bombs on the capital of the Japanese Empire. Another of the eighty men in the sixteen, twin-engine, American bombers over Japan was Lt. Col. James H. Doolittle, leader of the secret mission launched from the deck of the aircraft carrier USS *Hornet*.

After hitting targets in Tokyo, Joyce headed for mainland China, where he and his crew bailed out after their plane ran out of fuel. Like most of the other aircrews who also bailed out over China, Joyce and his men were conducted to safety in Chungking by friendly civilians and Chinese soldiers. The successful raid inflicted limited damage to Japanese facilities, but boosted American morale during the dark, early days of World War II, when the only news seemed to be of Japanese successes.<sup>1</sup>

The Doolittle Raid was conceived in the months after Pearl Harbor, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his military planners sought a way to strike back at the Japanese war machine. The idea for a raid by carrier-launched army bombers seems to have originated with a junior officer on the staff of naval operations chief Adm. Ernest King. Following discussions with army air forces Gen. Henry H. "Hap" Arnold, it was determined that it would be possible to launch army medium bombers from



Richard O. Joyce, 1980. Journal-Star Printing Company

navy aircraft carriers operating beyond the range of Japanese land-based aircraft, bomb targets in Japan, and still manage to reach Allied airfields in China. Lt. Col. James H. Doolittle, one of the most respected American aviators

of his day, was chosen to plan and lead the mission.

Joyce was a member of the Eighty-ninth Reconnaissance Squadron of the Seventeenth Bombardment Group, whose crews were among the first to qualify to fly the new B-25 "Mitchell" medium bomber. After virtually every man in the group responded to Jimmy Doolittle's request for volunteers, twenty-four aircrews and related support personnel from among the four squadrons were chosen in February 1942 to participate in the mission.<sup>2</sup> Once the crews had been selected, modification of the B-25s and training for a take-off from the flight deck of an aircraft carrier occupied some three weeks. At the end of March 1942 the planes were flown from the Florida training site to San Francisco, where the mission would embark aboard the new aircraft carrier *Hornet*.

Dick Joyce, a 1940 graduate of the University of Nebraska, had participated in army ROTC, entered the army air corps, and received his pilot's wings in 1941. After the Doolittle Raid was completed Joyce spent most of the remainder of the war training B-25 and B-26 crews in the United States. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his participation in the Doolittle Raid.

A Lincoln native and Lincoln High School graduate, Joyce returned to Lincoln after the war and went into the wholesale hardware business. Active in civic affairs, he was appointed to the Lincoln Airport Authority in 1964 and later served as chairman. He died February 13, 1983.<sup>3</sup>

*Samuel Van Pelt of Hickman, Nebraska, is an attorney and retired Lancaster County district judge.*

## Doolittle Raider

Joyce's recollections of the Doolittle Raid, excerpted below, are from a January 19, 1978, interview by then Lancaster County District Judge Samuel Van Pelt, through whose courtesy they appear here.

### The Recollections

**Joyce:** Word came down from the group headquarters, they wanted twenty-five crews and airplanes (sic), volunteers for a very special mission. I happened to be working as the assistant operations officer of . . . the Eighty-ninth Recon Squadron. We had three bomb squadrons and a recon squadron in a group, and I see the order come down, and we figured we were going to Africa. We knew we were going to get shipped out pretty quick anyway, so I volunteered, picked a crew, and the next day, boy, things moved fast, the next day we moved out to Eglin Field in north Florida from Columbia, South Carolina, with twenty-five airplanes, twenty-five crews. And we get down there and Doolittle called in the airplane commanders and told them that this was what they were going to do, and if anybody felt that it was not feasible they could back out with no jeopardy.

**Van Pelt:** He told you, you knew from the beginning what the deal was all about?

**Joyce:** Just the airplane commanders, not the rest of the people.<sup>4</sup> And we lost a couple people that backed off, some guy's wife was pregnant and all that kind of stuff. Then we started modifying those airplanes. It was going to be a low-level operation, so we took out the bottom turret. Doolittle had immense direct authority and power from Hap Arnold. He could order anything done and get it done right now, you see. We took out all the bombsight equipment because it was going to be a minimum altitude operation.<sup>5</sup> We took out everything we could to save weight. We took that bottom turret out and put in its place a square tank. He called, I think it was Goodyear in Akron (Is it Goodyear in

Akron, or Goodrich?) and ordered twenty-five tanks constructed and they were constructed in unbelievable record time. Just a square rubber box that would sit in that hole in the back end of that B-25 where we had taken that lower turret out. And he also bought some rubber sacks, just loose rubber sacks, that we laid in the crawl space up on top of the bomb bay and braced them with wood. We got carpenters in there to put wood to brace them so that they wouldn't go out through the back of the airplane. We had to anchor them to the airplanes.<sup>6</sup>

**Van Pelt:** What were they for?

**Joyce:** Fuel! We had to extend the range on this fuel, see.

**Van Pelt:** I see.

**Joyce:** We used half of the bomb bay. We figured well, we'll cut the bomb load down in order to increase the range with fuel. We used the top half of the bomb bay with a specially constructed tank, again that was, bang!, just built in unbelievable time, to add fuel on this airplane. I think the airplane carried around 900 gallons of fuel, normal, and we extended that through all these Mickey Mouse arrangements to over 1,200 gallons of fuel and cut the bomb load down to around 3,000 pounds, six 500-pound demolition bombs and/or incendiary clusters.<sup>7</sup>

**Ed. Note:** While the B-25s were being modified, the crews at Eglin Field were practicing takeoffs on airstrips painted with outlines the size of an aircraft carrier deck. A navy carrier pilot was assigned as an advisor. The crews also made fuel consumption test flights from Florida to Texas, and practiced low-level bombing and navigation techniques. On March 23, 1942, Doolittle gave the order to proceed to the Sacramento Air Depot in California.

**Joyce:** We changed all the props at Sacramento, put on brand new props to get better efficiency. We had been operating in the Louisiana maneuvers and the Carolina maneuvers out of gravel fields and the props were all nicked etc., so we put on all new props. Then we flew the airplanes from Sacramento to the

Alameda Naval Air Station in San Francisco Bay. . . . We cut the crew back to five people. We had a pilot, copilot, two gunners, and a combination navigator/bombardier. My navigator/bombardier [Lt. Horace "Sally" Crouch] was a character. He teaches math in Columbia, South Carolina, now. He was a little tiny guy and he was full of the devil, and he said, "Let's fly underneath the Oakland Bay Bridge." [I thought] What the hell, if they want to read the riot act to us, so what! I said, "Okay," so flying over from Sacramento I backed off and flew that airplane underneath the Bay Bridge there and landed at Alameda Naval Air Station.

The *Hornet* was lying in there at the dock and it looked like the biggest thing I'd ever seen. We taxied right up alongside the *Hornet*. They would throw a crane out, lower it and hook onto the airplane in a couple of spots and lift the airplane up and put it right on the deck of the *Hornet*. . . . We landed at Alameda with twenty-two airplanes. When they got to sixteen on board the deck of the *Hornet*, Marc Mitscher, Admiral [Captain] Mitscher, who was in command of the *Hornet*, called a halt. Why?, well that's all the room we've got. The airplane was too big to take it below decks in the elevators. We could only stack sixteen airplanes on the deck of the *Hornet* and the other six were left sitting on the dock out there. We took all the crews on board, in case somebody got sick or something. We had a maintenance group too. We added some people that were doing first echelon maintenance and armament and those kinds of things.

**Van Pelt:** What kind of security? I think the security would have been tighter than hell. Did you do all of this during broad daylight?

**Joyce:** We had to, we had to. Now we had another problem, another thing that happened, and it bothered us the same way. Our planes were camouflaged and painted brown, and everything the navy had was painted either blue or white,

everything they owned was painted blue or white. They didn't even own any brown paint. After they loaded these airplanes on board the *Hornet*, they moved the *Hornet* out into the middle of the bay. We asked why, and they said it's easier to maintain security on a big ship out in the middle of the water than it is up along dockside.

**Van Pelt:** Except everybody in San Francisco could look out there and see it.

**Joyce:** Yes, I took my crew and we went to dinner at the top of the Mark Hopkins Hotel, the "Top of the Mark." Everything was supposed to be super, super secret. We looked out and there was this great big carrier sitting there with these brown army airplanes on it. God Almighty, everybody in the whole city of San Francisco can see it. And then because of the tides, we sailed at 10:00 in the morning. God, we sailed right underneath that Oakland Bay Bridge, right underneath the Golden Gate Bridge, with these sixteen brown army bombers sitting on that carrier and everybody could look down and see them. But what they did, they planted a couple of stories that they were ferrying these airplanes to Honolulu and stuff like that, Doolittle had planted those stories to the press. But there was a task force sitting there which consisted of the *Hornet*, two heavy cruisers, four destroyers, and a tanker. Now that was the biggest task force that had been assembled in San Francisco Bay since war had been declared two months (sic) earlier. So it attracted some attention. People could look out and see all this stuff. And we started out as a task force. . . . We steamed right north and west of Hawaii and rendezvoused with another task force that came out of Pearl Harbor. It consisted of two more cruisers, the carrier *Enterprise*, and four more destroyers and another tanker. Now the reason for that was that as long as our airplanes were sitting on the deck of the *Hornet*, they couldn't operate their own airplanes. They had a complete complement of airplanes and men down on



Lt. Richard O. Joyce (front, left) and crew of plane #40-2250 pose on the deck of the *Hornet*. Next to Joyce is his copilot, Lt. J. Royden Stork. Behind them are Lt. Horace A. Crouch, navigator/bombardier (left); an unidentified crewman replaced before the mission; and Sgt. George E. Larkin, Jr., flight engineer. S/Sgt. Edwin Horton (not pictured) was the fifth member of Joyce's crew. U.S. Air Force Photo, U.S. Air Force Museum, Wright Patterson AFB

that hangar deck. They had them suspended from the ceiling, and they had airplanes tucked in every nook and cranny you could think of.

**Van Pelt:** I guess they would have.

**Joyce:** Now the first thing that we noticed was that, okay, here's the deck of the *Hornet*, it's 860-some-odd-feet long, and all of a sudden we're eating up half of it with our airplanes parked on it. We put the arithmetic to that again.

**Van Pelt:** How's the first one going to take off? [laughter]

**Joyce:** The deck is wood, and they dug out of the wood and inlaid some cork in two spots on the deck right by the island, the superstructure of that carrier. And our wingspread was such that we only had about eight feet of clearance from the right wingtip and the island. It was pretty close. So we get the navy guy

over, since all of a sudden our 860 feet is cut to 432 feet. And [we wanted to know], "What's with this?" [He said] "Well, you don't have to worry because they can grind up all this speed, see. We can always find fifteen or twenty knots of wind on the ocean and with that they'll put better than forty knots of wind across that deck, so you don't have to worry." Well, that was okay, except he was going to be up in the island watching.

**Van Pelt:** That's right, he wasn't going to be flying that thing with all that gasoline in it.

**Joyce:** We were a little concerned about that.

**Van Pelt:** How long did it take to get from San Francisco to say, Hawaii? When you met the other task force?

## Doolittle Raider

**Joyce:** Okay, we sailed from San Francisco on the fourth [second] of April, if I remember right. Our speed was limited by the speed of the slowest ship, which was the tanker, and the tanker was loaded and could only chug along about twelve or fifteen knots, you see. We all had to go at a reduced speed so we wouldn't leave the tanker. We had two tankers [after the two forces joined], we had the *Cimmaron* and the *Sea Witch* [*Sabine*]. And of course, they're loaded and they're riding real low in the water and so we chugged along at a hell of a slow speed and we steamed directly west and north of Hawaii and rendezvoused with this other task force. Well, it took from the fourth (sic) of April to the eighteenth of April, fourteen days.

**Van Pelt:** The eighteenth of April, when you took off? Okay, tell me about that.

**Joyce:** Well, what they did first, they refueled. We used these destroyers to escort us. Then they were going to make a final push, a two-day push at high speed, twenty-five knots, in and back out again. Theoretically they were going to go to within 400 miles, and we were going to pull a launch at 400 miles from the Japanese mainland. Now the destroyers can't run at twenty-five knots for two days in and two days out, they don't have the fuel. So what we did was to fuel the tankers [destroyers] and the cruisers out in the middle of the ocean going around in circles off these two tankers. Then we started to push with the four cruisers and the two carriers, that was all, just six ships. We abandoned the eight destroyers and the two tankers back out in the ocean. And I think they subsequently went back to Pearl Harbor or they picked up the task force coming back. . . .

We made this push at twenty-five knots toward Japan, and the program, the way the thing was planned, first of all, everybody had a specific target designated. I had a target for instance in the Shiba Ward in south Tokyo, a large steel complex, a huge thing. We were going

to put the first nine [ten] airplanes over the city of Tokyo. We were going to put two over Yokohama, and one at Nagoya, Kobe, Osaka, and someplace else, to create the illusion that we had a hell of a lot more airplanes than we did. We were going to try to bomb about six different cities and create the impression that it was a hell of a big attack.

And the deal was that we were going to take off about 5:00 in the afternoon. The lead airplane, which was going to have Doolittle on board as the airplane commander, was going to be loaded with nothing but incendiaries—2.2-pound thermite incendiaries—in clusters. They drop these big clusters and then the straps break and they spray, so they set a whole bunch of fires. He was to be the pathfinder and set a whole bunch of fires in Tokyo for pathfinding purposes. We were going to bomb at low altitude, 1,500 feet, that's low. Then we were going to fly on all that night, across the South [East] China Sea, and arrive in China the next morning.

You see, the Japanese had sealed up the Chinese coast. They had occupied all the main coastal seaports and the big cities up along the Yangtze River, and they weren't conducting any aerial reconnaissance inland in China because there was no need to.

**Van Pelt:** Nothing there, yeah!

**Joyce:** So what had happened was, the Americans had a military mission in Chungking, which was the inland capital of free China at that time. They had made arrangements with the Chinese to build three crushed rock strips 5,000 feet long. The way they did that was to take thousands of people with wicker baskets over their backs and get out there and they made a whole bunch of little rocks out of big rocks and put them in their baskets, and built these airstrips right underneath the nose[s] of the Japanese, within sixty miles of Hangchow.

**Van Pelt:** Didn't they [the Japanese] pick that up?

**Joyce:** No, they sure didn't. They weren't operating any airplanes. They weren't doing any aerial reconnaissance at all. They [the Chinese] hauled in a whole bunch of fuel in five-gallon tins and stored it underground in caves. We were going to land there and fuel those airplanes and fly them to Chungking, and that was the plan.<sup>8</sup>

Well on the morning of the eighteenth of April, we were supervising — We had already loaded the bombs the day before. We hauled them up from the ammunition bomb storage areas by elevators on the carrier, and we had loaded the bombs, and we were checking the arming wires and all that kind of business on the bombs, and we were topping off the tanks. We had fueled the airplanes and the weight of that fuel would compress that rubber up against the side of the [tank]. If you let them sit there overnight, then you can top them off and get some more fuel in. [On the morning of April eighteenth] They sounded general quarters, everybody man their battle stations, that's the alarm. The first thing they do, of course, is shut off that supply of fuel coming up from the bowels of the carrier, which is a fire hazard. That's part of the procedure of securing the carrier. And so we were unable to continue that.

What had happened was we were discovered by a small Japanese patrol vessel. It looked almost like a fishing boat. The [cruiser] *Nashville* pulled out of the convoy and opened fire with its deck guns and the *Enterprise* launched three dive bombers from catapults. They spit them out of there like popcorn. We could see this ship on the horizon just faintly and they dispatched it in nothing flat, just sunk it right now.

But then there was a big conference. Now "Bull" Halsey, Admiral [William F.] Halsey, was in command of the task force, and he was on board the *Enterprise*. I don't know who was the commander of the *Enterprise* at that time. Marc Mitscher was the commander of the *Hornet*, where we were, but "Bull" Halsey was the "Big Dog" in charge of



Lt. Col. James Doolittle (left) and *Hornet* commander Capt. Marc Mitscher prepare to attach a Japanese medal to a bomb that will be dropped on Tokyo. Lieutenant Joyce sits in the second row at extreme left. U.S. Air Force Photo, U.S. Air Force Museum, Wright Patterson AFB

the whole task force. So they had a blinker type conversation from one carrier to the next because we didn't use any radio. And it was determined — they had to assume that our presence had been reported, discovered and reported. Halsey determined it was necessary for the *Hornet* to be able to operate its own airplanes. We had to expect an attack, and it could not operate its own airplanes as long as we were on board. We therefore had to make one of three choices. We either had to commence preparations to take off immediately for the target (and we still had ten hours to go and another 250 miles to go, so we were 600 and some odd miles away, which was quite a bit more than we planned), or we could take off immediately and fly to Midway Island, which was only 1,400 miles away and abandon the mission, or we could push the airplanes overboard.

**Van Pelt:** Did they leave it up to you guys or Doolittle?

**Joyce:** No, they left it up to Doolittle. He thought that so much had gone into the preparation of this and so much hinged on it as far as being an important mission was concerned that we were going to go and do the best we could, try to stretch the fuel and if we couldn't make it, go down on the coast, and get into the boats and row. So we elected to start taking off, so this was like, oh, 7:30 in the morning. We started getting ready to go and I think the first airplane [Doolittle's] was off the deck at a few minutes after 8:00. Now it took about, we were going to rendezvous over the task force and go into formation and make it a simultaneous deal [attack], but everybody was sweating fuel. It took from oh, five to six minutes to get each airplane in position. We had a guy gauging the pitch of that deck, you know. We would run the engines up to the firewall and let it sit there, and he would have these flags going, you see, and when the deck hit the bottom of its

pitch, we'd release the brakes and start that take-off while the deck was coming up. And it took that long to get each airplane [off]. Nobody could afford to wait for anybody else, so what we did was to take off, just make one circle back across the carrier and check our compass against the carrier, which was holding a known course, which we knew. We checked our gyrocompass and magcompass against the known course of the carrier and took off on course for the target. Well, like I said, nobody could afford to wait for anybody else because we were all short of fuel.

It so happens, originally they had scheduled me to be a guinea pig. I don't know whether it was because I had a good takeoff record on those trials down in Florida or what it was for. Anyway, Doolittle had originally said, "Well, after we get outside of San Francisco about a day or so, we're going to run a takeoff test and load your airplane and see if it will go and you can fly it back to Alameda." Then he got to thinking, what the hell, it either goes or it doesn't go. If it doesn't go, the whole thing's scrubbed anyway. We needed all the airplanes we could get since we had been cut short six airplanes because of the inability of the *Hornet* to accommodate them. So he said, "Well the hell with it, we'll cancel that and you're going to go anyway as one of the target airplanes." So that was fine with me. I was the ninth [tenth] airplane off the deck, or the last airplane over the city of Tokyo, with a target in Tokyo.<sup>9</sup> Actually that takeoff looked pretty hairy, it looked like you could throw a rock off the end of that deck while you were sitting in the airplane. It looked awful short. But Doolittle was the first one to take off, and he didn't have any trouble getting off the deck so that instilled a certain degree of confidence in us.

**Van Pelt:** What were you thinking? Were you excited or were you scared?

**Joyce:** Oh, I was scared. Oh, cripes, we were in a terrible situation. We knew we didn't have enough fuel. I knew that



## Doolittle Raider

someplace down the line I was going to run out of fuel. I knew I never could make it. This was the first combat mission. We were taking off ahead of time, I didn't have enough fuel.

**Van Pelt:** You probably realized the magnitude and the importance of the whole thing.

**Joyce:** I was scared to death, I sure as hell was scared to death, you bet I was scared. Anybody who says they weren't is a goddamn liar.

**Van Pelt:** [Laughter] I can believe that.

**Joyce:** Oh, of course. God, I was just a young kid, I was twenty-two years old.

**Van Pelt:** You could do it then, but you probably couldn't do it now. What time did you get off?

**Joyce:** I got off a little before 9:00 A.M., about 8:45, something like that.

**Van Pelt:** Did you have any trouble getting off?

**Joyce:** No, I didn't have any trouble getting off. I never saw another airplane after I left the deck of the carrier, I never saw any of our people. I saw a Japanese patrol plane of some description at a distance before I hit the mainland of Japan, and I ran into a bunch of Zeros, fighters, over the target area, a bunch, but I didn't see any of our airplanes after I took off. We made a landfall, and we operated at minimum altitude across the water to avoid radar detection.

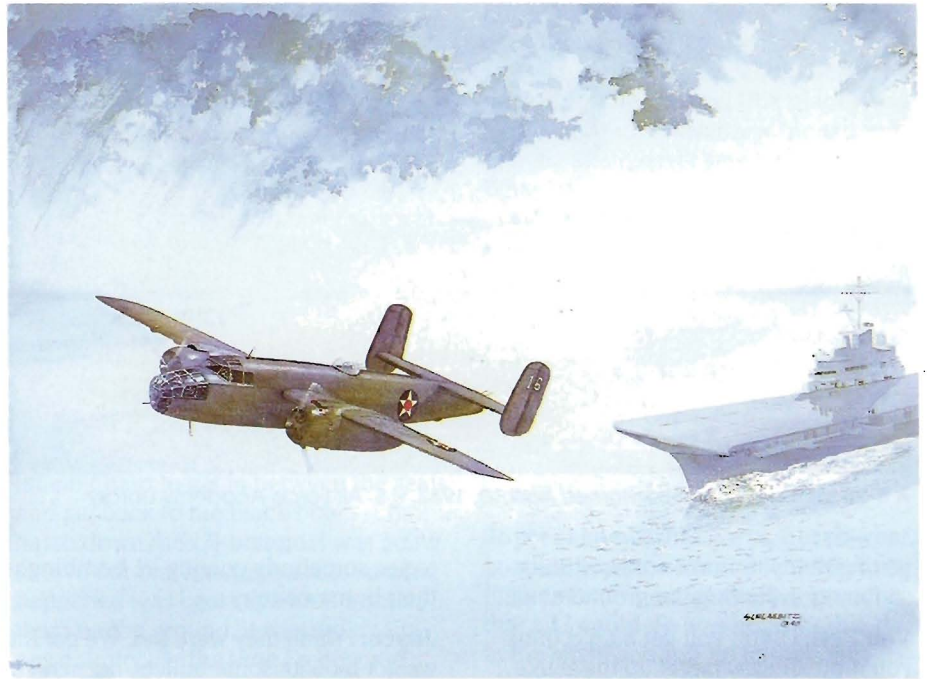
**Van Pelt:** How high?

**Joyce:** One hundred feet.

**Van Pelt:** Is that right? Is that hard, is that pretty tense?

**Joyce:** No, it just requires constant attention so you don't fly the airplane into the water, it requires constant attention. We had four and a-half hours to figure out what the hell was going to happen to us. You've got a little anticipation involved.

**Van Pelt:** Time to think, yeah. What was the weather like?



This watercolor by William D. Schlaebitz of Lincoln, Nebraska, portrays one of Doolittle's B-25s just after takeoff from the *Hornet*. Courtesy of William D. Schlaebitz

**Joyce:** Well, I got over the target area about 1:30 in the afternoon, 1:15 or something like that. It was a beautiful day, the sun was shining, God Almighty. I could see some smoke from the people that had been there ahead of me, you see. We came across Japan and there's a peninsula before you get to Tokyo Bay. You come across a land area and then across Tokyo Bay into Tokyo.

**Van Pelt:** You didn't have any trouble realizing where you were?

**Joyce:** No, we had certain orders, and there was a huge [aircraft] carrier lying in the bay there in Tokyo and we had orders not to bomb that, that would be a waste of bombs. We had orders not to bomb the Imperial Palace because that might have a reverse effect. We were ordered to bomb our specific assigned military target and there was no problem finding the target or identifying it. I backed off for about a three-mile bomb run and pulled up to 1,500 feet. It would be like dropping a bomb in the stadium

up here at the university. There was no way you could miss because of the magnitude of the complex. If you missed a hundred yards, so what?

**Van Pelt:** How many bombs did you have?

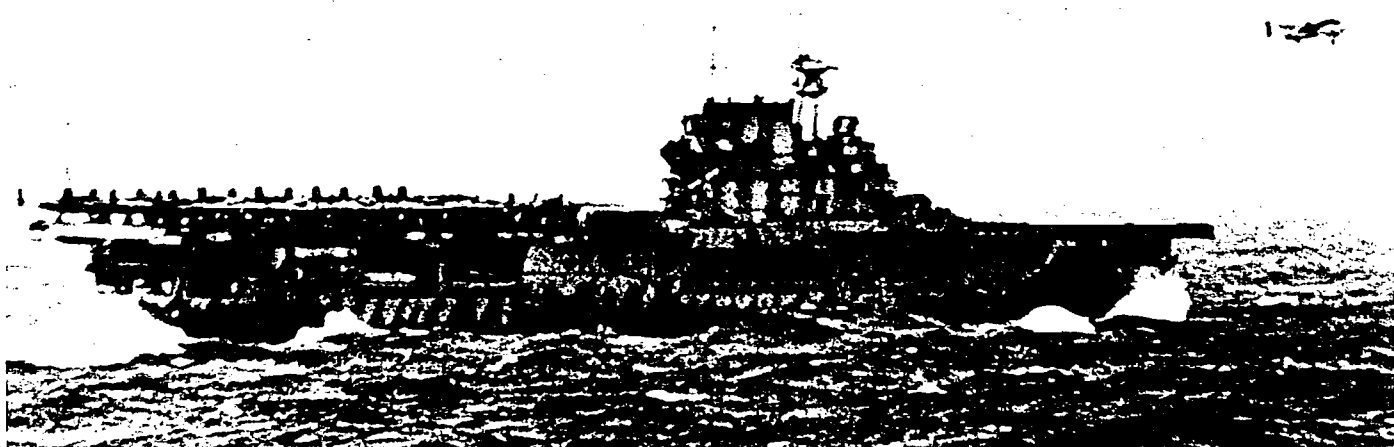
**Joyce:** I had six five-hundred-pounders.<sup>10</sup>

**Van Pelt:** Did you put them all in [the target]?

**Joyce:** In a pattern, all of them, right through the whole thing.

**Van Pelt:** How much damage? Did you do a lot of damage?

**Joyce:** Well, I couldn't tell. I was under a fighter attack so I wasn't watching the ground. I was watching the fighters. [Laughter] We had a PDI, which is a pilot directory indicator for the navigator. He would give it a course and I'd have to keep that PDI at zero in order to maintain the course and he dropped the bombs, I don't drop the bombs, he drops them. I'm watching these fighters



A B-25 taking off from the *Hornet*, April 18, 1942. U.S. Air Force Academy Library

getting ready to make a pass at me, see, so I'm not watching the ground at all.

**Van Pelt:** Didn't you get hit, I'd think you'd be an easy target up there like that?

**Joyce:** Well, I was with one exception. They [fighters] have got to take on some altitude in order to gain enough speed to make a pass. The minute that I felt the bombs go, I went right back down on the deck again. They've got to start a pullout when they make a pass at you like that, they've got to start a pull out pretty quick or they're going to go into the ground. I had the throttles as far as they could go up to the firewall and tied in knots, and as low as I could get, I mean like twenty to thirty feet just over the rooftops and everything else—as low as I could get.

And there was another factor involved. The pilots that they had flying those airplanes I think were probably students. All their top flying people were out in the combat areas. And these guys would make some passes but they wouldn't really close to a killing range. We were shooting at them all the time too with that top turret. They chewed at us all the time from a distance, but they wouldn't really bore in close. I suspect that their pilots were students.

**Van Pelt:** They were probably scared . . .

to see somebody coming in, bombing their home country.

**Joyce:** I think they were too. We got hit, we got hit with some bullets, not seriously, but there were some holes in the wing and a couple in the engine cowlings on the left side. The rear gunner reported some bullet holes in the tail here and there, so we suffered some minor damage.

I swung in back of Yokohama and back out to sea again. There was some cloud cover out over the ocean and I pulled up into the clouds.

**Van Pelt:** Back out, you mean you're heading west?

**Joyce:** I'm heading east now.

**Van Pelt:** Okay, why did you do that?

**Joyce:** Well, I wanted to get back out to the ocean, number one, get away from the land where the radar could pick me up, and I could see the cloud cover in the distance. I wanted to get in those damn clouds and mill around in there, I'll shake the fighters doing that. So I got into the cloud cover and milled around in the clouds, and when I came out, back down on the water again, the fighters were gone. I had shaken the fighters, I had gotten rid of the fighters, so I went back down to the water again to avoid the radar detection and I'm far enough

off shore to where they can't plot me or track me. And so what I did was to fly south and west around the Honshu Island, the main island of Japan, and across the South [East] China Sea all at minimum altitude, as low as I could get, within safety limits. And I ran into bad weather then along about dusk, 5:30 in the afternoon or something like that.

**Van Pelt:** Could you see how much gas you had and how much farther you could go?

**Joyce:** Well, at that time it looked like I wasn't going to be able to make land. I was talking to my navigator [Lt. Horace Crouch] all the time. I said to him (to show you what kind of a guy he was), I said to him, "What's our ETA for land, our estimated time of arrival over land?" He said, "What the hell do you care for, you're not going to make it anyway." He was lying back on the navigation table smoking a cigar. [Laughter]

Well, what happened was we got into bad weather down there south of Japan, real rough weather with a hell of a tail wind, about a thirty-knot tail wind, and rode that thing for five hours and that made the difference. That enabled me to get over land. Without that tail wind, I never would have made it. Now then he [Crouch] started perking up. He was plotting on a dead reckoning basis and



## Doolittle Raider

he was plotting us in. I said I gotta have a landfall because it is going to be dark and I'm going to have to pull up because there's mountains on the eastern coast of China. So we made a landfall over China, oh, late at night, it must have been close to 9:30 or 10:00 o'clock at night, because I bailed out at twenty minutes after ten that night.

**Van Pelt:** Is that what you did, did you jump out?

**Joyce:** Yeah, I figured I took off about 8:30 or 8:40, something like that, and bailed out at 20 minutes after 10 that night.

**Van Pelt:** How far over land were you when you went out?

**Joyce:** About eighty miles inland.

**Van Pelt:** Did you run out of gas, did you go until you ran out, is that what you did?

**Joyce:** Yes, I flew until we ran out. What had happened, what I did, I made some mistakes. I pulled up, the mountains in there according to our charts were six to seven thousand feet above sea level. I pulled up to about 8,000 feet, maybe 8,500, and was figuring on getting as far inland as I could until the red lights go on, that meant the fuel pressure was starting to come off, and we were running out of gas. I had about three minutes left so I ordered my crew to bail out. We had already packed a little musette bag full of cigarettes and candy bars and a canteen of water and a pint of medicinal. . .

**Van Pelt:** Knives, all that kind of stuff?

**Joyce:** Yeah, all that kind of junk. But I figured that we could hang onto that and jump out with it. There was no way to get from the back of the airplane to the front on account of the auxiliary fuel arrangements we'd made. I had two people in the back and I had the navigator [Crouch] and the copilot [Lt. J. Royden Stork] and myself up front. The top turret gunner [S/Sgt. Edwin W. Horton] was in back and the other gunner [Sgt. George E. Larkin, Jr.] was in

back. So I told them to bail out and I'd keep the intercom open in case they had a problem. This was a mistake I made. I was bailing out at night over mountainous country and I should have had everybody bail out at once so we'd be together on the ground. I never thought about it. I made a mental error there, but I didn't have much experience. I wanted to make sure they got out of the airplane. Then I had the navigator go, and I had the copilot go and I started to get out of the airplane and it stalled. I crawled back in the seat and recovered from the stall. We had a bucket [back] chute on and it was a little bit hard to get in between the seats and get back to the black hole . . . that hatch down the [?] bottom. I was going to dive out that hatch, you see. So what happened was I got separated from them on the ground, it was mountainous country. By the time I recovered from the stall and set the airplane in a slight shallow climb I got back to bail out, and as I was bailing out, the left engine quit.

Well, you get a hell of a sensation of sudden silence. I had been sitting there hearing that roar for fourteen hours. All of a sudden—and I couldn't see the ground, it was raining, dark, blacker than the ace of spades. So the minute I was clear of the airplane I opened the chute. I was going pretty fast and it really gives you a jolt.

**Van Pelt:** I'll bet you were happy, it was better to have that than not [opening].

**Joyce:** I couldn't see the ground, and I didn't know how far above the ground I was. But then the airplane goes away and with that one engine out it goes into a spiral and pretty soon here it comes back.

**Van Pelt:** Did it come right back at you?

**Joyce:** It came right back at me, it sounded like it was right there. [Laughter] It went underneath me. I was scared to death. Then it crashed, it hit a mountain and crashed. Now it didn't burn because there was nothing left on board to

burn. All the combustibles had been used, but it made a hell of a bang.

I was hanging in the chute here trying to see where it was [the plane] and I hit the ground. I never saw the ground coming at all, never saw it coming at all. Whacko—I hit the ground, and I go ass over teacup. I was on the side of a mountain in some loose shale. I go tumbling for a while and I gathered myself together. There really, there is no way you can move if somebody just suddenly deposits you like that. You can't go back the way you came, so you're really immobilized, you can't move.

**Van Pelt:** Your sense of direction would be screwed up.

**Joyce:** I knew what it was, but so what, I couldn't see the terrain. I couldn't see fifteen feet in front of me. It was such that all I could do was hollow out a deal in the shale and roll up in that parachute and go to sleep and see what goes on the next day. And I walked for about seven days then.

**Van Pelt:** You never saw the other guys, huh?

**Joyce:** Never got with them.<sup>11</sup>

**Van Pelt:** Did they all land together?

**Joyce:** As it turned out, I was dropping them up a valley and didn't know it. They went down the valley and they eventually got together. I'd gone over a couple of more ridges in the process of getting out and so I was going down another valley, actually going away from them. The next day I crawled back, the airplane crashed less than a mile from where I hit, and so I figured I'd crawl back to the airplane to see if I could salvage anything out of it, food or. . . To get back to it involved going over a couple of ridges and it was tough going. It was rainy and foggy the next morning and you couldn't see very much. I got back then to a ridge and I saw a couple guys walking across the ridge up in front of me and God, I was scared to death and so I hid in the rocks for while and finally I crawled up to the top of the ridge and looked over. Down in a kind

of clearing was what was left of that airplane, scattered over about three acres of ground. There were a whole bunch of people picking in the wreckage, scavenging in the wreckage.

**Van Pelt:** Were they Chinese or Japanese?

**Joyce:** They were Chinese. I didn't know it at the time so I laid up in the rocks and watched them for about two hours. I was scared. I didn't know what the hell to do! I couldn't speak any Chinese, I didn't have any money, I didn't know for sure where I was, I was alone. I was in enemy occupied territory. I was in real trouble, and I was scared to death.

So in the course of watching them, I determined there were some women with them, some children. They were not armed, they were not in uniform, so I figured they had to be peasants. They weren't military. So finally I didn't know what to do and I just stood up and hollered.

**Van Pelt:** Did they run?

**Joyce:** No, it froze them right in their tracks, froze them right in their tracks. They just stood there and looked at me.

So I came down off the top of that ridge, and I was making signs, friendly signs, smiling to beat hell. And I picked up pieces of the bomb cable, the bomb hoist cable or something and handed it to a couple, three of the older men [who] came forward then out of the group. And I picked up some pieces to try to indicate to them to "Help yourself, whatever you want, here it's all yours." [break in tape] It stunned them. It turned out they were very primitive people scratching a miserable living out of the worst ground you can imagine in that mountainous country. And I think that what happened was that they couldn't figure out how that airplane could be in a million pieces and I was in one piece. And my clothes looked odd to them. I had on a brown flying suit and a helmet and goggles like a man from Mars.

**Van Pelt:** Yeah, exactly, exactly. Did they take you in then?

**Joyce:** They pointed way down the side of this mountain to a little, I could see a little village down there. Obviously what had happened, they had heard the airplane hit the night before and they came up to scrounge around in the

wreckage. And they pointed way down there and so they offered to lead me down there. We had a terrible communication problem. I couldn't speak a word of Chinese and they couldn't speak a word of English so it was a problem. Plus the fact that Orientals don't convey much by their facial expressions. An American, you can tell whether he is happy or sad or mad or glad by his looks.

**Van Pelt:** By his eyebrows and his eyes.

**Joyce:** An Oriental has a very stoic facial expression and it's very difficult to determine what he's thinking from the external appearance. . . . But they appeared to be friendly and they led me down this long trail, it took the rest of the day.

We got down there and they were living in bamboo huts and had no electricity, no roads, nothing but just manmade trails. And they had very little of anything—no chickens. But they put me up for the night. They got a bamboo mat out. I slept in one of their little huts. They offered me food but I was afraid to eat it. I thought if I got sick I was really a dead pigeon. So I survived on *O Henry* candy bars that I had in my bag. I'd cut



A group of Doolittle Raiders in China. Doolittle stands at center with flag. To his left are Joyce and Lt. Richard Knobloch. Courtesy of Gen. Richard Knobloch and Pictorial Histories Publishing Company, Missoula, Mont.

## Doolittle Raider

up my parachute and stuffed as much of it in my flying suit [as I could], the silk panels. I had taken the silk shroud lines, those are braided shroud lines, and wrapped a whole bunch of them around my waist. My belly wasn't quite as big in those days.

**Van Pelt:** Oh, that was smart, that would be good cord.

**Joyce:** I could make belts for them, that was money, I figured I could use that for money, make a braided silk belt for someone.

**Van Pelt:** How long were you there in that village?

**Joyce:** Well, overnight. Then they started taking me out the next day, down the valley which was to the north up toward the Yangtze River, which is where I didn't want to go because that's where the Japanese garrisons were. But you couldn't traverse the country as the crow flies, you had to go that way. They'd take me to the next little village, which would maybe be only a mile or so away, you see. We didn't move very far. And they'd have a big conference at that village and obviously they were explaining how they had found me way up in the mountain. I had a map printed in Chinese that I laid out. God! If I laid it out once, I bet I laid it out twenty times, you know, trying to find out where I was. I'd say to them, "Shanghai," and somebody'd say [panting sound] and I'd say, "Okay, Hangchow."

**Van Pelt:** Did you figure out where you were then?

**Joyce:** No, not really. Within a maybe fifty-mile radius I knew where I was. I'd say, "Okay, now this place, this place right here. Where is this on the map?" I couldn't get them to orient themselves to a map. They just weren't that educated. They were very primitive people. But they were friendly, and I'd pay them off making belts for them out of silk, something out of that silk. But they always wanted more than I gave them. They always made me walk in front. I

was always afraid somebody was going to hit me in the back of the head for the rest of that silk that I had on, so I was nervous. I had lost my gun bailing out. I had a .45 in a shoulder holster and when that chute snapped me, it jerked the gun out of there.

**Van Pelt:** It was probably around not too far away, but it might not be worth anything.

**Joyce:** I couldn't find it. Anyway, I walked, I spent two days doing that, three days, I guess. The third day I ran into some Chinese guerrillas that were operating undercover, three soldiers. That scared me half to death. I ran into them on the trail. I thought they were Japanese. There wasn't anything I could do.

**Van Pelt:** Probably a good thing you didn't have a gun, you might have started shooting at them.

**Joyce:** I would have been in trouble. Then they took me back down this mountain and locked me in a hut with one of them and the other two went off some place. Now where they went I don't know and the next day they came back but they kept me a prisoner there a day and they shook me down real good. And they found this holster, and in my musette bag I had a couple of clips of ammunition. They couldn't find the gun. They laid the ammunition out and the holster and they made signs saying, "Okay, now where's the gun?" I tried to explain that I had lost it. We had a terrible time with communication. But I could see what they were wondering was, where the hell's the gun? I couldn't explain to them that I had lost it. So they shook me down pretty good to try to find it and they couldn't find it.

**Van Pelt:** Are they the ones that got you back?

**Joyce:** Eventually. I did get out, I got back to Chusien, which is where we were trying to get to in the first place, which is one of those five [airfields].

**Van Pelt:** Did these guys get you there,

did the guerrillas get you there?

**Joyce:** Yes, they took me to a headquarters. There's some more to that story that's kind of interesting. They eventually got me there. Eventually I got into an escort of about eight or ten guerrilla soldiers.

**Van Pelt:** Did you ever see any Japanese [soldiers]?

**Joyce:** I never did.

**Van Pelt:** When did they figure out who you were and what you were?

**Joyce:** Who, the Chinese?

**Van Pelt:** Yeah.

**Joyce:** I found out later — I ran into an American, a Chinese [who was] an American citizen who was born in Honolulu and graduated from the University of Hawaii [and] who was running a hospital out in this little tiny town for the Methodist Church. He was the first guy that I found that could speak English. He told me these were the Gissimo's [Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek's] soldiers and they had been sent out looking for me and all the rest of us, because the Japanese had put out a price on our heads. And by the same token the Gissimo said that if they found me and anything ever happened to me, they were all going to get shot. So they took pretty good care of me. They operate in a different manner than we do.

**Van Pelt:** Did the other guys get back okay, your other [crew members]?

**Joyce:** They got back ahead of me quite a bit, by about five days or so ahead of me.

**Van Pelt:** How many of the crews didn't make it?

**Joyce:** Well, we lost, we had sixteen crews of five guys, that's eighty people. We had one crew that landed in Russia against orders because Russia was not at war with Japan. The Russians wouldn't give us permission to go to Russia because they were afraid it would create an incident that might

jeopardize their neutrality. We lost two people [meaning bombers and crews] who tried to crash land in the water off the coast with disastrous results. And one of them crashed, [Lt. Ted W.] Lawson was the captain of one of them, and he went right up through the top of the airplane and mangled his leg and jaw. One of his people in the rear evidently was knocked out and drowned in the process. We lost another guy bailing out. They found him on the ground dead. Whether his chute tangled or didn't open or what happened, we don't know for sure, but he was dead.<sup>12</sup>

And we lost eight prisoners—eight people were captured by the Japanese.

**Van Pelt:** Did they kill them all?

**Joyce:** No. What they did, they sentenced them all to death . . . they sentenced them under what they called the Enemy Airman's Act, which they passed in July and made it retroactive to cover [the raid]. Accused them of machine-gunning civilians and bombing nonmilitary targets. So then the emperor commuted the sentences of four of them to life imprisonment and ordered the execution of the two airplane commanders and the two top turret gunners who were the people that he claimed [committed the crimes.] Now before they could execute them, one of them died of malnutrition in a Japanese prison camp, so they actually executed three. One of them was sicker than hell and didn't even know what was going on, what was happening to him. They propped him up against a stake and shot him. So they executed three. Four of them were imprisoned, not as prisoners of war but as war criminals. They kept them in solitary for four and one-half years, oh, they were in bad shape. They were liberated at the end of the war under a very fantastic set of circumstances, which, if I had some more time, I could explain to you. I could come back sometime and finish that off. So we lost what, twenty percent, we lost sixteen people, which was twenty percent of our people.



Lincoln, Nebraska, native Sgt. Donald E. Fitzmaurice (third from left) was the engineer/gunner in Lt. Dean Hallmark's crew. Fitzmaurice died when Hallmark's B-25 ditched in the East China Sea. U.S. Air Force Photo Collection (USAF Neg. No. 94605 AC), courtesy of National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution

**Van Pelt:** A highly successful mission.

**Joyce:** But we lost all the airplanes!

**Van Pelt:** Well, that's true.

**Joyce:** And Doolittle thought he was going to get court-martialed for losing all the airplanes. He felt really bad about losing all those airplanes. He felt they were of paramount importance to Claire Chennault and we lost them all. We could ill afford to lose sixteen bombers at that stage of the war, so he felt very bad about losing all those airplanes.<sup>13</sup>

**Van Pelt:** It was the fault of having to take off too early though, wasn't it?

**Joyce:** Well, of course, of course.

**Van Pelt:** He [Doolittle] didn't ever catch any [reprimand]?

**Joyce:** No, hell no, he was a hero, a Medal of Honor [recipient]. And he is a rare guy, a remarkable guy.

**Van Pelt:** I've never met him.

**Joyce:** Well, he's just a little tiny guy.

He's only about five feet, eight inches tall, a wiry little guy and [with] tremendous vision.

**Van Pelt:** Must have been the perfect guy to have in command of this deal.

**Joyce:** [A] High caliber guy, really high caliber guy. Great vision and great ability.

**Van Pelt:** He's still alive, isn't he?

**Joyce:** You bet. I still hunt with him. He comes out and hunts in Nebraska every year. He's full of you-know-what and vinegar. He's eighty-one years old and he can go the whole treatment, a good shot, and he's a helluva guy, a helluva guy. There's nobody really quite like him. He's done so many things in the course of his career that are spectacular. He's a remarkable fellow, and highly admired and highly respected by everybody that either served under him or that came in contact with him, I think without exception.<sup>14</sup>

## Doolittle Raider

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Available secondary sources on the Doolittle Raid include Ted W. Lawson, *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, ed. Robert Considine (New York: Random House, Inc., 1943); Carrol V. Glines, *Doolittle's Tokyo Raiders* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1964); Glines, *The Doolittle Raid, America's Daring First Strike Against Japan* (New York: Orion Books, 1988); Stan Cohen, *Destination: Tokyo, A Pictorial History of Doolittle's Tokyo Raid, April 18, 1942* (Missoula, Mont.: Pictorial History Publishing Co., 1983, 1992 ptg.); and James H. Doolittle, with Carrol V. Glines, *I Could Never Be So Lucky Again* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Glines, *Doolittle Raid*, 28-29. The other squadrons in the group were the Thirty-fourth, Thirty-seventh, and Ninety-fifth Bombardment Squadrons.

<sup>3</sup> *Lincoln Journal*, Feb. 14, 15, 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Doolittle recalled that none of the fliers were told the details of the mission until they were enroute to Japan aboard the carrier. He did offer to let any of the volunteers back out, no questions asked. Doolittle, *Never Be So Lucky*, 245-46.

<sup>5</sup> Another reason was to avoid the risk that the top secret Norden Bombsight would fall into enemy hands. *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>6</sup> The larger of the two auxiliary tanks was a rubber "leak-proof" receptacle that fit inside a protective box. All of the auxiliary fuel tanks were manufactured by the U.S. Rubber Company of Mishawaka, Indiana. *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>7</sup> The normal bomb load of 2,400 pounds for a B-25 was reduced to about 2,000 pounds (four bombs) for the Tokyo mission. Cohen, *Destination: Tokyo*, 8; Doolittle, *Never Be So Lucky*, 2. The bombers carried various combinations of 500-pound demolition and 500-pound incendiary clusters, depending upon their targets.

<sup>8</sup> The airstrips were near Chuchow in northeastern China, from which the bombers were to proceed on to Chungking. They would then be assigned to the Tenth Air Force being formed in the China-Burma-India Theater. Doolittle, *Never Be So Lucky*, 236-37; Cohen, *Destination: Tokyo*, 65.

<sup>9</sup> All the cited sources indicate that Joyce piloted plane number ten.

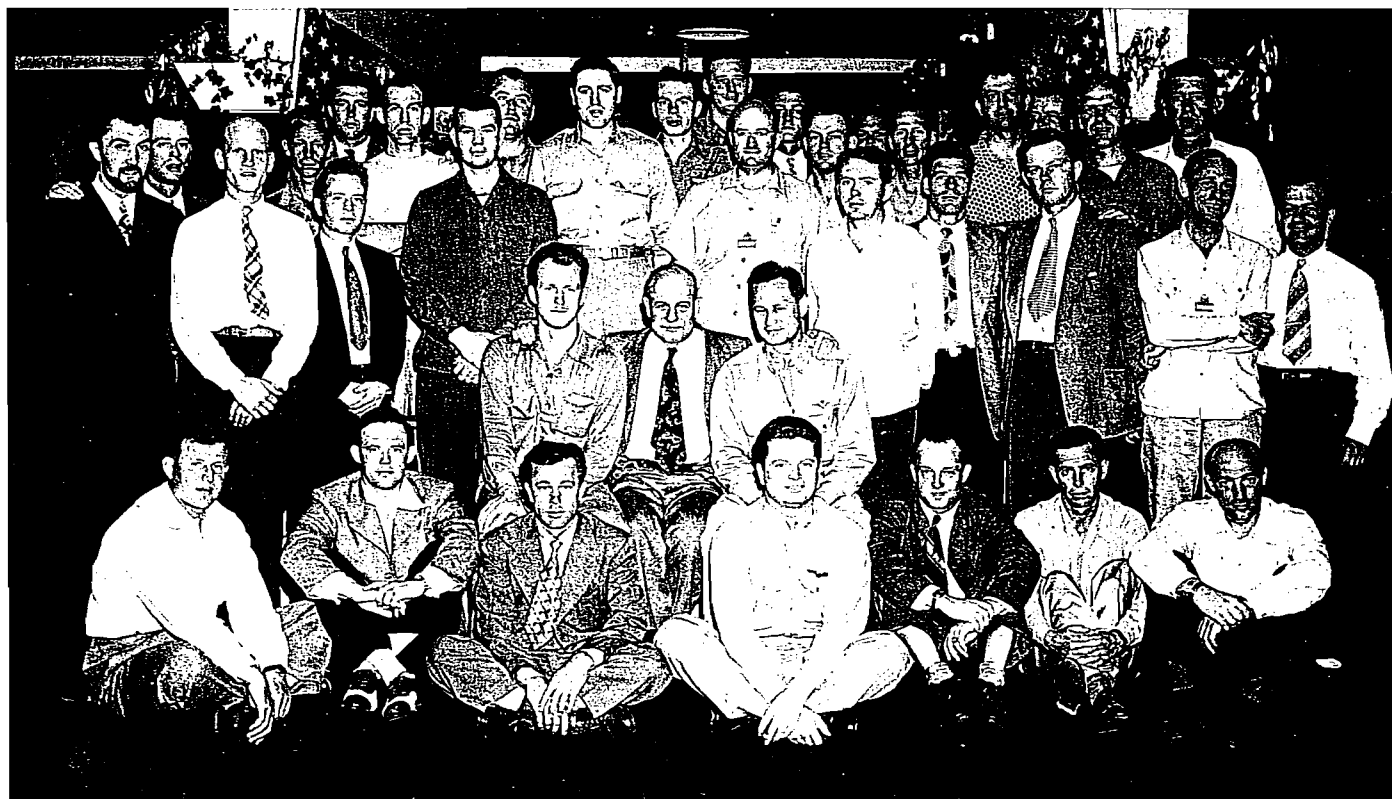
<sup>10</sup> See note 7 above. In this, and a few other details, Joyce's recollections here vary from his earlier accounts. For example, see Glines, *Doolittle Raid*, 118-20.

<sup>11</sup> The crew was reunited at Chusien. Glines, *Doolittle Raid*, 120.

<sup>12</sup> None of Lawson's crew died as a result of the crash landing. Two crew members of another B-25 died when the plane ditched in the water off the China coast. One of these men, Sgt. Donald Fitzmaurice, was a Lincoln, Nebraska, native. See Glines, *Doolittle Raid*, for a full account of casualties, and the fate of the men captured by the Japanese.

<sup>13</sup> Chennault had commanded the American volunteer "Flying Tigers" in China, and was aviation advisor to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.

<sup>14</sup> Gen. James H. Doolittle died at age ninety-six on Sept. 27, 1993, in California. *Lincoln Journal*, Sept. 28, 1993.



Tokyo Raiders gather around General Doolittle at a Florida reunion, April 18-21, 1947. Richard Joyce is seated second from left in the front row; his copilot, J. Royden Stork, is third from left, and Lt. Col. Richard O. Knobloch is fourth from left. U.S. Air Force Photo Collection (USAF Neg. No. 62856 AC), courtesy of National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution