

The Doolittle Raid - Part II

Lead: Convinced America needed a boost to its flagging morale and hoping to inflict at least a little damage on the enemy, President Roosevelt encouraged his service chiefs to strike the Japanese Home Islands. They sent Jimmy Doolittle to Tokyo.

Intro. *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Up to the middle of 1942, the Second World War in the Pacific was largely a one-sided affair. Nearly everywhere American forces were on the defensive, reeling from repeated defeats. Lt. Colonel Doolittle, a

legendary test pilot and air ace, assembled a volunteer force and they began to practice to fly B-25 Mitchell Medium Bombers off the deck of the USS *Hornet*. The plan was to rendezvous with Admiral William Halsey's carrier taskforce in mid-Pacific and close to within 500 miles of Japan where they would launch the two engined bombers heavily loaded with fuel for the 2000 mile trip.

All went as planned until at 600 miles out the task force began to encounter Japanese picket boats and one of them got off a message before it was destroyed. The element of surprise was gone, but Halsey and Doolittle decided to go with the plan anyway. At 8:20 on the morning of April 18, 1942

16 B-25 bombers lumbered down the breathlessly short deck of the *Hornet* and clawed their way into the air at the start of 625 mile trip to Japan.

Despite the warning, the force achieved surprise because the Japanese miscalculated their arrival time. All planes dropped their bombs and headed out over the Sea of Japan for bases in Nationalist China. Several of the raiders were killed when their planes crashed, some were captured and executed, most returned to active duty and combat.

The Doolittle Raid accomplished very little actual damage. The B-25s only could carry four 500 pound bombs. The real effect was psychological. Americans were

ecstatic. At last someone had done something. The Japanese had thought their home islands could be protected from damage. The Doolittle-Halsey Raid confirmed them in their plans to try and take out the carriers they missed at Pearl Harbor. Later that year, this effort ended in disastrous defeat at Midway.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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Resources

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Potter, E.B. *Bull Halsey*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985.

Sweetman, Jack. "Great Sea Battles of World War II: The Halsey-Doolittle Raid," *Naval History* 9(3, May/June 1995).