

General James H. Doolittle, U.S. Army

Brigadier General James H. Doolittle received his Medal of Honor citation for World War Two in 1942: “For conspicuous leadership above the call of duty, involving personal valor and intrepidity at an extreme hazard to life. With the apparent certainty of being forced to land in enemy territory or to perish at sea, Gen. Doolittle personally led a squadron of Army bombers, manned by volunteer crews, in a highly destructive raid on the Japanese mainland.”

General Doolittle was an American aviation pioneer recalled to active duty during WW II and awarded the Medal of Honor for his valor and leadership as commander of the Doolittle Raid, a bold long-range retaliatory strike on the Japanese main islands months after the attack on Pearl Harbor. He was eventually promoted to lieutenant general and commanded the 12th Air Force over North Africa, the 15th Air Force over the Mediterranean, and the 8th Air Force over Europe.

Early Life and Education: Doolittle was born in Alameda, CA. He attended Los Angeles City College and later won admission to the University of California, Berkeley where he studied in The School of Mines. Doolittle enlisted in the Signal Corps Reserve in 1917 as a flying cadet, he ground trained at the Army’s School of Military Aeronautics, and flight-trained at Rockwell Field, CA. Doolittle received his Reserve Military Aviator rating and was commissioned a first lieutenant in the Army Signal Officers Reserve Corps on March 11, 1918.

Family: Doolittle married Josephine "Joe" E. Daniels on December 24, 1917. Married for over 70 years, Josephine Doolittle died in 1988, five years before her husband. The Doolittles had two sons—James Jr., and John, who became military officers and pilots.

Military Career: During WW I, Doolittle stayed in the U.S. as a flight instructor and performed his service at Camp John Dick Aviation Concentration Center, TX; Wright Field, OH; Gerstner Field, LA; Rockwell Field, CA; Kelly Field, TX; and Eagle Pass, TX. Recommended for retention in the Air Service during demobilization at the end of the war, Doolittle qualified by examination and received a Regular Army commission as a 1st Lieutenant, Air Service, on July 1, 1920. Subsequently, he attended the Air Service Mechanical School at Kelly Field and the Aeronautical Engineering Course at McCook Field, OH. He earned the Bachelor of Arts from the University of California, Berkeley in 1922.

Doolittle was one of the most famous pilots during the inter-war period. In September 1922, he made the first of many pioneering flights, flying a de Havilland DH-4 equipped with early navigational instruments in the first cross-country flight, from Pablo Beach (now Jacksonville Beach), FL, to Rockwell Field, San Diego, CA, in 21 hours and 19 minutes, making only one refueling stop at Kelly Field. The U.S. Army awarded him the Distinguished Flying Cross.

Within days after the transcontinental flight, he was at the Air Service Engineering School (a precursor to the Air Force Institute of Technology) at McCook Field, Dayton, Ohio. In July 1923, after serving as a test pilot and aeronautical engineer at McCook Field, Doolittle entered the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In March 1924, he conducted aircraft acceleration tests at McCook Field, which became the basis of his master's thesis and led to his second Distinguished Flying Cross. He received his [M.S.](#) in Aeronautics from MIT in June

1924. Because the Army had given him two years to get his degree and he had done it in just one, he immediately started working on his [Sc.D.](#) in Aeronautics, which he received in June 1925. His doctorate in aeronautical engineering was the first ever issued in the United States.

Following graduation, Doolittle attended special training in high-speed seaplanes at Naval Air Station Anacostia in Washington, D.C. He also served with the Naval Test Board at Mitchel Field, NY and was a familiar figure in air speed record attempts in the area. He won the Schneider Cup race in a Curtiss R3C in 1925 with an average speed of 232 MPH. For that feat, Doolittle was awarded the Mackay Trophy in 1926.

In April 1926, Doolittle was given a leave of absence to go to South America to perform demonstration flights. In Chile, he broke both ankles. He returned to the U.S., and was confined to Walter Reed Army Hospital for his injuries until April 1927. Doolittle was then assigned to McCook Field, where he was the first to perform an outside loop previously thought to be a fatal maneuver.

Instrument Flight: Doolittle's most important contribution to aeronautical technology was the development of instrument flying. He was the first to recognize that true operational freedom in the air could not be achieved unless pilots developed the ability to control and navigate aircraft in flight, from takeoff run to landing rollout, regardless of the range of vision from the cockpit. Doolittle was the first to envision that a pilot could be trained to use instruments to fly through fog, clouds, precipitation of all forms, darkness, or any other impediment to visibility; and in spite of the pilot's own possibly convoluted motion sense inputs. In 1929, he became the first pilot to take off, fly and land an airplane using instruments alone, without a view outside the cockpit. Having returned to Mitchel Field that September, he assisted in the development of fog flying equipment. He helped develop, and was then the first to test, the now universally used artificial horizon and directional gyroscope. He attracted wide newspaper attention with this feat of "blind flying" and later received the Harmon Trophy for conducting the experiments. These accomplishments made all-weather airline operations practical.

In January 1930, he advised the Army on the construction of [Floyd Bennett Field](#) in New York City. Doolittle resigned his regular commission on February 15, 1930, and was commissioned a Major in the Air Reserve Corps a month later, being named manager of the Aviation Department of [Shell Oil Company](#), in which capacity he conducted numerous aviation tests. While in the Reserve, he also returned to temporary active duty with the Army frequently to conduct tests.

Doolittle helped influence Shell Oil Company to produce the first quantities of 100 octane aviation gasoline. High-octane fuel was crucial to the high-performance planes that were developed in the late 1930s.

In 1931, Doolittle won the Bendix Trophy race from Burbank, CA, to Cleveland.

In 1932, Doolittle set the world's speed record for land planes at 296 MPH and having won the Schneider, Bendix, and Thompson trophies--retired from air racing.

In April 1934, Doolittle was selected to be a member of the Baker Board. Chaired by former Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, the board was convened during the Air Mail scandal to

study Air Corps organization. In 1940, he became president of the Institute of Aeronautical Science.

On July 1, 1940, Maj Doolittle returned to active duty in the U.S. Army Air Corps. He was assigned as the assistant district supervisor of the Central Air Corps Procurement District at Indianapolis, and Detroit, where he worked with large auto manufacturers on the conversion of their plants for production of planes. The following August, he went to England as a member of a special mission and brought back information about other countries' air forces and military build-ups.

Doolittle Raid: Following the reorganization of the Army Air Corps into the USAAF in June 1941, Doolittle was promoted to lieutenant colonel on January 2, 1942, and assigned to Army Air Forces Headquarters to plan the first retaliatory air raid on the Japanese homeland. He volunteered for and received General H.H. Arnold's approval to lead the top secret attack of 16 B-25 medium bombers from the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Hornet*, with targets in Tokyo, Kobe, Yokohama, Osaka and Nagoya.

After training at Eglin Field and Wagner Field in northwest FL, Doolittle, his aircraft, and flight crews proceeded to McClellan Field, CA for aircraft modifications at the Sacramento Air Depot, followed by a short final flight to Naval Air Station Alameda, CA for embarkation aboard the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Hornet*. On April 18, the bombers took off from the *Hornet*, reached Japan, and bombed their targets. Fifteen of the planes then headed for their recovery airfield in China, while one crew chose to land in Russia due to their bomber's unusually high fuel consumption. As did most of the other crewmen who participated in the mission, Doolittle's crew bailed out safely over China when their bomber ran out of fuel. By then they had been flying for about 12 hours, it was nighttime, the weather was stormy, and Doolittle was unable to locate their landing field. Doolittle came down in a rice paddy (saving a previously injured ankle from breaking) near Chuchow (Quzhou). He and his crew were helped through Japanese lines by Chinese guerrillas and American missionary John Birch. Other aircrews were not so fortunate. Although most eventually reached safety with the help of friendly Chinese, four crewmembers lost their lives as a result of being captured by the Japanese and three due to aircraft crash or while parachuting. Doolittle thought he would be court martialed due to having to launch the raid ahead of schedule after being spotted by Japanese patrol boats.

Doolittle received the Medal of Honor from President Roosevelt at the White House for planning and leading his raid on Japan. The Doolittle Raid is viewed as a major morale-building victory for the U.S.. Although damage to Japanese war industry was minor, the raid showed the Japanese homeland was vulnerable to air attack, and forced them to withdraw several front-line fighter units from Pacific war zones for homeland defense. More significantly, Japanese commanders considered the raid deeply embarrassing, and their attempt to close the perceived gap in their Pacific defense perimeter led directly to the decisive American victory during the Battle of Midway in June 1942.

World War II, Post-Raid: In July 1942, Brig Gen Doolittle was assigned to 8th Air Force following his rejection by General Douglas MacArthur to be commander of the Southwest Pacific Area to replace Maj Gen George Brett. Maj Gen Frank Andrews first turned down the position, and, offered a choice between George Kenney and Doolittle, MacArthur chose

Kenney. In September, Doolittle became commanding general of the 12th Air Force, soon to be operating in North Africa. He was promoted to major general in November 1942, and in March 1943 became commanding general of the Northwest African Strategic Air Force, a unified command of U.S. Army Air Force and Royal Air Force units. Maj Gen Doolittle took command of the 15th Air Force in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations in November 1943. On June 10, he flew as co-pilot with Jack Sims, fellow Tokyo Raider, in a B-26 Marauder on a mission to attack gun emplacements at Pantelleria. Doolittle continued to fly, despite the risk of capture, while being privy to the Ultra secret, which was the German encryption system broken by the British. From January 1944 to September 1945, he held his largest command, the 8th Air Force in England as a lieutenant general, his promotion date being March 13, 1944 and the highest rank ever held by an active reserve officer in modern times.

Post War: On 5 January 1946, Doolittle reverted to inactive reserve status in the Army Air Forces in the grade of lieutenant general. On 10 May 1946, he retired from the U.S. Army. In 1946, the Secretary of War asked Doolittle to head a commission on the relationships between officers and enlisted men in the US Army. Called the "Doolittle Board", or informally the "GI Gripes Board", many recommendations were implemented for the postwar volunteer U.S. Army, though many professional officers and noncommissioned officers thought the Board "destroyed the discipline of the Army".

On 18 September 1947, his reserve commission as a general officer was transferred to the newly established U.S. Air Force. Also in 1947, Doolittle became the first president of the Air Force Association, an organization he helped create.

In 1948, Doolittle advocated the desegregation of the U.S. military.

In March 1951, Doolittle was appointed a special assistant to the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, serving as a civilian in scientific matters, which led to Air Force ballistic missile and space programs.

In 1952, following a string of three air crashes in two months at Elizabeth, NJ, President Harry S. Truman appointed him to lead a presidential commission examining the safety of urban airports.

In 1956, he was appointed chairman of the National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics (NACA) and was the last person to hold this position, when NACA was superseded by NASA.

In 1959, Doolittle retired from Air Force Reserve duty, but remained active in other capacities, including chairman of the board of TRW Space Technology Laboratories.

In 1972, Doolittle received the Tony Jannus Award for his distinguished contributions to commercial aviation, in recognition of the development of instrument flight.

On April 4, 1985, the U.S. Congress promoted Doolittle to the rank of full four-star general (O-10) on the U.S. Air Force retired list.

On September 27, 1993, James H. "Jimmy" Doolittle died at the age of 96 in Pebble Beach, CA, and is buried at Arlington National Cemetery next to his wife.

Military Awards: Medal of Honor, Presidential Medal of Freedom, two Distinguished Service Medals, the Silver Star, three Distinguished Flying Crosses, the Bronze Star, four Air

Medals, and decorations from Great Britain, France, Belgium, Poland, China and Ecuador. He was the first person to be awarded both the Medal of Honor and the Medal of Freedom, the nation's two highest honors. Doolittle was awarded the Public Welfare Medal from the National Academy of Sciences in 1959. In 1983, he was awarded the United States Military Academy's Sylvanus Thayer Award. He was inducted in the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America as the only member of the air-racing category in the inaugural class of 1989, and into the Aerospace Walk of Honor in the inaugural class of 1990. The headquarters of the United States Air Force Academy Association of Graduates (AOG) on the grounds of the United States Air Force Academy, Doolittle Hall, is named in his honor. On May 9, 2007, the new 12th Air Force Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC), Building 74, at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona, was named in his honor as the "General James H. Doolittle Center." Several surviving members of the Doolittle Raid were in attendance during the ribbon cutting ceremony.

Masonic History: Hollenbeck Lodge #319 in Los Angeles, CA, Scottish Rite Mason 33° and Grand Cross, Shriner, and National Sojourner.