

KINS COMMUNITY COMMENT (442-5744)

This is Ron Pierre for Community Comment.

For most Americans, April 18, 2013 was just an ordinary day. It was a Thursday filled with routines, work, problems and all the other things people live with. For many of us with an Air Force heritage, however, this 18th of April marked a very special day. Generations of Air Force veterans knew that this day would come. We didn't know what year, but the day was an inevitability!

This year a final toast was offered up at the Special Operations Base at Hurlburt Air Field, Eglin AFB, Florida. This final toast was to three airmen: Richard Cole, Edward Saylor, and David Thatcher. The last three surviving members of the Doolittle Raiders. As the cups of brandy were raised, the words once again reflected back to April 18, 1942, when 16 B-25 Liberator bombers launched from the deck of the carrier U.S.S. Hornet enroute to bomb the Japanese homeland. The toast was to crew mates and comrades in arms who are the living remaining members of one of America's most unique military units. That first strike bombing mission 71 years ago set the agenda for winning World War II.

Five short months before, the United States had been attacked at Pearl Harbor and our country was reeling from the Sunday sneak attack. I can recall my parents talking about World War II and the fears they had held as young people in their 20's, especially after Pearl Harbor.

Nationwide the morale of the entire country was very low. The country needed a spark to unite the country and to demonstrate that American was not an easy target. The Doolittle Raid on the Japanese homeland provided that morale boost that many say ignited a patriotic fire that ultimately led to a victory. The United States would retaliate! The Doolittle Raiders warriors were selected to deliver the message. America answered for December 7, 1941 on April 18, 1942.

Under the leadership of then Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle, 80 men, in five-member crews, volunteered for the most dangerous of all special operation missions. They would secretly sail to a launch location off the coast of Japan. They would execute an unconventional takeoff in basically land-based bombers from the pitching deck of an aircraft carrier in mid ocean, bomb Japan, and then either ditch the aircraft into the

sea or land in China. The group's leader was famed aviation legend Jimmy Doolittle who had been asked to plan and execute an impossible bombing mission. Doolittle was asked to plan the mission because of his extraordinary airmanship and flying experience. National leadership stated at the time, that only one person could make this special mission happen. The 80 members of the Doolittle Raiders all knew the risks. Their training was rigorous but very short. As the raiders climbed into their aircraft they carried the prayers and hopes of an entire nation.

Now only three Raiders remain. They are old men now, two or three generations removed from the warriors at Hurlburt who hosted the final reunion and that final toast to that April day in 1942.

To Richard Cole..... Edward Saylor.....and David Thatcher..... I also toast the memory of your successful mission and to your 77 fellow airmen who carried a Nation's hope on the wings of 16 B-25 Liberators April 18, 1942.

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