

A FITTING HONOR

AFA's work on Capitol Hill helped secure a Congressional Gold Medal for the Doolittle Raiders.



LEGISLATIVE NOTE

By Matt Bearzotti

Do you know who Jimmy Doolittle was? It's a question I've often asked in meetings with Capitol Hill staff as a way of explaining how the Air Force Association came into being in October 1945 to advocate for an independent air service.

The answer is seldom yes, even though the late Doolittle received the Medal of Honor during World War II and became AFA's first president.

Perhaps even fewer know about the daring raid that Doolittle led on Tokyo with 79 courageous airmen 72 years ago. But theirs is a story worth honoring, and AFA has worked tirelessly to ensure their brave acts are not forgotten.

The events preceding the raid are well-known. On Dec. 7, 1941, Japan launched a surprise attack on US forces at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, as part of a full-scale offensive in the Pacific. The Japanese made rapid gains; the United States and its allies were in retreat and despondent. Any sort of victory was desperately needed.

In the Pentagon, operational planners put into motion a bold retaliatory strike: B-25 Mitchell bombers would launch from the deck of a Navy aircraft carrier steaming in the western Pacific. They would then fly on to Tokyo, bomb it, and continue to allied China.

The raid took place on April 18, 1942, with Doolittle piloting the first of the 16 B-25s that departed the carrier *Hornet*. The mission succeeded in inflicting a critical psychological defeat on Japan early in the war and boosted Allied morale.

It came with a human cost: Three Raiders died as the crews tried in vain to reach prearranged landing fields in China with

their too-low-on-fuel bombers. Further, Japanese forces in China executed three captured Raiders, and one more died later in Japanese captivity.

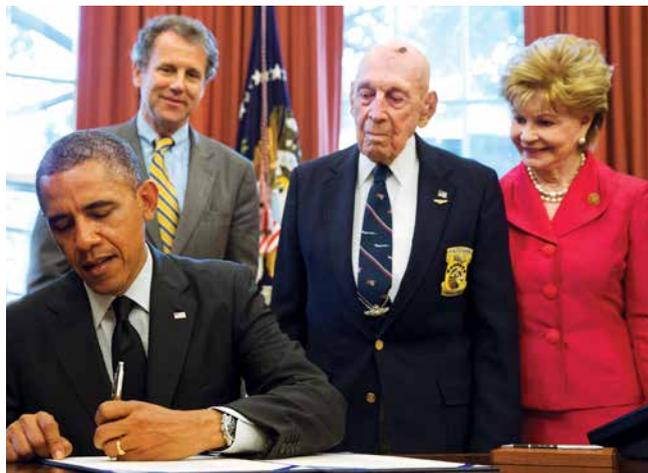
A month after the raid, President Franklin D. Roosevelt awarded Doolittle the MOH for his valor and leadership. All of the other Raiders—each of whom had volunteered for the secret mission—received the Distinguished Flying Cross. Three of them were also awarded the Silver Star.

Nearly 70 years later, in 2009, AFA presented a Lifetime Achievement Award to the Raiders, represented by two surviving members, Richard E. Cole and Thomas C. Griffin. (The latter died in February 2013.)

However, for Raider supporters like Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) and Brian Anderson, the sergeant at arms for the Doolittle Tokyo Raiders Association from Dayton, Ohio, there was more work to do in recognizing the achievement.

In 2012, Brown's office, working with Anderson and AFA, put forward a Senate resolution to recognize the 70th anniversary of the raid. It easily passed. A year later, Brown introduced S 381, legislation to award the Doolittle Raiders a Congressional Gold Medal, the highest civilian award that Congress can bestow.

AFA's government relations team lent support, writing letters to Congress en-



President Obama signs HR 1209 into law at the White House, May 23, 2014. The legislation awarded the Doolittle Raiders a Congressional Gold Medal in recognition of their military service during World War II. Behind Obama (from left) are: Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), Doolittle Raider retired Lt. Col. Richard Cole, and Rep. Madeleine Bordallo (D-Guam).

AP photo by Jacquelyn Martin

couraging the bill's passage and providing Anderson with a space at the association's Air & Space Conference in National Harbor, Md., to increase awareness.

In May 2014, the House and Senate agreed to a bill awarding the Doolittle Raiders the medal. Days later, President Obama signed the bill into law. Cole, one of the four surviving Raiders, was present at the President's signing ceremony.

The medal recognizes the Raiders for "outstanding heroism, valor, skill, and service to the United States in conducting the bombings of Tokyo" and for volunteering for "an extremely dangerous mission" and "willingly put[ting] their lives in harm's way, risking death, capture, and torture."

AFA's work honoring Doolittle and the Raiders is not done. In September, the association will dedicate its operations building in Arlington, Va., in Doolittle's name.



Matt Bearzotti is AFA's legislative manager.