

Virginia Aviation History Project



A HERO AMONG HEROES – VIRGINIA’S SHORTY MANCH

by Linda Burdette

On April 17-20, 2013, three of the four surviving members of the Doolittle Raiders met for their last public reunion. Lt Col Richard Cole was Doolittle’s co-pilot in flight #1. Lt Col Edward Saylor was the engineer in flight #15. Staff Sergeant David Thatcher was the gunner of flight #8. One survivor, Col Bob Hite, the co-pilot of flight #16, was unable to attend due to poor health. Fittingly this last reunion was at Fort Walton Beach, Florida, and included ceremonies at Eglin Field where the Raiders trained for their historic mission.

And so, it seems a very fitting time to pay tribute to the one member of Doolittle’s Raiders from Virginia: Lt Col Jacob Earl “Shorty” Manch.

Manch was born Dec 26, 1918, in Staunton, Virginia, and lived there with his parents, Martin and Lucie Manch, and sister, Rosemary until he left for college. His father, a music teacher, founded Manch College of Music in Staunton, which unfortunately failed in the Great Depression. Music was clearly a large part of Manch’s upbringing; music ran in his family and many of the family were quite talented. This could have explained his enthusiasm for his record player and records during the bombing mission to Japan.

His was an idyllic childhood and his sister later re-



Shorty Manch in uniform

ported that he was very mischievous and something of a prankster. Every Halloween he would unscrew the gates from a neighbor’s fence and hang them on telephone poles, but would always put them back the next day. His wanderlust and sense of adventure developed very early in life. He would collect bus money from his mother to take trips but then hitchhike and use the bus money to have fun on his trips. After his father’s school closed, he attended Augusta

Military Academy, where he grew to 6 feet 7 inches and was nicknamed “Shorty”. As he matured, his gleeful nature remained intact. At his final dress parade at Augusta in 1938, he wore no shoes but painted his feet black.

After graduation, he attended Hampden-Sydney College, Washington and Lee University, and Southern Methodist University in Texas. But in 1940, the winds of war were already blowing across Europe. Many in the U.S. believed it was just a matter of time before the country became involved. And Shorty Manch urgently wanted to become a pilot in the Army Air Corps. He was commissioned a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army Reserve on May 10, 1940 and attended officer training at Camp Washington near DC and Fort Bliss, Texas.

One hurdle that Manch faced in becoming an Army pilot was his height. His 6 foot 7 inches was well over the Army maximum height of 6 foot 4 inches. Never one to stand on ceremony, Manch decided to go straight to the top and finagle an interview with Hap Arnold, then Chief of the Army Air Corps. For days, he and Rosemary traveled to Washington to wait in the reception area of Arnold’s office, hoping that Arnold would notice and invite them in. Arnold would politely nod as he walked through but no meeting was forthcoming. This went on for some days until finally the General said “You’re here again. You must really want to see me.” So Manch got the opportunity to tell Arnold about his dream of becoming a pilot. After hearing his story, Arnold told Manch to stand and stoop a little. He gleefully declared that Manch was now the required height, commenting “We need boys like you!” Arnold could not have known the series of events he put in motion that day.

In January, 1941, Manch departed from Staunton’s Chesapeake and Ohio train station en route to his aviation training. In marked contrast to his homecoming two years later, the only people at the railroad station were his parents and sister. On Feb 10, 1941, Jacob Manch enlisted as a Flying Cadet and graduated from Cal-Aero Flight School in Ontario,

California, before tackling advanced training at the Advanced Flying School in Stockton, California. Fledgling pilot Manch was then assigned to the 17th Bomb Group at Pendleton Field, Oregon, and was there when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

In early 1942, the war was going poorly for the U.S. Already reeling from the attack on Pearl Harbor, the American public learned of a series of Japanese victories. The enemy claimed divine protection and the American public was almost ready to believe it. President Roosevelt knew that morale needed bolstering and challenged his military leaders to plan a bombing raid against the Japanese mainland. This bold move stunned the military, but of course, James Doolittle rose to the challenge. He and Navy Captains Francis Low and Donald Duncan convinced Army and Navy leadership that it was possible for Army bombers to take off from the deck of Navy carriers. Slowly a plan emerged. Beginning with 24 B-25 bombers, Doolittle was going to train crews to take off from extremely short fields with a maximum load of bombs. Then the airplanes and crew would be loaded onto the U.S.S. Hornet, transported within striking range of Japan, and launched for an air attack.

The only problems with the plan? Well, let’s see. The Army and Navy had never worked together on an operation like this. Army bombers had never taken off from Navy carriers and many experts said it couldn’t be done. Japanese aviation pretty much ruled the Pacific sky and the island’s anti-aircraft assets were plentiful and well-trained. The entire plan depended on the element of surprise and any minor, seemingly insignificant leak of any portion of the plan could be catastrophic. So many risks led even Doolittle to anticipate that the mission could easily suffer a 50% fatality rate. But Doolittle, Arnold, and George C. Marshall all saw it as the best option for turning the tide of this war and so Doolittle began recruiting his pilots.

Soon after the extraordinary plan was approved, LTC Jimmy Doolittle approached the 17th Bomb Group

looking for volunteers. It is hard to imagine the unit commander standing before a group of pilots, navigators, and gunners and explaining that he is



The Proud Crew of Whiskey Pete:

(L-R) Lt. Charles Ozuk, Jr. (Navigator); Lt. Robert Gray (Pilot); Sgt. Aden Jones (Bombardier); Lt. Jacob “Shorty” Manch (Co-Pilot); and Cpl. Leland Faktor (Flight Engineer/Gunner)

looking for volunteers for a mission. What’s the mission? “Can’t tell you; that’s classified.” Where is it? “Can’t tell you; that’s classified.” Is it dangerous? “The most dangerous you can imagine. Half of you may not return.” But the most amazing part is that every man volunteered.

The volunteer B-25 pilots flew their airplanes to the Army Proving Ground at Eglin Field at Valparaiso, Florida. They were there for about a month, getting the airplanes modified for this unique mission and receiving training. They practiced navigation over water, bomb sighting, and short-field take-offs. One of the runways was marked with flags denoting distances for take-off and all the pilots were challenged to get their planes airborne in the shortest distance possible. Like pilots everywhere the men found time to have fun. Captain Ted Lawson decided to name his aircraft the “Ruptured Duck” and suddenly all the pilots were claiming names. As co-pilot of the plane, Manch didn’t warrant naming rights but the pilot, LT Robert Gray, decided to name their airplane

after a pony he owned as a boy, Whiskey Pete. The other members of the crew were LT Charles Ozuk as navigator, Sergeant Aden Jones as bombardier, and Corporal Leland Faktor as flight engineer/gunner.

Training and modifications completed, crews flew 22 B-25 airplanes to San Francisco, California, where bombers and crew were loaded on aircraft carrier USS Hornet, bound for the Japanese mainland. Two of the 24 bombers had been damaged in training and so didn’t make the trip to California. As the remaining planes arrived at the port, Doolittle culled those with any mechanical problems and ended up with 16 B-25 Bombers aboard the Hornet. Whiskey Pete was loaded on deck and strapped down. The fact that the brass in Washington knew and appreciated the Raider’s enormous personal risk became evident when, as they were loading the ship at San

Francisco, Doolittle received a message from General George C. Marshall saying “May the Good Lord watch over you.”

At embarkation on April 3, the pilots and crew still didn’t know where they were bound. Men speculated on the ultimate destination – Aleutians, Panama Canal, even Martinique. Two days after departure, the Captain announced the destination and a huge cheer went up from the ship, both Army and Navy celebrating.

Next set in the realization that although they had spent countless hours practicing short-field take-offs, none had actually taken off from a cruiser. However once they knew their destination, their regard for their airplanes became an obsession. Every minute not consumed studying maps, routes, Japanese culture, and navy operations was spent maintaining their airplanes. It must have hurt that their 16 airplanes were tied down on the deck, instead of safely below with the Navy fighters, but there was simply

no way to store airplanes like the Bombers below deck. It must have been doubly hard for Manch and his fellow pilots to know that if the Naval group met the enemy during the trip and Navy fighters were needed, the Army planes would be pushed overboard

each day, the crews began to prepare for the mission in earnest. Manch stowed his record player aboard Whiskey Pete and then convinced the bombardier on a different plane to bring along a cake tin full of records. Unfortunately he would lose both records and player during the mission.



Sixteen B-25 Bombers were tucked onto the deck of the U.S.S. Hornet, tied down and transported from San Francisco, California to within 800 miles of the Japanese coast. All aboard the Hornet knew that if the Navy fighters stored below deck were needed to defend the Navy carrier group, the bombers would be pushed overboard to allow the Navy fighters to launch.

to allow the Navy fighters to be brought topside to defend the ships.

Even with the studying, planning, and airplane maintenance, the crew still had lots of time on their hands. Navigator Frank Kappeler recalled Shorty Manch and his record player. It seems Shorty brought along his phonograph and record collection, but for some reason was partial to “Deep in the Heart of Texas”. Kappeler reported that he seemed to play this song constantly – at least 3 or 4 times a day. However, in his book, *30 Seconds over Tokyo*, Ted Lawson makes the claim that he was really the one who regaled everyone with this song. What is certain is that Manch had his record player and quite a collection of records with which he could create some “razz-ma-tazz.” With Tokyo getting closer

The plan called for the attack to be launched at dusk on Sunday, April 19, when the Hornet was around 400 miles from the Japanese coast. The airplanes would arrive at Tokyo and the other target cities well after dark to benefit from the element of surprise. After the attack, the airplanes were to fly to China. Everyone knew that the Army bombers could not land on the carrier after the attack. The numerous reasons included that the carrier deck was too short to land the bomber safely; the tails of the bombers were not constructed to withstand the shock of the sudden stop with the Navy arresting gear; and, last but not least, since the bombers could not be stowed below deck, the first bomber landing would block the runway for any other planes. So agreements had been reached with the Chinese government to allow the planes

to land in China and the airplanes were then to be transferred to the Chinese to form the core of a new aviation unit. The situation in China was so volatile that there was even a chance that the Japanese could have taken over the friendly airfields by the time the American planes arrived and so there was a special code for the Chinese to use if it were unsafe for the bombers to land.

But plans don’t always go according to plan. Early on the morning of April 18, 1942, while they were still 800 miles from their goal, a Japanese fishing vessel caught sight of the flotilla and although the ship was sunk, everyone knew that many Japanese fishing vessels operated as information gathering ships for the Japanese military and suspected that it was able to radio its news back to the Japanese military.

Pilots were immediately ordered to man their planes. Manch proved his Virginia roots by ensuring that he was the most well-armed of Doolittle's Raiders. He carried two .45 pistols, a .44-caliber rifle, a .22 semi-automatic pistol, a Lugar pistol, extra clips of ammo, a hunting knife, a Bowie knife, and an axe. Despite being weighed down with weaponry, he insisted on taking a supply of cigars and Baby Ruth candy bars. To ensure their safekeeping, he dropped them down the front of his shirt.

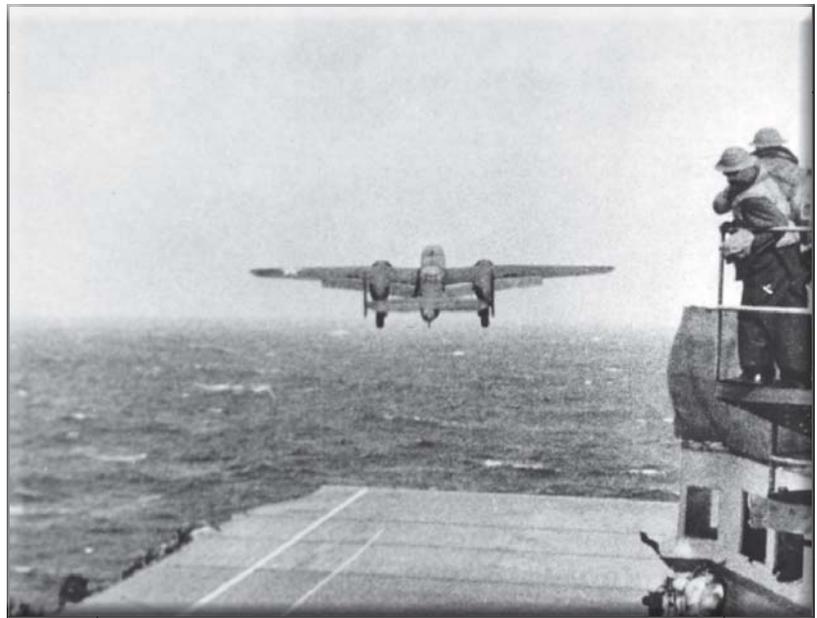
There was no radio communication between the ships. As a matter of fact, the pilots reported that they were not allowed to use any type of transistor radio or even electric razors during this last portion of the cruise! So at 8:00 a.m. Admiral Halsey in the flag ship flashed a message via signal lamp "Launch planes. To Col Doolittle and Gallant Command, good luck and God bless you." The hearts and prayers of every person on those ships no doubt went with that group of airplanes toward Japan.

Flight #1, piloted by Doolittle, took off at 8:20 a.m. The other pilots held their breath as the big bomber lumbered down the carrier runway. Would it work? If Doolittle, the most accomplished pilot any of them had ever known, couldn't successfully lift off from the carrier, they would lose all hope. Doolittle didn't disappoint. His departure was picture-perfect and once airborne, he circled back around the ship to encourage the others and get his bearings to Tokyo. A great cheer went up from the Navy personnel on the flight deck. One by one, the bombers taxied into position, waited for the carrier to drop to a trough in the wave and begin its ascent, and hit the throttle. Not one pilot or airplane stumbled; all 16 were airborne within an hour. So instead of a departure at dusk and a stealthy arrival in Tokyo around midnight, Doolittle's Raiders would be flying over Japan in broad daylight, arriving at Tokyo and other targets at

high noon or shortly thereafter. It could have been a total disaster for a plan which depended so heavily on secrecy and surprise.

Manch, Gray, and Whiskey Pete were Flight #3. They faced a 4-hour journey to their target, an unknown number of enemy, dicey weather, and a difficult trek to China where they were unsure of their welcome and the enemy controlled large portions of the provinces. Their spirits couldn't have been higher.

Immediately after the airplanes left the area, the Navy vessels turned and ran for Hawaii. They knew that the American cause would not be furthered by a large number of ships being damaged or even lost to the Japanese Navy and any contact with them would only increase the danger for Doolittle's Raiders. They arrived at Hawaii a week later. (Unfortunately



Until the historic departure of the Doolittle Raiders on April 18, 1942 the only take-offs of Army bombers from Navy carriers had been trials conducted in the Atlantic Ocean just outside Norfolk. Those tests were performed using bombers with no load and under ideal conditions. By contract, Doolittle's Raiders took off in very high seas, almost gale-force winds and with a full load of bombs and fuel.

the Hornet did not survive the war. The Japanese discovered that she transported Doolittle's Raiders and at the battle of Santa Cruz the following fall they

concentrated firepower on her until she sank.)

Doolittle dropped the first two bombs on Tokyo at 12:15 p.m. Ironically, the Japanese government had just concluded an air raid drill, complete with assurances to the populace that no enemy could ever possibly reach Japanese shores and bomb them. When the American bombers appeared overhead, many thought it was just part of the drill – at least until the bombs began exploding. The panic in the streets was immediate and swift. The Japanese didn't have sufficient air raid shelters or emergency personnel and equipment to deal with such an attack.

As the third plane, Whiskey Pete's crew knew that the Japanese military would already know about the raid and would be on alert. The airplane ran into anti-aircraft fire but was not damaged. They dropped the incendiary bomb on a dock area and the other three bombs on industrial/military sites – a steel plant, a gas company, and a chemical works. Gray later reported that as they departed the area, they also machine-gunned a barracks for good measure.

The raid on Tokyo lasted one and one-half hours; twelve of the thirteen aircraft bound for Tokyo successfully dropped their entire load of bombs on their planned targets. Despite the Japanese claims later that the bombs destroyed homes and hospitals, the Raiders were very certain that all targets were military. They had spent hours on board the Hornet studying maps and pictures of the city, including orientations by Lieutenant Stephen Jurika, the former U.S. Naval Attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. The one civilian target that the men joked about hitting was the Emperor's Palace. It was highly identifiable on the Tokyo skyline and more than one pilot fantasized about bombing it. But they met with an emphatic "no" from Doolittle. He stated unequivocally that it was not a military target and under no conditions were they to strike it. The fact that it was standing and undamaged after the raid gives credibility to the description of targets and is quite a testament to the men's willingness to follow orders.

After the attack, the group faced three major obstacles. First, they had launched from the carrier some

400 miles before they planned and the additional distance meant they were significantly lower on fuel than they had expected. Second, a storm over the China Sea further created turbulence and obliterated visibility, although it did provide a tail wind. Third, a heavy fog blanketed the Chinese coast and prevented any possibility of landing. Probably no pilots ever rued three strikes as badly as the Raiders did that night. So, all crews except one had to bail out of the airplanes. (The only airplane to survive the raid was flight 8, piloted by Captain Edward York. Running seriously low on fuel, he realized that they could never make the coast of China and their only survivable option was to head for Soviet territory. Unfortunately the Soviets held the crew as virtual prisoners for the next 14 months and confiscated the airplane.)

The flight to China must have been nerve-racking for Manch and the crew of Whiskey Pete. They were conserving fuel as much as possible and never quite certain that they could make the Chinese coast, much less friendly territory in China. The weather was so bad that LT's Gray and Manch were not certain exactly when they entered mainland China. But just when the fuel situation was getting critical, LT Gray saw some lights below and knew that they were at least over land. He gave the order for the crew to bail out of Whiskey Pete at 6,200 feet.

Manch managed to gather all his weaponry before he jumped, but when his parachute opened, he suffered a severe jolt. His weapons flew out of his hands and his candy and cigars literally flew upwards out of his shirt, many unwrapping themselves in the wind currents. So not only did his record player go down with the airplane, he also lost all his trading material to help him get assistance from the Chinese peasants.

Imagine the fear of these men as they parachuted from this plane into a pitch black night, with no idea where they would land, what type of terrain they would hit, whether they would land in the midst of the enemy. For this crew, that fear was certainly well-founded. The pilot, CPT Gray, landed in the dark and as he fumbled with his parachute, realized that it

was dragging him toward a sheer cliff. He managed to unhook the parachute just before he went over. A second crew member, Corporal Leland Faktor was not so lucky. His body was found near the wreckage of the airplane, making him the first casualty of the raid. The surviving crew was concerned that he may have delayed bailing out of the airplane until too late, but the military later concluded that he must have suffered a secondary fall, perhaps falling down a cliff just like the one Gray faced. The navigator, LT Charles Ozuk, injured his leg on landing. Neither Manch nor SGT Aden Jones, the rear gunner, were injured. However none of the crew landed within sight or sound of one another, especially in the dark. The logistics of bailing out of an aircraft in the dark over completely unknown territory just didn't allow the luxury of planning their parachute landings

Manch alighted on a hill and elected not to try to maneuver the rough dangerous terrain at night. He spent that first night wrapped in his parachute to avoid freezing and the next morning he began walking. Lacking provisions, he tried to make a water bag out of his parachute's rubber cushion and cut his hand, his only injury. After wandering for a while, he was resting by a river when Chinese villagers found him. Manch spoke no Chinese and couldn't explain his situation. Mystified by this 6 foot 7 inch creature, the Chinese showed him a Japanese flag. He wasn't certain how to react – if they had heard of the bombing of Tokyo, perhaps a positive reaction would be best. At any rate, he decided to follow his gut and in reaction to the flag, he held his nose in the universally understood gesture for a foul odor. Then they brought out a British flag but Manch shook his head. Finally they found an old Saturday Evening Post with a picture of President Franklin Roosevelt and he nodded and pointed to himself. Nationality established, the Chinese welcomed him with open arms. They took him to their village and made a makeshift bed for him – a wooden door laid across two saw horses. It is a measure of his fatigue and gratefulness that he described it later as an “extraordinarily soft bed.” His visit included only one embarrassing incident. He went to bathe in the

river and looked up to see the entire village standing around watching him bathe. He must have been the first white man they'd seen and all were inordinately curious. As soon as he was able, he began searching for the rest of the Doolittle raiders. He got his bearings wrong and walked for two days toward the Japanese lines before the Chinese luckily intercepted him again. He finally linked up with the surviving crew members from Whiskey Pete and they traveled by boat to Chuchow. By this time, they had met up with the Chinese military and were taken by train, bus, and finally airplane to meet up with the rest of the surviving raiders in Chunking.

After moving the men from China to Calcutta, India, Doolittle contacted the families of each of the men and told them about the raid and the participation of their sons, husbands, fathers, and brothers. Manch was able to call his parents and tell them that he was fine and would be home soon. However, Manch seemed to take a liberal view of that “soon” promise. While the men had been guaranteed that they would immediately be posted back to the States after the raid, he volunteered to fly with Clair Chennault and the Flying Tigers in the China-Burma-India campaign and spent the next year piloting bomber raids and flying supplies over the Himalayas to China.

Eighty men took off from the deck of the USS Hornet that April day. Doolittle had warned that the fatality rate on the mission could be as high as 50%. Careful planning and even more careful execution lowered that fatality number significantly. None died during the actual bombing raid and only three died in the series of crashes in China. Eight were taken prisoner by the Japanese in China after the raid; the Japanese executed three of them shortly after and one died of malnutrition and mistreatment in a Japanese POW camp. But the War was not kind to these brave warriors. Almost all continued to fight and thirteen more died while serving their country during World War II, including the pilot of Whiskey Pete, LT Bob Gray, who was tragically killed six months to the day after the raid on Tokyo in a crash in Assam, India.

Back home, Mrs. Manch had not forgotten the prom-

ise that the men could come home and in October, 1942, she lectured General Hap Arnold in a letter that her son should be allowed to come home at least on a well-earned furlough. She continued her campaign until Manch was allowed to come back in the summer of 1943. He arrived on June 25, on a passenger train, and thousands of Staunton residents crammed the station platform, with some even balancing on the platform roof. The Mayor and other dignitaries had planned a reception ceremony, but it suffered an impromptu cancellation when Manch appeared and the crowd went wild, with bands playing and the crowd surging forward to see their new hero. That evening the guests of honor at a reception at the Woodrow Wilson Birthplace were Shorty Manch and a group of wounded soldiers from the North African campaign who were convalescing at

1946, was selected for a commission in the regular army, a rare feat in those days. He followed up this accomplishment with a more personal one. On 12 September 1947 he married Dollie Lee Mathis in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. He served in Japan and Korea as Air Liaison Officer with the 7th U.S. Infantry Division during the Korean War. He fought at the Chosin Reservoir and spent 14 months on the battle front, including flying supplies to American units cut off by the North Koreans near the Yalu River.

In 1953, he returned to the U.S. and was assigned to Nellis Air Base in Nevada as a flight instructor. On March 24, 1958, he and a student, First Lieutenant Harold Forman, set out in an Air Force T-33 Shooting Star, a jet trainer, for a lesson. As they streaked across the Nevada sky, the engine flamed out just

over Las Vegas. Realizing they were over a populated area, Manch told Forman to parachute to safety but he remained with the airplane to ensure that it missed residences and schools in the potential path. Once he was clear of the area, he bailed out but by then it was too late for his parachute to open properly and he died in the fall. His body was found about 200 yards from the wreckage. The city of Las Vegas named the Jacob Manch Elementary School in his honor. This heroic man, who repeatedly put his life in mortal danger during two wars to serve his country, had sacrificed his life to protect innocent citizens of that same country. After Manch's death, his widow, Lee, carried the torch for him until her death on October 29, 2003, in Las Vegas,

Nevada. She attended the reunions of the Doolittle Raiders on his behalf and became a great favorite with all the survivors and their families. She lived for some years in Norfolk, Virginia, and supported the aviation community and their history, including being a great supporter of the Virginia Aviation Museum in Richmond. Pilots who knew her invariably speak of her with great respect and affection.

In 1946 the Doolittle Raiders began holding annual reunions to commemorate the date of the attack. In



During more carefree times, in 1956 in Las Vegas, Shorty and Lee Manch pose with a million dollars.

(L-R) are Lee Manch, Lew Gill, Mrs. Lew Gill, Jacob "Shorty" Manch. Photo courtesy of A.M. Stevens

a local hospital. Manch spoke to the crowd about the bombing, the intense planning that went into it, and his Chinese exodus. But he showed his real character when he concluded by saying "I have no more right to be up here than the boys out there who are back from Tunisia, so give them a big hand for me." The crowd responded with a thunderous ovation for the wounded warriors from Africa. Manch remained stateside for the rest of the war, assigned to bases in California, Utah, and New Jersey and in

1959, the city of Tucson, Arizona, presented them with 80 silver goblets. Each goblet is engraved with a Raider's name, but it is engraved twice – one readable when the goblet is upright and the other readable when it is upside down. Each reunion, the survivors toast those who have passed away and there is a bottle of 1896 Hennessy Cognac set aside for the last toast. (1896 was the year James Doolittle was born.) In 2013, the survivors decided that their health was too questionable to hold more public reunions, but they do plan to meet privately later and have that last toast. It will no doubt be a poignant and emotional time for them.

The Raiders have said that they are amazed by the esteem of the American public. When they began the reunions, they thought the public would attend for a few years, but after a while, the only people interested would be themselves and perhaps their families. They continue to be surprised when people stand in line for 2-3 hours for autographs or when parents take their children out of school to attend the reunions and learn about the courage and dedication of the Doolittle Raiders. They repeatedly say that they didn't do anything special – they just performed the mission as assigned. Their humility makes them ever more the heroes they deny they are. These men are not just examples of the American spirit; they ARE the American spirit. When their country needed them, they were willing to volunteer for an unthinkable mission under impossible conditions and rather than despair, work so hard that it became possible, doable, and done. Their example of courage in the face of overwhelming odds is a challenge to every warrior, every defender, every guardian of the American way.

And one of them was proud to be a Virginian.

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