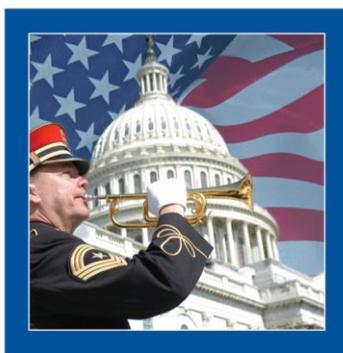


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MICHAEL COLBERT  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

NATIONAL  
**MEMORIAL DAY**  
CONCERT

**A CONVERSATION WITH LT. COL. DICK COLE**  
**SOLE SURVIVING MEMBER OF THE LEGENDARY DOOLITTLE RAIDERS**

During the 2017 **NATIONAL MEMORIAL DAY CONCERT**, Emmy Award-winner **Gary Sinise** will present a 75th anniversary salute to the Doolittle Raiders, the daring aviators who changed the course of World War II in the Pacific. In the following interview, sole surviving member, 101 year-old Lt. Col. Dick Cole, discusses his war-time experiences. To learn more about Colonel Cole and the Doolittle Raiders join us for the **NATIONAL MEMORIAL DAY CONCERT**, only on PBS **Sunday, May 28, 2017, from 8:00 to 9:30 p.m.**

**Q: What first intrigued you about flying?**

**COLONEL COLE:** I was born and raised in Dayton, OH. As a young kid, I used to ride my bicycle from where we lived three or four miles to McCook Field, the Army Air Corps' first test base. I got to watch all the old-timers. They were testing air refueling, dropping a hose out of one airplane that was higher than another. I also remember the first big bomber, the Barling [Wittmann-Lewis NBL-1]. I remember reading about [John] MacReady, [Carl] Spaatz and [Jimmy] Doolittle. I went up in a plane at the airport in Vandalia, Ohio, for a dollar. It was a Ford Trimotor.

**Q: What prompted you to join the Army Air Corps? Did you and your fellow aviators think there would be another war?**

**COLE:** Well, I graduated from high school in the middle of the Depression, and it was a good job. I had made up my mind earlier I was going to be a pilot or a forest ranger. I enlisted in the Army Air Corps in November 1940, went through training and was sent to the 17th Bombardment Group at Pendleton, OR. But I didn't really think too much about there being a war in the offing. I enjoyed the job I had.

**Q: Where were you when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor?**

**COLE:** On Friday, December 5, 1941 we had landed at March Field, south of Los Angeles for scheduled exercises. Our group commander, Lt. Col. Walter Peck, recognized the men needed some time off. So, along with several of my buddies, we checked into the Hollywood Plaza hotel to see Hollywood. We saw the movie stars' homes, CBS, NBC, the motion picture studios, and splurged on steaks and seafood. Early Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, there was a knock on the door and one of the

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pilots from another room announced that the Japanese had invaded Hawaii. A few minutes later, a young man in the uniform of the hotel looking somber told us that all military personnel had to report to their bases, immediately. Back with my unit, it was like clockwork, our ships were dispersed, machine guns set up, anti-aircraft, search lights, aircraft warning devices. Everyone was on alert.

**Q: When did you learn about the Doolittle mission?**

**COLE:** The squadron had a bulletin board you had to read every day. I saw a notice they wanted volunteers for a mission, so I put my name there. In fact, the whole group and the group commander volunteered. We trained at Eglin Field, just outside Pensacola, FL. It was the biggest Army Air Corps base at that time, with several satellite fields that wouldn't attract attention. We flew out of those fields. We were confined to base, in isolated barracks, and told not to talk about our training. It looked like things were going to get a bit tough.

**Q: Who was Jimmy Doolittle to you at the time? What did you know about him?**

**COLE:** He was a very well-noted pilot - for his flying skills, number one. He had developed a blind flying technique at Mitchell Field [NY]. He was also the first pilot to perform the outside loop. Doolittle was interested in helping develop the aviation industry and was very education oriented. He was the first man to receive a doctorate of aviation and engineering from MIT.

**Q: How did you come to be Doolittle's co-pilot?**

**COLE:** The individual I trained with became ill and had to drop out. So, I went to the operations officer, who said, "Well, the old man's coming in this afternoon - I'll crew you up with him, and if you do OK, you've got yourself a pilot." Doolittle came in, said, "Fine," and took the pilot's seat.

**Q: As you were training, what was it like to prepare for the short take off on the aircraft carrier when the planes were not designed to do that?**

**COLE:** The Navy was good enough to provide a lieutenant by the name of Henry Miller from Pensacola. He was to teach the pilots the techniques of short take off. He had never seen a B-25 before but he was a good instructor. What he did really was to teach the pilots to use a zero point of thrust on takeoff. Your engines are delivering one hundred percent forward thrust. And he did that in about three lessons with each pilot.

**Q: What was your opinion of the B-25 as a pilot?**

**COLE:** When I reported to the 17th Bomb Group, it had B-18s and -23s. The B-18 was a slow, lumbering airplane, about like a C-47. The B-23 was a bit faster. I don't know how many of those were built, but there were very few. Then we started to get the B-25, which was really a kick in the air as far as flying. It was like switching from a training plane to a single-engine plane. We all liked the B-25.

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**Q: How many of the group's B-25Bs made it aboard the *Hornet*?**

**COLE:** Sixteen. We backed up alongside the carrier, and a gigantic crane swung around, hooked up to the loading points on the B-25 and hauled it up. The normal takeoff with the B-25 loaded was somewhere around 3,000 feet. We had to be airborne in 500 feet.

**Q: How were the B-25s modified for Doolittle's mission?**

**COLE:** All excess equipment was taken out, like the Norden bombsight, the lower turret. Mechanics installed a bladder tank in the bomb bay. In place of the lower turret they put another fuel tank. We also ended up with 10 five-gallon cans of fuel in the rear of the airplane. It just about doubled the capacity to 1,100-some gallons.

**Q: You left port on April 2, 1942. Describe the scene.**

**COLE:** When we began to steam away from Alameda, it was pretty foggy, but by the time we got around to the Golden Gate Bridge - which most of us had never seen - the sun broke through the clouds. We were two days at sea, and the PA system alerted everybody: "This force is bound for Tokyo." We were pretty excited - above all happy to know what we were going to do. Things quieted down as people began to realize what they were getting into. Initially, the Navy people weren't very happy with us, because we were upsetting their routine, had blocked off some passageways. But when they announced what our mission was, why, they couldn't do enough for us. We joined up with the task force en route, someplace abeam of Hawaii. Navy airplanes on *Hornet* had to be put down on the second deck. There wasn't space for any B-25s. One of the reasons *Enterprise* went along was that it had fighter airplanes, in case we had a meeting with the Japanese.

**Q: What was it like to jump into the mission when you were on the ship, not knowing what it was going to be?**

**COLE:** Of course, right away, there was a lot of spontaneous yelling and jumping and everything. After a while it got kind of quiet. You finally realize what you're getting into. But nobody jumped ship or backed out as far I know.

**Q: Why did you launch early on April 18?**

**COLE:** The Navy ran across a Japanese picket ship, *Nitto Maru*, and Halsey made the decision we would launch. I was on my way to breakfast, when the PA announced, "Army pilots, man your planes! Paul Leonard, the crew chief, was already there. We took the engine covers off the plane, pulled the props through and went over the checklist. We were all set when Doolittle came.

**Q: Describe the launch procedure.**

**COLE:** We placed the B-25 in the middle of the deck, with about seven feet between the right wingtip and the ship's island. The Navy had painted a white line down the deck for the left main gear and another for the nose gear. We taxied up and revved the engine. A launcher picked the appropriate time, the peak of an up movement with the water, and

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the carrier just dropped out from underneath the airplane. We got off a good 20 or 30 feet from the end of the deck.

**Q: When approaching Tokyo, was there any anti-aircraft fire?**

**COLE:** No, as we approached Japan, first off, I personally was impressed with the beauty of the place. There were no enemy ships. We weren't shot at, people were working on boats and swimming and waving at us. It was very peaceful, like landing in New Orleans. Our target was the whole northwest part of Tokyo. We had incendiary bombs. We didn't need to have a precision target to drop those because they scatter all around. And, when the time came, Colonel Doolittle said that he was approaching a point he had picked out from a photograph on the carrier. Bomb doors were open and he approached his target and let 'em all loose.

**Q: Were there any complications once the bombs were dropped?**

**COLE:** After several hours, Tokyo navigator Hank Potter passed a note up to us that we were going to end up about 180 miles short of China. The weather was very bad - a lot of lightning, rain. But the warm front had developed a "kamikaze wind," from east to west, and that gave us the tailwind to China. We were all supposed to land in Chuchow, but there were complications. The airplane carrying a portable homing station crashed on the way there. And the Chinese, on hearing our engines, thought we were Japanese and turned off electricity [to the lights], which we couldn't use anyway because of the weather. The only thing we could do was fly until we ran out of gas and then bail out. It was dark, and we didn't know anything about the terrain except that it was mountainous, but that was the only alternative, unless you wanted to commit suicide. We bailed out at around 9,000 feet. You're supposed to count, "One thousand...two thousand...three thousand," then pull the rip cord. I think I said, "One thousand," and pulled. I pulled it so hard I gave myself a black eye.

**Q: How did your crewmates fare?**

**COLE:** Everybody bailed out successfully. We all had compasses and knew we needed to walk west rather than try to go east. By chance we were all together the next night.

**Q: What was Doolittle's mood?**

**COLE:** Real worried. He thought the mission had been a failure, because he'd lost all the airplanes and some of his people. He was really down in the dumps.

**Q: What happened after the raid?**

We were in China, the first day after the raid and Colonel Doolittle wanted to visit where the airplane had crashed. The Chinese would only take two people. He took [Colonel Doolittle] and Gunner Paul Leonard. The guide went further up the mountain. And by that time, it had been picked over by the Chinese. Colonel Doolittle was feeling pretty low because he thought the raid a failure because he lost all the airplanes and he didn't have any idea where many of the pilots were. And, Paul Leonard sensed it and Colonel Doolittle said that he thought he was going to be fired. Well, Paul told him "Oh, no sir

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they're going to give you the Congressional Medal of Honor and promote you to General." And that's what happened.

**Q: Looking back at your experiences now, what do you recall to be the most important aspects of the raid?**

**COLE:** In the beginning, we were promised - or told that if we survived the mission, we'd get to come home. But between that and what happened, there were twenty-six of us that didn't get to go home. I think that I was pretty naive. My main objective was to get flying time. The raid was designed for two reasons. One was to prove to the Japanese that their island could be struck by air. And, to prove to the Japanese people that their higher ups were not being truthful by saying Japan couldn't be bombed by air. And the other reason was a morale builder for the United States and the Allies; a morale shot in the arm. The damage we did wasn't much. But the raid caused the Japanese to bring back forces from down around Australia and India and concentrate their power in the Central Pacific. They also transferred two carriers to Alaska, and that evened the odds with the U.S. Navy at Midway. Japanese naval forces were at a disadvantage from then on. It was a turning point in the war. By that time, the Japanese military owned the Pacific Ocean. We did that and we were proud of that.

**Q: Did you feel like heroes when you were honored for your role in the raid?**

**COLE:** No, we were just doing our job, part of the big picture, and happy that what we did was helpful. We went to visit Washington to shake hands with the President and received the Congressional Gold Medal. That was very impressive. We couldn't have done it without the Navy. They risked two of their carriers and quite an armada.

**Q: How do you feel about having your story told on this year's NATIONAL MEMORIAL DAY CONCERT?**

**COLE:** The Doolittle Raiders and I are honored to be remembered 75 years later. We were proud to be able to help our country in her time of need. This is an event that the whole nation can enjoy. I am thankful to be included.

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