

Richard Cole, last surviving member of the Doolittle Raiders, dies at 103 in Texas



Retired Lt. Col. Richard Cole, the last survivor of the Doolittle Raid, the first U.S. strike on the Japanese islands during World War II, died Tuesday in Texas. He was 103.

Cole was one of 80 men sent to target factory areas and military installations in Japan on April 18, 1942. The daring raid stunned Japan and is credited with boosting U.S. morale and helping turn the tide of the war in the Pacific.

“There’s another hole in our formation. Our last remaining

Doolittle Raider has slipped the surly bonds of Earth, and has reunited with his fellow Raiders,” General David Goldfein, chief of staff of the Air Force said Tuesday. “The Legacy of the Doolittle Raiders – his legacy – will live forever in the hearts and minds of Airmen, long after we’ve all departed.”

Richard Cole was the last surviving member of the Doolittle Raiders



Cole, born in Dayton, Ohio, was mission commander Jimmy Doolittle’s co-pilot in the all-volunteer attack which took place less than five months after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

After bombing targets in northwest Tokyo, Cole’s plane turned toward China with plans to land at an airfield. But things went awry when authorities at the airfield heard their engines, assumed it

One of Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle’s B-25 bombers takes off from the flight deck of the USS Hornet for the initial air raid on Tokyo, April 18, 1942. The raid came just four months after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, the Doolittle raid did little damage, but lifted the spirits of Americans.

was Japanese and turned off the lights. Cole and Doolittle couldn't find a place to land at night.

Shortly before running out of fuel, everyone bailed out; Cole gave himself a black eye when he pulled his parachute ripcord. He landed in a tree where he spent the night, climbing down in the morning, and walking the whole day before finding a couple of Chinese students who eventually took him to Doolittle, who said, "Boy, am I glad to see you."

Richard Cole: Last Doolittle Raider remembers historic mission 75 years ago

David Thatcher: 79th Doolittle Raider dies in Montana

Of the 80 men who flew from the USS Hornet deck, three died in the raid, and four who were captured by the Japanese were executed or starved to death. Two others who survived the raid were later killed while flying the China-Burma-India route over the Himalayas known as the "Hump."

After the raid, Cole went to India, helped establish the dangerous Hump flying route and flew more than 100 missions carrying cargo, earning three Distinguished Flying Crosses.

The Doolittle Raiders received the Congressional Gold Medal in 2015, and donated it to the National Museum of the U.S. Air Force in Ohio.

Cole, who often attended Raider-related events and air shows, told The Associated Press last year that since he was older than many of the other Raiders, he didn't expect to be the last.

"I figured that Mother Nature and the good man upstairs would pick the time, and I wouldn't have any control over it," he said.

Cole will be buried at Arlington National Cemetery, the Air Force Times reported, and memorial services are also being scheduled at Joint Base San Antonio-Randolph in Texas.

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