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Description
The Doolittle Raiders flew into the history books during their historic WWII sneak attack on Japan on April 18, 1942. It was a successful mission, but nearly all of the 16 planes crash landed in China. For 68 years the Doolittle Raiders have gathered each year to toast those who died. Because of their age, the four living Raiders have decided that 2013 would be their last toast.

Keywords

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"Doolittle Raiders Raise a Glass for the Last Time." Jim Miklaszewski, correspondent. NBC Nightly
Doolittle Raiders Raise a Glass for the Last Time

BRIAN WILLIAMS, anchor:
Honoring the nation’s veterans, President Obama laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery today. One notable guest joining the President, 107 year-old Richard Overton who is believed to be the nation’s oldest living veteran of World War II. Also this Veterans Day weekend, there was an emotional gathering of the Doolittle Raiders, the men who pulled off the secret mission to strike back at Japan after Pearl Harbor. Just four of them are still alive and this year they say it was time for one final gathering to honor their fallen comrades. Our final report tonight from our Pentagon Correspondent Jim Miklaszewski.

JIM MIKLASZEWSKI, reporting:
On most days you will find Dick Cole at home on his tractor in Comfort, Texas. At a remarkable 98 years old, he’s still going strong. As a boy he dreamed of becoming a military combat pilot.

DICK COLE: I wanted to be one of those guys that go after the bad guy.

MIKLASZEWSKI: He soon got his chance. When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, Cole was already a pilot in the Army Air Corps. Not just any pilot, he became the copilot for the legendary Jimmy Doolittle and the Doolittle Tokyo Raiders. And only four months after Pearl Harbor, they flew straight into the history books.

COLE: They had put out the word about they’re looking for people to go on a dangerous mission.

MIKLASZEWSKI: So dangerous, Doolittle gave his men the chance to back down.

COLE: Nobody jumped ship. Nobody backed out.

MIKLASZEWSKI: Against all odds, Cole and Doolittle flew the first of 16 B-25 bombers with their 80 crew members off the deck of the hornet for the historic sneak attack on the Japanese homeland. The mission succeeded but three crew members were killed and almost all 16 planes crash landed in China. And Cole himself was injured when he bailed out.

COLE: I pulled the rip cord so hard, I gave myself a black eye.
MIKLASZEWSKI: Cole insists he’s no hero. But huge crowds turned out at the National Air Force Museum at Dayton, Ohio, this past weekend to honor the few Doolittle Raiders still alive today. The mission itself is on exhibit with an actual B-25 bomber. Who’s that hanging out the window there?

COLE: That’s supposed to be me.

MIKLASZEWSKI: But the occasion was bittersweet. For 68 years, Doolittle Raiders gathered to toast those who have died. Because of their age, they decided this would be their last.

COLE: And may they rest in peace.

MIKLASZEWSKI: For the Doolittle Raiders, it was their final mission.

COLE: The story has run—run its course. It’s about time to tie things up and ride off into the sunset.