Doolittle Raid — April 1942

At the beginning of 1942, America and it's British ally were the underdogs fighting a two-front world war. After losing Singapore (and Tobruk in North Africa), Winston Churchill described 1942 as one of the darkest years in British history.

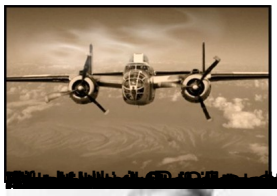
The United States military was still a small fraction of the combined and combat experienced Germans and Japanese. Also, America had just lost many of its capital ships at Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. For the Japanese, Pearl Harbor became a tactical success, but a strategic disaster that had "awakened a sleeping giant."

Jimmy Doolittle of air racing fame was among the few people in America with the vision, leadership, and flying skills to pull off an early counter strike on Japan. Risking a portion of the US aircraft carrier force that was outnumbered 2 to 1, Doolittle planned, trained the crews, and led an attack using US Army medium bombers launched from the deck of the USS Hornet I (CV-8) to target Tokyo, Japan.

Leaving Alameda Air Station on April 1, 1942, the Hornet with 16 B-25s lashed to the deck and escorted by the USS enterprise (CV-6) and a dozen cruisers and destroyers headed towards Tokyo.

A day before the launch date, the American task force was discovered by a Japanese picket boat. Before US cruisers could open fire, the boat sent a brief message. The choices were to push the B-25s overboard and head for home, or launch hundreds of miles early with insufficient fuel to fly to the Chinese base at Chuchow.

For Doolittle and his men the decision was easy! Turning the Hornet into the wind at flank speed, Doolittle's first B-25 was airborne using only half the flight deck. Flying just above the waves for hours, they achieved complete surprise and dropped small bomb loads over Tokyo and Yokahama before heading for the coast of China.



Mountain View, CA