

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 361

“I Could Never Be So Lucky Again”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor had neutralized the US Pacific Fleet at a stroke, but all three of America’s Pacific aircraft carriers were at sea on the day the strike came.

For Admiral Yamamoto, this took some of the shine off his otherwise brilliant attack. For the United States Navy, it represented an opportunity.

All they needed to do was figure out how to exploit it.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 361. I Could Never Be So Lucky Again.

If there was a silver lining to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, from the American point of view, it was that none of the three US Navy aircraft carriers assigned to the Pacific Fleet had been at Pearl Harbor when the Japanese struck.

On the day of the attack, USS *Lexington* had been under way to Midway to deliver 18 dive bombers to the US naval air station there. That’s because in addition to their value as mobile air bases that could launch air attacks and reconnaissance missions at sea, aircraft carriers were also used as literal aircraft carriers, ferrying airplanes across ocean distances beyond the flying range of the aircraft.

After the attack, *Lexington* received orders to cancel its mission, rendezvous with its task force, and search the region west of Hawaii for Japanese ships. It found none.

Lexington’s sister ship, USS *Saratoga*, had recently completed a refit at Bremerton Navy Yard in Washington and was that day at San Diego, to take on its air group in preparation for its return to service in the Pacific. After the Pearl Harbor attack, *Saratoga* was ordered also to take on a US Marine fighter squadron of Brewster Buffaloes and ferry them to Pearl Harbor.

Saratoga and *Lexington* were twenty years old. They had been laid down in 1920 and 1921, respectively, and were originally intended to be battlecruisers. Following the Washington Naval Conference, where the United States and its allies had agreed to limit their battleship construction, the two partially-constructed ships were completed as aircraft carriers.

USS *Enterprise*, the Pacific Fleet's third carrier, was far newer. *Enterprise* was a purpose-built aircraft carrier, commissioned in 1938. The design and construction of *Enterprise* and its two sister ships, USS *Yorktown* and *Hornet*, had incorporated the lessons the US Navy learned from its earlier carriers. In 1941, they were the pride of the US Navy.

Enterprise, as you already know, was just returning to Pearl Harbor from a mission to ferry a squadron of Marine Corps Wildcats to Wake Island. The ship had been scheduled to return on December 6, the day before the attack, but had been delayed by bad weather. You have to call that a lucky break, although it wasn't so lucky for the pilots of the reconnaissance squadron *Enterprise* had launched that morning. After completing their search patterns, they attempted to land at Pearl Harbor, only to find themselves caught between Japanese fighter planes above and American anti-aircraft guns below. Seven of them were shot down, either by the Japanese or by friendly anti-aircraft fire; eight airmen were killed and two wounded.

Radio messages from Pearl Harbor informed *Enterprise* of the attack and ordered it to launch an air strike to the southwest, believed to be the location of the Japanese task force that had launched the strike. The American strike force found nothing and returned to their ship, except for their fighter escort of six Wildcats. These planes were ordered to proceed to Oahu and land at Hicks Field, where they could assist in the defense of the base, in the event of another Japanese strike. Alas, even though they had been alerted that the Wildcats were coming, panicky anti-aircraft gunners at Pearl Harbor fired on them anyway, shooting down three of the fighters and killing their pilots. *Enterprise* arrived at Pearl Harbor the following day, Monday, December 8.

As I say, it was fortunate for the Americans that their three Pacific carriers survived December 7 intact. In our time, you will find those willing to argue that Pearl Harbor was a blessing in disguise, because it forced the US Navy to rely on aircraft carriers rather than battleships as its primary offensive weapon in the Pacific at this pivotal moment in naval history when the aircraft carrier was supplanting the battleship as the primary capital ship of a modern navy.

There is truth in this, although it's an oversimplification. The main value of aircraft carriers was originally seen as reconnaissance. It is valuable in naval combat to locate an enemy fleet before it can locate you. As early as the First World War and later in their war against China, Japan used carrier planes to bomb targets on shore, just as battleships can fire shells at targets on shore, so there's also that.

By 1941, naval strategists were beginning to understand the threat that land-based aircraft posed to ships at sea. Anyone who doubted that by December 10, 1941 learned it from the sinking of HMS *Prince of Wales*.

Prince of Wales was sunk in part because it lacked defensive air cover, and here was surely a role that aircraft carriers could fulfill—providing air cover for other ships.

But most of the airplanes on an aircraft carrier are not fighters, but bombers, meant for offensive action against enemy ships and shore installations. Of necessity bombers designed to ride aboard carriers must be smaller and lighter and therefore carry less ordnance than bombers based on land. Would these puny craft be enough to sink an enemy battleship, in the face of enemy fighters and anti-aircraft guns? In 1941, this was debatable. Yes, carrier-based planes had proved decisive at Taranto and Pearl Harbor, against enemy ships caught by surprise in port, but could they take on a full enemy task force under way at speed on the high seas? This remained to be seen.

Enterprise arrived at Pearl Harbor in the evening. Normally it took at least 24 hours to resupply and rearm a carrier; task force commander Admiral William Halsey worked the crew all night and *Enterprise* was ready to depart the following morning. *Enterprise* and its task force were assigned to patrol the waters west of Hawaii and intercept any further Japanese attacks. On December 10, their second day at sea, aircraft from *Enterprise* sank the Japanese submarine *I-10*, making *Enterprise* the first US warship to sink a Japanese vessel since the outbreak of the war.

Meanwhile, *Saratoga* was tasked with carrying relief supplies to Wake Island, while *Lexington* was ordered to attack a Japanese base in the Marshall Islands as a diversion. Unfortunately, Wake fell to the Japanese before *Saratoga* and its task force arrived.

In January 1942, *Saratoga* was hit by a torpedo from a Japanese submarine while on patrol. The torpedo caused serious damage, forcing the ship to return to Pearl Harbor and then back to Bremerton for repairs and upgrades. *Saratoga* would be out of action until June, but it would be replaced by USS *Yorktown*, which had transited the Panama Canal from the Atlantic and was now available for action in the Pacific.

The American carriers spent the following weeks escorting transports carrying US soldiers to American Samoa and raiding Japanese bases in the Marshall Islands, the Gilbert Islands, Wake and Marcus Islands and at Rabaul in the Bismarck Islands. These attacks were generally successful in that the Americans usually shot down more Japanese planes than they lost and did some damage to Japanese bases, though their overall effect on the Japanese war effort was modest. Even so, American sailors and pilots gained valuable experience, the US Navy's morale began to recover, and the Japanese learned that despite Pearl Harbor and despite their dramatic victories in the first three months of the war, the Americans were still very much in the fight.

The buildup of American land, naval, and air forces in the Southwest Pacific was a major concern to the Japanese military. The Americans were taking advantage of a chain of islands—Tahiti, Samoa, Fiji, and New Caledonia—which represented stopovers on a nautical highway that ran well to the south of the Japanese-controlled regions of the Pacific and linked the United States to Australia. American air and naval forces in Australia could threaten the Japanese

position in the East Indies and that all-important oil necessary to maintain the Japanese war effort.

In a matter of a few months, Japan had captured every territory it had yearned for: the resource-rich lands of Indochina, Malaya, and the East Indies. The Americans had been ousted from the Philippines and the British from Singapore. Now that Japan controlled these lands, the next phase of the war plan called for a network of air and naval bases from Singapore to Rabaul, to defend Japanese gains. If the British or the Americans wished to strike back, they would have to enter Japanese-controlled waters, under skies dominated by Japanese planes.

But success made the Navy greedy. So much had been accomplished at so little cost. The Navy hadn't lost a single ship larger than a destroyer. Why stop now? Let's press on, to India, to Australia, and to Hawaii.

The Navy proposed invading and occupying Australia with five divisions, to pre-empt American use of Australia—or at least the northern coast of Australia—as a base for attacks on Japanese forces in the East Indies, but the Army, tied down as it was in China, couldn't spare the numbers of soldiers an occupation of Australia would require. The generals pointed out to the admirals that Australia was double the land area of Japanese-occupied China, territory it had taken the Army four years to capture. Five divisions wouldn't be nearly enough. It would take more like twelve divisions, the generals calculated, and even if the Army could spare twelve divisions, Japan's merchant fleet wasn't large enough to keep them supplied in distant Australia, and the Navy would be tied down defending this lengthy merchant ship pipeline from Allied attacks.

Very well, then; if taking Australia was an unrealistic goal, the admirals figured the next best thing would be for Japan to continue its island-hopping advance to the east of Australia and then south. They already held the port of Rabaul on New Britain and had heavily reinforced this base. The next logical steps would be an advance down the Solomon Islands and the New Hebrides, then to take New Caledonia, or perhaps Fiji or Samoa, or all of them. Japanese air and naval forces stationed in those islands would be well positioned to interdict ocean traffic between the US and Australia. If the Americans sent their Pacific Fleet all the way to the Solomon Islands, Japanese submarine and surface raiders would whittle away at its escorts until Japanese planes based in the islands finished them off.

The fall of Singapore had isolated Australia from Britain. The fall of New Caledonia would complete the job by isolating Australia from the United States. Afterward, Australia would hardly matter anymore.

Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, commander of the Combined Fleet and architect of the Pearl Harbor strike, was the one senior naval commander not satisfied with this plan. The failure of his Pearl Harbor strike to take out any of the American carriers stung him. Those carriers were now engaging in hit-and-run attacks on the periphery of Japanese-controlled waters, and there would be more where they came from. Yamamoto understood better than any other Japanese

commander what the American economy was capable of. This year it was three carriers harassing Japanese bases; next year it would be six. In two years, twelve.

Yamamoto dismissed the Japanese Navy's preferred strategy of waiting for the Americans to come to them. The Navy had already wargamed this scenario, and the Navy couldn't make the strategy work, even in a simulation.

Waiting was bad strategy because time was not on Japan's side. Japan's goal was to force the Americans into a negotiated agreement that would respect Japan's rights in the Western Pacific. If that was to happen, it would have to happen quickly. American morale was already low. If Japan could sink those three carriers, leaving the US Navy with no capital ships in the entire Pacific Ocean, that would further demoralize them. Perhaps enough to force the Americans to the negotiating table at last.

But how to sink those three American carriers? Yamamoto had a plan. The Navy needed to pose a serious threat to the US in some way, a threat that the Americans could not ignore. It needed to be a threat that would draw those three carriers out of Pearl Harbor and force the Americans to venture into the range of the Japanese Combined Fleet.

And waiting to pounce would be Japan's entire force of seven carriers. The Americans would find themselves outnumbered. Their carriers would be sunk in the deep ocean, lost forever.

The other admirals didn't like that idea. It seemed risky. They only agreed to it because Yamamoto threatened to resign otherwise, and Yamamoto was the Navy's most popular commander. If he resigned, it would hurt morale and lead to Japanese sailors questioning their leadership.

The Navy agreed to Yamamoto's plan, although they were not ready to set a date to execute it. Sometime in June, perhaps. But Admiral Yamamoto got the green light to proceed with the planning.

Oh, and what did Yamamoto think would be the appropriately serious threat that would force the American carriers to respond?

How about a Japanese assault on Midway?

[music: Mozart, *String Quartet No. 19 in C.*]

The sneak attack on Pearl Harbor had infuriated the American public. Overnight, all reservations about America going to war had been set aside. Even after Germany and Italy declared war on the United States, the US government might have committed to a "Germany first" policy, but the American people were far more focused on revenge against Japan.

The public had been told of the attack of course, but the Navy's losses were classified information. Many Americans waited confidently for the news of the Navy's Pacific Fleet

carrying out retaliatory strikes against the Japanese. And they waited, and they waited, but all they heard on the radio was news of further Japanese advances. Singapore. Java. Burma. The Philippines. Gradually the realization sank in that the US Navy was not responding to the Pearl Harbor attack in kind because it couldn't.

Since last December, President Roosevelt had been asking the US military to find a way to bomb Japan itself. A bombing raid on the Home Islands would feel like suitable revenge for Pearl Harbor and would lift American spirits. It would also send a signal to the Japanese public, in the same way the British bombing raids sent a signal to the German public. You are not beyond our reach, and your political and military leaders can't protect you.

But this was a tall order. Conventional bombing raids were impossible, since the US had no airbases within bomber range of Japan. Therefore, something unconventional was required. Let's just put a pin in this story thread for a few minutes. You can be sure I will come back to it.

At this time, the Japanese were proceeding with their plan to leapfrog from island to island, beginning at Rabaul, toward the goal of Fiji, Samoa, and/or New Caledonia. Remember that the idea here is to advance forward, relying on Japan's air superiority, capture a forward location, and deploy air units there that will provide cover for the next advance.

The Japanese had heavily garrisoned Rabaul, on the island of New Britain. The first stage of this advance was toward the large island of New Guinea. New Guinea is only about 100 kilometers from New Britain at their closest, and both islands were administered by Australia under a mandate from the League of Nations. On March 5, four transport ships, carrying Japanese Special Naval Landing Forces, left Rabaul, escorted by seven cruisers and six destroyers.

After three days at sea, Japanese landed at the ports of Lae and Salamaua on the northeast coast of New Guinea. Small Australian ground and air forces offered little resistance. However, the American carriers *Lexington* and *Yorktown* were in the Gulf of Papua, which is the body of water just off the southeast coast of New Guinea, between New Guinea and Australia. Aircraft from these carriers were able to fly over New Guinea and surprise the Japanese. Soon after, American B-17 bombers based at Townsville in Australia made their own attack.

The surprise American air attacks sank three of the transport ships and damaged a cruiser, two destroyers, and several other ships, while suffering minimal losses. They did not prevent the Japanese from seizing the bases on New Guinea, but they made them pay a price for it. And on the question of what carriers are actually capable of, you can add to the list that they can surprise an enemy with airstrikes launched from the other side of an island.

Concurrently, the Japanese sent more troops southeast from Rabaul and seized the islands of Buka and Bougainville by the end of the month; again, the outnumbered Australian garrisons withdrew.

The losses the Japanese had suffered did not dissuade them from pressing forward with their island-hopping strategy, but it forced a pause in the drive toward New Caledonia, since it was now clear that Japanese carriers would be required to provide fighter air cover against the American carrier planes and the American and Australian bombers based in Townsville. The Japanese sent their two largest and most modern carriers, *Shokaku* and *Zuikaku*, which had just returned to Pacific waters following the Japanese raid on the Royal Navy in the Indian Ocean.

[music: Mozart, *String Quartet No. 19 in C.*]

James Doolittle was born on December 14, 1896, in Alameda, California. His family lived in Nome, Alaska, for a time. He graduated high school in Los Angeles and went on to the University of California at Berkeley. His college studies were interrupted by the First World War, during which he trained pilots for the Army Air Service.

After the war, he remained in the Army with the rank of first lieutenant. He completed his degree at Berkeley and went on to earn a master's and a doctorate in aeronautics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Afterward, Doolittle worked as an aeronautical engineer and test pilot for the military. As a test pilot, he became well known after setting numerous speed and distance records.

Doolittle became an early advocate for instrument flying. In the early days of aviation, pilots relied on their eyes to see where they were and their human bodies' various motion and balance senses to work out their plane's orientation, acceleration, and pitch, hence the expression "flying by the seat of your pants," which at that time was meant literally. As airplanes became faster and capable of more complex maneuvers, it soon became apparent to Doolittle and other aviation pioneers that rapid maneuvers can confuse and disorient a pilot's senses. Fog, rain, and darkness can impair a pilot's ability to see.

Gyroscopes were adapted as cockpit instruments to track an airplane's direction, and to provide what is known as an "artificial horizon," which displays the aircraft's orientation with respect to the Earth's horizon. Radio marker beacons can be used to show a pilot when an airplane is properly aligned with a runway and how far the plane is from that runway. In 1929, Doolittle flew the first demonstration flight, in which he took off, flew, and landed his plane on instruments only, with the cockpit windshield shrouded to block out any visual cues. In 1932, he set an air speed record of 296 miles per hour, and he was instrumental in developing higher-octane gasolines that allowed for more powerful aircraft engines.

After the United States entered the Second World War, James Doolittle was promoted to lieutenant colonel in what was now called the US Army Air Forces. His first assignment was to find a way to realize President Roosevelt's ambition of a retaliatory bombing raid on Japan.

It was not Doolittle nor anyone in the Army Air Forces, but a Navy captain named Francis Low who first hit on the solution. Low observed that some of the Army's twin-engine bombers,

despite their much larger size, were capable of taking off from a runway no longer than the flight deck of an aircraft carrier.

Doolittle and Low were assigned to develop an attack plan, and they set to work. They settled on the Army's B-25 Mitchell as the only bomber suitable for the attack. The B-25 was one of the newest aircraft in the American arsenal, one that had not yet seen combat. On February 3, 1942, as proof of concept, they successfully launched two B-25s from the deck of the carrier USS *Hornet* while it was at sea off the coast of Virginia.

All well and good, but taking off from a carrier and landing on a carrier were two different things, and landing looked all but impossible. Well, after bombers complete their missions, they normally return to where they began, but it didn't have to be that way. Doolittle proposed that following the bombing raid on Japan, the B-25s would proceed to the Soviet city of Vladivostok and land there. Afterward, the planes could be turned over to the Soviet military as part of American Lend-Lease aid.

However, when the Americans queried the Soviet government about this idea, Moscow turned it down. The Soviets had signed a non-aggression agreement with Japan. Violation of Soviet neutrality might draw a Japanese attack on the USSR, which Moscow could not afford. The coming of spring would surely see a renewed German offensive. The Red Army needed to be in the west, not the east of the country.

With the Soviets refusing to cooperate, the next best plan would be to land the bombers in China. Chiang Kai-shek and his government happily agreed to permit these landings, after which the bombers would be refueled, flown onward to China's provisional capital of Chongqing, and handed over to the Chinese military.

It sounds simple, but in order for this to work, the B-25s would need major modifications. The carrier might get within, say, 500 nautical miles of Japan, but after the raid, these bombers might have to fly an additional 1,500 nautical miles to reach unoccupied China. The B-25 had a range of about 1,300 nautical miles. For this to work, that number would have to be doubled.

The 17th Bombardment Group was chosen to fly the mission, as they were the unit most experienced with the B-25. They were based in Pendleton, Oregon at this time and assigned to fly antisubmarine patrols in the Pacific. The unit was moved to Florida; the cover story was that they would be flying similar missions against German U-boats in the Atlantic, which, since the U-boats were having their own way with American shipping at the time, no one found suspicious. Flight crews were then asked to volunteer for a special assignment, extremely dangerous, but not otherwise specified.

USS *Hornet* was the third and last of the *Yorktown*-class carriers, after *Yorktown* and *Enterprise*. The ship was built in response to Japan's repudiation of the Washington Naval Treaty, making it America's newest aircraft carrier, only commissioned in October 1941, less than two months

before the Pearl Harbor attack, and was still running training missions out of the Navy's base in Norfolk, Virginia.

Hornet was assigned a peculiar training mission on February 2, 1942, when the carrier went to sea with two B-25 bombers on its flight deck. At sea, the two bombers were launched, after which *Hornet* did a 180 and returned to base. That was a real head scratcher for the crew.

In the Pacific, they must have been wondering when *Hornet* was going to join them. It was America's best carrier in the Atlantic, but why wasn't it in the Pacific? Let's hope they finish training soon.

Hornet left Norfolk on March 4, bound for the naval base at Alameda, via the Panama Canal, arriving on March 20. The carrier held its full complement of 72 fighters and bombers, but these were kept stowed below as 16 B-25 bombers from the 17th Bombardment Group were loaded onto the flight deck. They were crammed as tightly as possible into the rear of the flight deck, so as to give each plane the maximum possible room for takeoff. The tails of the bombers in the last row stuck out over the Pacific Ocean.

Each B-25 had a crew of 5, making 80 Army airmen altogether. The planes were loaded with a mix of high explosive and incendiary bombs and specially modified to maximize their range. Extra fuel tanks were installed; the gun turret in the belly of the plane was removed to make room for them. In place of the guns, two broomsticks were installed to give the impression the guns were still there. Inside, the planes' radios were removed to save weight; the mission was going to be conducted under radio silence anyway. Also removed were the bombers' precious Norden bombsights. The Nordens were too valuable to risk on this mission, since if a bomber got shot down over Japan, the Japanese might get their hands on one. Besides, the plan for this mission was low-level bombing, for which the Norden was less useful. A simpler, lighter bombsight would be adequate.

Hornet left Alameda as part of Task Force 18 at 9:00 AM on April 2, during a thick fog, which helped conceal the improbable sight on its deck. Only after the ship was at sea was *Hornet's* captain, Marc Mitscher, cleared to open the sealed orders he'd been given. He read them, then explained their mission to the crew.

On April 8, Task Force 16, centered on USS *Enterprise*, left Pearl Harbor to rendezvous with *Hornet* and proceed west. Admiral Halsey, commander of Task Force 16, as the senior officer of the combined force, assumed overall command of the operation.

Hornet could not launch its own planes as long as the bombers were on deck, so *Enterprise* was there to provide air cover. Accompanying the two carriers were the heavy cruisers USS *Salt Lake City*, *Northampton*, and *Vincennes*, the light cruiser *Nashville*, eight destroyers, and two oilers.

On April 17, the oilers refueled the task force. They and the destroyers then turned back toward Pearl Harbor, while the carriers and the cruisers made a mad dash westward. The goal was to get in, launch the bombers, and get out as quickly as possible.

There was disagreement between the Navy and the Army over the timing of the bomber attack. The Army wanted to launch in the small hours of the morning, so that the bombers would reach their targets at dawn and get to China before nightfall. The Navy objected that launching the bombers at night was risky. It would require lighting up *Hornet's* flight deck, and lighting up your ship at night while in enemy waters wasn't exactly the Navy's standard procedure. The Navy wanted to launch at dawn, but that would put the bombers over Tokyo in broad daylight and remember there will be no fighter escorts on this mission.

They settled on a compromise, to launch at dusk. This would mean they'd be bombing Tokyo by night, so Colonel Doolittle, who was planning to pilot the first bomber, would navigate to Tokyo and drop incendiary bombs, which would light up the city and provide a clear target for the bombers following. The bombers would then land in China in the morning.

But events make the best laid plans obsolete. They hoped to launch the bombers at a distance of 400 nautical miles from Tokyo. It turned out they wouldn't have that luxury. At 3:10 AM the following morning, April 18, radar aboard *Enterprise* detected a Japanese patrol boat more than 700 nautical miles out from the Japanese coast. The Americans were not expecting Japanese patrols this far from the Home Islands. The task force changed course to avoid the Japanese patrol, but it wasn't the only one.

Finally, at 7:38 AM, lookouts on *Hornet* spotted a Japanese patrol boat. USS *Nashville* was dispatched to fire on the boat and sink it. Five of the eleven crew members of the patrol boat were rescued by the Americans, but the radio room aboard *Hornet* reported that the boat had gotten off a signal reporting its sighting of the American task force before it sank.

As a side note, we now know that the patrol boat's radio message was received in Japan only in garbled form and its significance was not understood, but on April 18, 1942, Admiral Halsey had to assume the Japanese Navy was alerted to their presence. *Enterprise* and *Hornet* were at risk of enemy attack, and remember that its fleet carriers are all the Navy has in the Pacific since Pearl Harbor. The loss of two of America's newest carriers was an unacceptable risk. Never mind that they were still almost 600 nautical miles out; Halsey ordered the bombers be launched immediately, adding "Good luck, and God bless you."

Did I mention that none of these pilots, not even Doolittle, had ever taken off from a real aircraft carrier, as opposed to lines painted on a runway in the shape of a flight deck? Well, they hadn't.

At 8:20 AM, forty minutes after the patrol boat was first sighted, Colonel Doolittle's bomber was the first to take off, meaning it would have less deck available than any of the planes behind.

When Doolittle's plane reached the end of the flight deck, it was seen to go nose down toward the sea. Fortunately, Doolittle was able to raise the nose and climb before his plane hit the water.

The other fifteen bombers took off without incident. They headed toward Japan, flying as low as they dared over the ocean waves, to avoid detection, and reached the Japanese coast about noon, local time. The bombers then climbed to 1500 feet and proceeded to their targets. One bomber each was assigned to targets in Osaka, Kobe, Yokosuka, and Nagoya. Two were assigned to Yokohama, and the remaining ten to Tokyo. By spreading out the attacks, the Americans hoped to convey the impression that the bombing raid had been bigger than it actually was.

The bombers encountered some anti-aircraft fire and a few enemy fighter planes, but the Japanese were mostly caught off guard. No bomber was shot down. One was damaged, and another forced to jettison its bombs prematurely when it came under fighter attack, but fifteen planes bombed their assigned targets.

One of the bombers was low on fuel. The planes' carburetors had been adjusted for maximum fuel economy, but on this particular plane, they were misadjusted. Since the only alternative was to ditch in the middle of the East China Sea, the pilot made the decision to proceed to Vladivostok, despite lacking permission to land there.

The other fifteen planes headed for China. They were lucky enough to pick up a tail wind, which made it possible for most of the planes to reach the Chinese coast. Had they been less fortunate, they would have had to ditch their aircraft in the ocean and attempt to paddle to China on rubber rafts.

Even so, none of the planes had enough fuel to reach a landing field. Some pilots made emergency landings wherever they could. Other flight crews bailed out of their planes. One of these was killed. Doolittle himself had to bail out; he landed in a farmer's dung heap, which sounds unpleasant, but at least it was soft.

Five members of the flight crews were in Russia, one was dead, and ten were missing. The remaining 64 were smuggled across the lines into unoccupied China with the aid of helpful Chinese civilians, and a 22-year-old Southern Baptist missionary turned US Army intelligence agent in China named John Birch. You'll probably hear his name again in some future episode. Way in the future.

Colonel Doolittle considered the raid a failure, as he had lost all 16 of his planes in a bombing raid that had done only modest damage. He expected to be demoted at least, and possibly court-martialed.

Instead, he was promoted two ranks, to brigadier general, and awarded the Medal of Honor. The Distinguished Flying Cross was awarded to all 80 crew members of what became known as the Doolittle Raid.

The raid was a tremendous boost to American morale. The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor had been countered with a surprise attack on Tokyo. Take that, Tōjō.

On the ground, 87 Japanese civilians were killed and some 500 wounded, including women and children. The Japanese government and press denounced the attack. Japanese newspapers interviewed parents of children killed in the attack and asked them how they thought the Americans should be punished. You can imagine their replies.

Still, the raid was a blow to morale in Japan. This was something that was not supposed to happen. The enemy wasn't supposed to be anywhere near the Home Islands. The Japanese government and military had announced nothing but success after success, and were assuring the public that victory was near.

In military terms, the raid forced the Japanese to increase fighter cover over the Home Islands at a time when those planes were badly needed to help cover the Japanese Navy in the campaign in the Solomon Islands.

More important, the Japanese military had lost face. The Imperial Navy sent ships to intercept the American task force that had launched the bombers, but the Americans escaped.

The military and the government in Japan were determined never to allow anything like this to happen again. Unfortunately for them, Pacific geography was not their friend. There were plenty of islands in the Southwest Pacific that could be used to guard the approaches to the East Indies, but there was no similar barrier of islands to the east. East of Japan was a whole lot of nothing.

But there were the American-held Midway Islands. You know, the island group Admiral Yamamoto has been so keen to invade? The Navy decided now was time to move Yamamoto's plan onto the front burner.

But that is a story for another episode. We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank George and Susan for their kind donations, and thank you to Manu for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like George and Susan and Manu help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, you are most welcome; just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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And I hope you'll join me next week, here on the *History of the Twentieth Century*, as the Imperial Japanese Navy and the United States Navy fight the first carrier vs. carrier combat in naval history. Scratch One Flattop, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. Well, a few more things, really.

The five Americans who landed in Soviet Russia were interned and their plane impounded, per the USSR's obligations as a neutral power. The Americans were moved to Ashkabad in Turkmenistan, where they escaped over the border into Iran, presented themselves at the British Embassy in Teheran, and were then repatriated. Their "escape" may have been staged by the Soviet NKVD.

About four months after the attack, the Swiss Consulate in Shanghai informed the US government that eight of the missing ten crew members had been captured by the Japanese. The other two drowned when their plane ditched into the ocean.

The eight prisoners were tried before a Japanese military court and sentenced to death. Three of them were executed; the other five had their sentences commuted. They were held under harsh conditions. One of them died in 1943; the other four were rescued by American soldiers in 1945.

The Japanese Army took their revenge on the Chinese civilians who had helped the American bomber crews escape to safety. Japanese soldiers swept through the region where the bombers went down. Anyone identified as having helped the Americans was tortured and killed, but it didn't end there. Civilians were shot at random, women raped, and villages burned. The Japanese also applied biological warfare, deliberately spreading pathogens such as cholera, typhoid, bubonic plague, and dysentery in food and water supplies. An estimated 250,000 Chinese civilians died in these reprisal actions.

On a more cheerful note, when President Roosevelt was asked by a reporter where the American bombers had been based, he facetiously answered that they had come from Shangri-La. Shangri-La is the name of an imaginary paradisiacal valley hidden in the Himalaya Mountains, as described in English author James Hilton's 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*, which was made into a 1937 American film directed by Frank Capra and starring Ronald Colman. Everyone in 1942 would have recognized the reference.

In the late 1930s, the WPA built a retreat center for the use of the US President in the mountains of Maryland, an American version of Britain's Chequers. President Roosevelt subsequently named it Shangri-La. In 1944, the US Navy got in on the joke when it named one of its new aircraft carriers USS *Shangri-La*.

In 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower renamed Shangri-La to Camp David, after his grandson, and that is the name it is known by today.

James Doolittle became one of the most famous pilots in history. In 1967, he was inducted into the National Aviation Hall of Fame. In 1991, he published his autobiography, titled *I Could Never Be So Lucky Again*. He died in 1993, at the age of 96.

[music: Closing War Theme]

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