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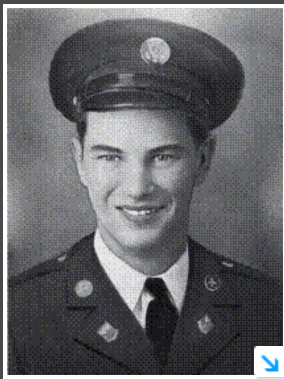
When U.S. needed win in WWII, Iowans stepped forward



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(Photo: Special to the Register)

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They looked like they were posing for high school yearbook photos, these 80 brave men.

The five-man crews stood in front of their B-25 bombers. Some grinned. Some put on a tough-guy facade. A few blinked or looked the wrong direction as the shutter snapped. But these largely jolly snapshots don't tell the story. Because even then, with smiles on their faces and shines on their shoes, none of them expected to live.

On April 18, 1942, these crews boarded 16 bombers and attacked military targets in Tokyo, Japan, in a daring nighttime raid led by legendary pilot Jimmy Doolittle. Among the 80 were three Iowans: Col. Charles Ross Greening, Cpl. Leland Dale Faktor and Staff Sgt. William J. Dieter. Their contributions to the pivotal raid will be honored Saturday in Greenfield, when all three men will be posthumously inducted into the Iowa Aviation Hall of Fame.

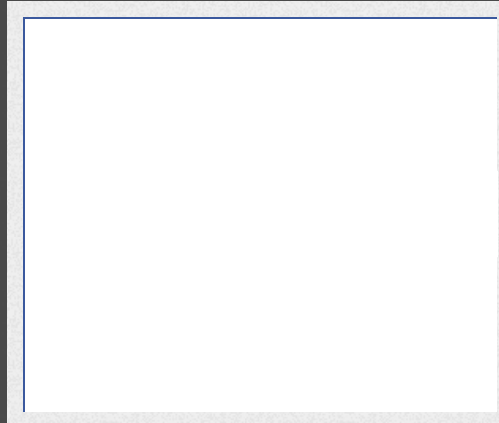
The Iowans were among 80 men who volunteered for a mission described only as secret, dangerous and from which few were expected to return. But the men also knew America badly needed a win.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Americans entered World War II with gusto. But victories were rare. German submarines sunk scores of ships off the East Coast. In the Pacific, the Japanese forced Gen. Douglas MacArthur to retreat from the Philippines. As many as 80,000 Filipino soldiers and U.S. servicemen were captured and tortured in a brutal slog known as the Bataan Death March.

Doolittle, then a colonel, cooked up the idea for the Tokyo Raid. The idea was fraught with problems. The bombers were too big to be stored below decks of the aircraft carrier. They would have to be lined up nose to tail on the deck. That meant a short runway for takeoff, especially for the first plane, which Doolittle would pilot.

The planes could not carry enough fuel to make the raid and return to the carrier. The plan was for the crews to land in parts of China still free of Japanese occupation and then make their way back home. To keep weight down and improve fuel efficiency, crews stripped the planes of all but the essentials. They replaced guns with broomsticks painted to look like machine guns. They loaded extra fuel in drums, hoping it would be just enough to get them into free China.

The Doolittle Raiders, as they later would be known, didn't even get to pick their moment of attack. A small fishing boat spotted their aircraft carrier a few miles from



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Japan. The U.S.S. Hornet's guns destroyed it, but Doolittle worried the boat had radioed their location back to the mainland. Rather than scrub the mission, he ordered an immediate launch.



Col. Charles Ross Greening (Photo: Special to the Register)

Cpl. Leland Dale Faktor was a month and a day shy of his 21st birthday when his aircraft took off from the Hornet. He was an engineer and gunner on the third plane in the Doolittle Raiders' air caravan of 13.

Born in Plymouth, he was an aviation enthusiast throughout most of his young life. He enlisted in the service at Fort Des Moines in August 1940. Earlier that month, Faktor completed mechanic's school at Chanute Field (now an Air Force base) in Illinois. The Tokyo Raid would be his first and last mission. He died falling down a cliff after bailing out of his B-25. He was the first casualty of the raid.

"He was very popular among his schoolmates at Chanute," said Bob Dieter, a retired Cedar Falls attorney and a cousin to William Dieter, another Doolittle Raider. Bob Dieter has done extensive research on the three Iowans involved in the mission. "They named a hall after Faktor at Chanute Air Force Base."

"We probably know the least about Leland Faktor," Dieter said. "He was so young. He never had any children. But when America needed him, he stepped forward."



The sixth B-25 to take off from the U.S.S. Hornet included Iowan William J. Dieter. He stayed in the gunner's bubble at the bottom of the plane as long as possible in hopes of spotting a safe landing space. He and another crewman died when the plane ditched. The three other crew members were captured, and two died in captivity. Only one member of the sixth crew survived the war, the highest casualty rate of the Doolittle Raiders. (Photo: Special to the Register)

Death in plane crash

Staff Sgt. William J. "Bill" Dieter was aboard the sixth B-25. Dieter grew up in Vail and worked for his uncles on their farms. He liked to drive fast cars on Iowa's dirt roads and eventually made his way to join the Army at Vancouver Barracks, Wash.

Dieter was a bombardier on the sixth crew, which had the roughest go of any of the 13 planes. Their bombs smashed a steel mill north of Tokyo before making its run

toward China.

As bombardier, Dieter was in the belly of the plane, with a clear view of the water. He tried to warn the pilots of any obstructions, but stormy weather nagged his visibility.

"They were getting to a point where they were going to have to bail out, and the other crew told Bill to come on out of there, but he stayed until the last minute in case they were headed into rocks or something," his cousin, Bob Dieter, said.

Dieter stayed too long. The plane crashed in the water, and he and another crewman drowned. Dieter was 29. The three other crewmen were eventually captured by the Japanese; two of them died as prisoners of war. Only the navigator survived the war. It was the highest casualty rate of any of the Doolittle Raiders' planes.



Col. Charles Ross Greening of Vail, second from the left, piloted the 11th B-25 in the Doolittle Raid. Greening was one of three Iowans involved in the air raid on Tokyo and the only one to survive the war. (Photo: Special to the Register)

Survivor is captured

Col. Charles Ross Greening piloted the 11th B-25. Born in Carroll, Greening studied fine art at Washington State College. Greening flew his bomber over a Japanese air base.

Four fighters attacked the bomber. Greening and crew managed to blast a large oil refinery and storage area and shoot down one of the fighters. The No. 11 bomber also fired at three Japanese patrol boats before heading toward China. The crew bailed out, and the aircraft crashed into the mountains. All five survived with injuries and fought in other battles throughout the war.

Greening flew successful missions in North Africa. He was shot down and captured. While being taken to a prison camp, several Americans including Greening took advantage of the slow-moving German transport train to break through floorboards and side walls in an effort to escape.

Greening evaded recapture for three months before being sent to Stalag Luft I at Bath, Germany. There he spent his free time painting. He crushed can labels and mixed the pigments to make watercolor paintings. And he maintained his sense of humor.

Greening took to saying "goon up" whenever their German guards were near. A

German officer who spoke English reprimanded him. Greening told the officer, "Sir, don't you understand Goon Up stands for 'German Officers or Noncom Upon the Premises.'"

"He got it so the Germans were calling themselves goons," said Greg Schildberg, president of the Iowa Aviation Museum. "It was a real 'Hogan's Heroes' kind of thing."

Greening was released at the end of the war and was a military attache in Australia and New Zealand. While vacationing with his wife, he was bitten by a strange bug that caused an infection. He died at Walter Reed Hospital in March 1957. He was 42.



Iowan Leland Faktor, far right, was the first casualty of the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo in April 1942. He was the gunner aboard the third B-25 to take off from the U.S.S. Hornet. Just 20 when he died, he was popular among his fellow airmen. A hall at Chanute Air Force Base in Illinois is named after him. (Photo: Special to the Register)

Tribute to sacrifice

The Doolittle Raid did little substantive damage to Tokyo, especially in comparison to future bombings of the Axis power. But it proved a huge morale booster for Americans. Pearl Harbor had hit the U.S. hard. Finally, the U.S. hit back.

The Doolittle Raiders showed that Japan's homeland was vulnerable, and prompted Japanese commanders to shift some of their Pacific fleet closer to the mainland. This gave Allied forces a major tactical advantage during the battle of Midway two months later, which proved a major turning point in the Pacific theater.

But there is another lesson of the Doolittle Raid that's easily forgotten in any discussion of history: The results were not a foregone conclusion. History is too often taught as a series of names and dates to be memorized. One thing happened, then another and so on. With the absence of narrative, we forget that these were real people — fellow Iowans in the case of Dieter, Faktor and Greening — facing an uncertain future.

These 80 Doolittle Raiders had no idea how this was going to turn out. Faktor and Dieter never got to see how it ended. They knew there was a high likelihood they would die. But they climbed aboard planes when the outcome of the worst war man has ever seen was very much in doubt, and pointed themselves straight at danger.

That's the intrepidity and sacrifice being honored Saturday in Greenfield.

About Saturday's ceremonies

The Iowa Aviation Museum on Saturday will induct the three Iowans who were among 80 pilots and crew members that participated in the Doolittle Raid on Tokyo on April 18, 1942, during World War II.

Those honored are Col. Charles Ross Greening, Cpl. Leland D. Faktor and Staff Sgt. William J. Dieter.

WHAT: Reception and banquet.

WHERE: Iowa Aviation Museum and the Warren Cultural Center, Greenfield.

WHEN: A reception begins at the Cultural Center at 5:30 p.m., followed by dinner and a final toast to the airmen.

COST: \$35, dress is business formal.

MORE INFO: 641-343-7184 or email aviation@iowatelecom.net.

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