

Exhibit features the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Columbia Army Air Base and the Doolittle Raiders

Departing or arriving at Columbia Metropolitan Airport soon? Take a look at an exhibit, flanking the USO Room, which honors one of military history's most storied missions – whose origins were right where you'd be standing. It is worth a visit to the concourse at Columbia Metro Airport just to experience the history that is interpreted in the exhibit.

The exhibit commemorates the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Doolittle Raid which took place within the calendar year Columbia Army Air Base opened.

Organized and mounted by a splinter group that felt it had been too long since a Doolittle exhibit was last on view at the airport, the exhibit boasts: Victory Started Here.

The first panel lays the groundwork: Present day Columbia Metropolitan Airport was developed from legacy local farmland as Lexington County Airport just before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, rushed the nearly-complete commercial facility into use as a military base. Early in 1942 the facility was renamed Columbia Army Air Base(CAAB) and became a large and significant B-25 medium-range bomber training center.

Artwork anchoring that initial panel is the former base's iconic guard gate. Set on the shelf nearby is a copy of *Cornfield to Airfield: A History of Columbia Army Air Base*. Released by Rachel Haynie in December 2011 to commemorate the twin anniversaries, the concise book includes military, local history and eye-witness accounts along with a list of 255 individuals, from across the USA and from all walks of life, who lost their lives in aircraft-related accidents during the years of Columbia Army Air Base operations. [info.historyCAAB@gmail.com](mailto:info.historyCAAB@gmail.com)

Next, the crest of the 17<sup>th</sup> Bombardment Group represents the experienced crews that reported here from Pendleton AFB in February 1942 to promptly meet Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle, and volunteer for an important mission, kept secret – even from them. Within weeks, stepped up security required all mission personnel to depart CAAB for secluded Eglin AFB, Florida, for specialized training.

The navigation map used for the mission, but before take-off, signed by members of all Doolittle Raiders crews, centers the next panel. The document, on loan from Bob Bartlett, member of the South Carolina Military History Club, was given by Cindy Cole Chal, daughter of Lt. Richard Cole, Doolittle's co-pilot on the audacious assignment.

Supporting artifacts for this panel are a sextant, courtesy of Ed "Jib" Colie, and a navigational slide rule as well as a replica of a Mark Twain bombsight, a much less expensive alternative to the costly, top-secret and heavy Norden bombsight, deemed ineffective for the Doolittle Raid's low-level bombing orders. The bombsight is on loan from Martin Crouch, son of Columbia Raider, the late Horace "Sally" Crouch.

An original painting of the USS Hornet cruising beneath a B-25 by Tim Robinson [seattleartist.org](http://seattleartist.org) dominates the next panel. The text reads: April 18, 1942: Led off by Doolittle himself, 16 B-25s crewed by 80 took off for the only operation in which US Army Air Force bombers launched into combat from a Navy aircraft carrier – the USS. Their objectives: Japanese military and industrial sites.

“At anchor” on the painting’s shelf is a 1/700<sup>th</sup> scale model of the Hornet, also on loan from Barlett. The USS Hornet became the first and only Naval aircraft carrier from which Air Force planes were launched into military action.

All 80 airmen who flew the Tokyo Raid began that historic episode here. Three are claimed as South Carolina native sons.

Lt. William G. “Billy” Farrow, pilot, Crew # 16, was selected for pilot training while attending the University of South Carolina. He received his commission and Army Aviation wings in 1941 and served with the 17<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group in Pendleton, Oregon before being reassigned to Columbia Army Air Base. The Darlington, South Carolina native was captured and ultimately executed October 15, 1942 by the Japanese after “Bat Out of Hell”, the plane he piloted, bombed an oil storage tank and damaged the Mitsubishi Aircraft Factory in Nagoya, Japan. Allowed by the Japanese to write a final letter home, he encouraged his family...” don’t let this get you down. Just remember that God will make everything right and that I will see you again in the hereafter.”

Horace E. “Sally” Crouch, navigator bombardier, Crew # 10, survived heavy anti-aircraft fire and, in spite of a hole blown in the fuselage, successfully bombed his target, a Tokyo steel mill before he and other crew members bailed out north of Chuchow, China. After rejoining his unit, Crouch flew missions with the American Volunteer Group (AVG) in China as a member of the 11<sup>th</sup> Bomb Squadron, remained in service, retiring from the Air Force in 1962. After retirement, the 1940 Citadel civil engineering graduate returned home and taught mechanical drawing at Columbia High School. Col. Crouch died December 21, 2005.

Adding drama and color to this panel is a painting of Horace Crouch’s plane by, and courtesy of Hartsville artist Scott Huffer.

Lt. Nolan A. Herndon, navigator bombardier, Crew # 8, was detained in Russia for thirteen months after his plane was ordered to divert and land there. After his release, the Texas native held several more assignments before the war ended. He married a cousin of fellow Raider “Sally” Crouch and settled in South Carolina where he was embraced as a native son and hero for the remainder of his life. He died October 7, 2007.

The next panel depicts what remains on the local scene to represent that era. One rare Mitchell bomber, forced by engine failure to ditch April 4, 1943, was rescued in 2005 and is exhibited at Southern Museum of Flight, Birmingham, Alabama. Another aircraft featured is the only B-25 bomber remaining in South Carolina from Columbia Army Air Base’s expansive training fleet. It was rescued from the floor of Lake Greenwood in 1983

and now is in the stewardship of the South Carolina Historic Aviation Foundation, [shistoricaviation.org](http://shistoricaviation.org). A picture of that aircraft, poised on the grounds of the South Carolina State Museum for the 2002 Doolittle Reunion, centers that panel.

The surviving Raiders chose to return to Columbia, SC for three significant annual reunions: their 50<sup>th</sup>, 60<sup>th</sup> and again in 2009. While back in town, they were showered with appreciation, honored by fly-overs, events - including tea dances, escorted along parade routes in vintage vehicles, recognized at tribute ballgames, and immortalized by a new historical marker, unveiled during their stay. Their group picture, taken at the 2002 reunion, is flanked by a copy of Ted Lawson's book – courtesy of Richland County Public Library's Local History Room. Lawson wrote the seminal book, *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, as he recovered from mission-related injuries; it became the script for a feature film of the same name, starring Spencer Tracy and Van Johnson.

Touchstones for this segment are a baseball from a tribute baseball game played in Columbia and an airman's cap. These and several other display artifacts are courtesy of the Bruce Cotner Collection.

Across the full six-foot width of the exhibit case are pictures of all sixteen crews that flew the Doolittle Raid, their names and ranks at that time.

Desirous of telling all the stories associated with the legendary mission, the exhibit's organizers overshot their target and some items had to be omitted.

According to Ron Shelton, education vice president, South Carolina Historic Aviation Foundation (SCHAF) and science curator emeritus, South Carolina State Museum, said one omission was the one item known to be tied to Columbia Army Air Base. "It's a souvenir called a Sweetheart Pillow, and it was given to SCHAF by Gen. Woody Randall. I so regretted that space did not work out to include it; it's a neat item and came from CAAB."

Barlett offered, in addition to other items, a picture and story about Stephen Jurika, who played a significant, but little-known role in the mission. Because he had been in Tokyo in 1939-1940, Lt. JG Stephen Jurika, Jr., Information Officer on the USS Hornet, briefed the Raiders on their target assignments. To the Japanese Friendship Medals Doolittle attached to bombs headed to Tokyo, Jurika added one he had been awarded a few years earlier. Several Raiders told Barlett, during one of the reunions, that they remembered Jurika and how he helped.

Incidentally, another 70<sup>th</sup> reunion will occur in November 2012 when the 345<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group, founded at CAAB, meets in Columbia.

The exhibit will remain on view until April 19, 2013, around the time of winter when the volunteers left CAAB for Eglin AFB, Florida, where they continued training in secrecy for an event that tilted WWII's morale in favor of the Allies.