



# Bullet'n Backstory

Joint Munitions Command

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## Doolittle's Raid: The World War II Legacy of JMC

On December 21, 1941, in response to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt directed the Joint Chiefs of Staff to develop a plan to attack the Japanese mainland as quickly as possible. The dual intention of this proposed mission was to simultaneously improve American morale and cause the Japanese people to doubt their leadership. In response, Navy captain Francis S. Low, Assistant Chief of Staff for anti-submarine warfare suggested to Admiral Ernest E. King that a bombing mission could be accomplished by launching twin-engine bombers from aircraft carriers. King supported the idea and assigned military test pilot Lt. Col. James Doolittle to plan the attack. Doolittle chose the B-25 Mitchell for the raid, modifying the bombers to carry twice their normal fuel capacity. After failed negotiations with Russia, Doolittle arranged for the bomber to land in China following the raid.



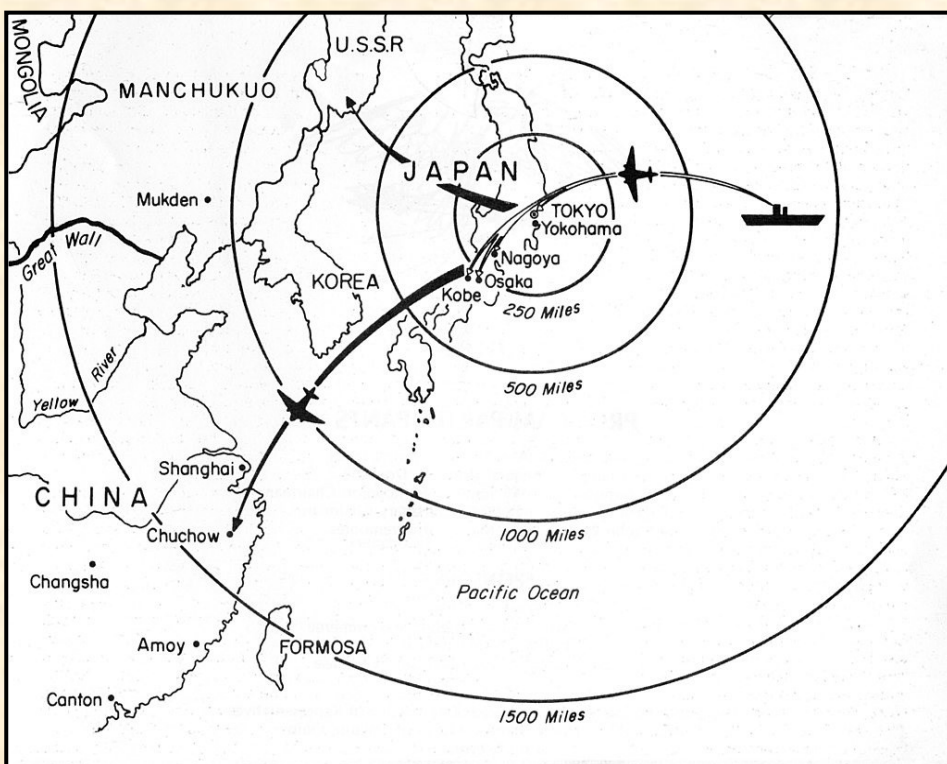
Crew #1: Lt. Henry A. Potter, navigator; Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle, pilot; SSgt. Fred A. Braemer, bombardier; Lt. Richard E. Cole, co-pilot; SSgt. Paul J. Leonard, gunner.

Initial planning called for a squad of 20 bombers. Twenty-four Mitchell bombers were sent to a modification planning in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to remove enough weight to accommodate the additional fuel requirements. Following the modifications, the bombers were sent to Eglin Field, Florida, where 24 crews participated in three weeks of intensive training. On March 25, 1942, the most operational 22 bombers flew from Florida to California. On April 1, 1942, 16 modified bombers were loaded onto USS *Hornet* at Naval Air Station Alameda. Each bomber carried four 500-pound bombs consisting of high-explosive munitions and incendiaries. The task of preparing these bombs had fallen to Savanna Army Depot near Savanna, Illinois. The installation had originated in World War I as Savanna Proving Ground, its location chosen in part due to its close proximity to Rock Island Arsenal, a significant arms manufacturing center. With the start of World War II, Savanna was chosen as the site of the nation's sole "Group I" light-weight self-loading plant. As a result, Savanna loaded the bombs which would be used in the Doolittle Raid.

The task force left San Francisco Bay on April 2 and consisted of two carriers, three heavy cruisers, one light cruiser, eight destroyers, and two oilers. On April 17, the oilers refueled the fleet then withdrew under the protection of the destroyers. On April 18, the task force was spotted by a Japanese picket boat, which radioed the mainland about a potential attack before being sunk by the American fleet. Though 10 hours early, Doolittle ordered an immediate attack to reduce the chance of facing increased defenses on the Japanese mainland. All 16 bombers successfully launched from the carriers and hugged the surface of the ocean to

avoid detection. The planes reached Japan six hours later and bombed 10 military and industrial targets in Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya, Kobe, and Osaka, without any being shot down. Fifteen headed for China while one plane, short on fuel, headed for the Soviet Union. The 15 planes crash landed in China, with two crews missing. The 16th landed safely and was interned by the Soviets. In all, three crew members were killed in action, eight were captured (three executed, one died), and 69 escaped safely.

Following the war, Savanna Army Depot revealed its role in the Doolittle Raid and the conflict. The base closed in 2000 under a predecessor command, but a plaque at the site commemorates Savanna's pride and service:





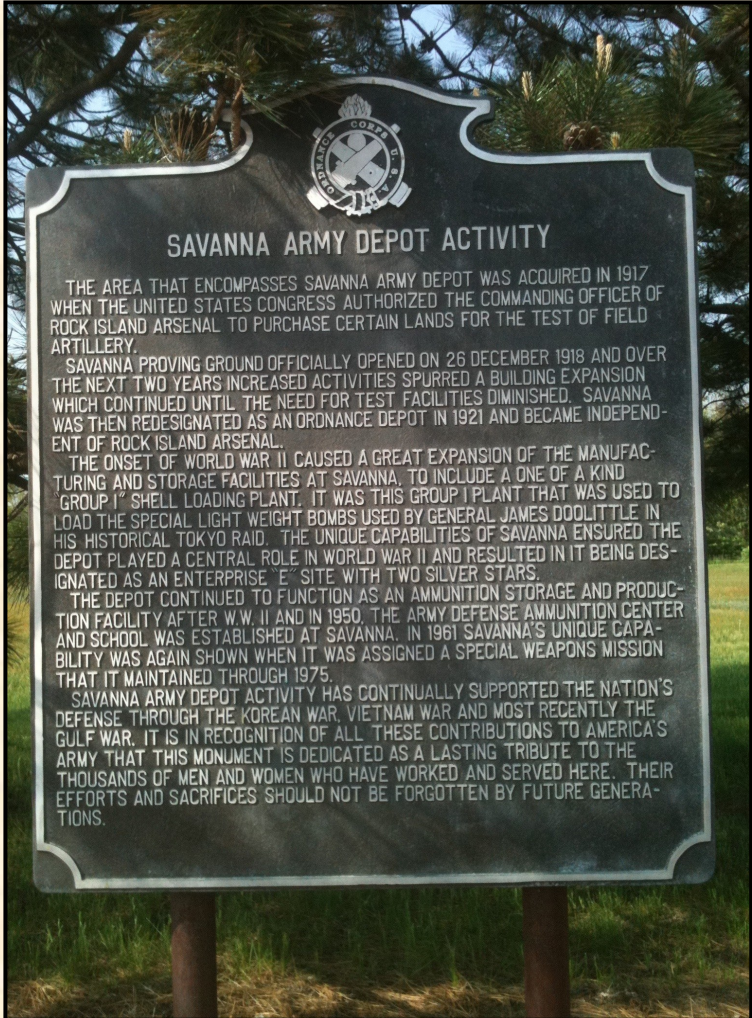
“The area that encompasses Savanna Army Depot was acquired in 1917 when the United States Congress authorized the commanding officer of Rock Island Arsenal to purchase certain lands for the test of field artillery.

“Savanna Proving Ground officially opened on 26 December 1918 and over the next two years increased activities spurred a building expansion which continued until the need for test facilities diminished. Savanna was then redesignated as an ordnance depot in 1921 and became independent of Rock Island Arsenal.

“The onset of World War II caused a great expansion of the manufacturing and storage facilities at Savanna, to include a one of a kind ‘Group I’ shell loading plant. It was this Group I plant that was used to load the special light weight bombs used by General James Doolittle in his historical Tokyo raid. The unique capabilities of Savanna ensured the depot played a central role in World War II and resulted in it being designated as an Enterprise ‘E’ site with two silver stars.

“The depot continued to function as an ammunition storage and production facility after W.W. II and in 1950, the Army Center and School was established at Savanna. In 1961 Savanna’s unique capability was again shown when it was assigned a special weapons mission that it maintained through 1975.

“Savanna Army Depot Activity has continually supported the nation’s defense through the Korean War, Vietnam War and most recently the Gulf War. It is in recognition of all these contributions to America’s Army that this monument is dedicated as a lasting tribute to the thousands of men and women who have worked and served here. Their efforts and sacrifices should not be forgotten by future generations.” ~ ~  
*Dr. Paul-Thomas Ferguson*



JMC Historical Document Collection

The JMC Public and Congressional Affairs Office (PCA) maintains the JMC Archives, which collects and maintains historically significant records, including: emails, manuscripts, letters, reports, studies, images, videos, films, photographs, oral history interviews, briefings, SOPs, policies, decision papers, memoranda, statistics, newspapers, newsletters, brochures, maps, blue prints, drawings, artifacts, and more. Such records are pertinent to the Army’s institutional knowledge of active and predecessor installations, the ammunition industrial base, and JMC missions. JMC regularly uses these materials to research command history, and to answer research queries. When JMC workers leave positions or make physical moves, it is vital that their records be assessed before disposal. If employees are uncertain about the historical value of materials, the best policy is to make the items available to Command Historian Keri Pleasant (keri.j.pleasant.civ@army.mil) or Archivist Paul Ferguson

This Month in Military History

**July 3, 1863:** The Battle of Gettysburg, the largest battle ever fought on the American continent, ends with a major Union victory, resulting in 50,000 casualties and ending the threat of Confederate invasions.

**July 5, 1295:** Scotland and France form what will become the Auld Alliance, a joint defensive pact against England. It stipulated that if either country was attacked by England, the other would declare war. The alliance continued through 1560.

**July 9, 1401:** Turko-Mongol leader Tamerlane invades and destroys Baghdad. As a result of his order that every soldier should return from battle with at least two severed human heads, 20,000 civilians are put to death.

**July 13, 1870:** Otto von Bismarck publishes an altered version of the Ems Telegram, intentionally stirring up hostility in both France and Germany, in order to instigate the Franco-Prussian War.

**July 16, 1099:** After capturing the city of Jerusalem from the Muslim Fatamid Caliphate in the final major battle of the First Crusade, out-of-control Christian crusaders herd the city’s civilian Jewish population into a synagogue and then set it on fire. They later convert all Jewish and Muslim holy sites to Christian use.

**July 19, 1553:** After serving as pretender to the throne of England and Ireland for nine days, sixteen-year-old Lady Jane Grey, first cousin of Edward VI and Mary I, is deposed. She and her husband were executed by Mary I in February 1554.

**July 23, 1777:** King Louis XVI of France agrees to secretly supply the American colonists with munitions in their fight against Britain. French support will later prove to be the turning point, securing American independence.

**July 27, 1214:** King Phillip II of France (Augustus) defeats King John of England and Holy Roman Emperor Otto IV at the Battle of Bouvines. As a result, King John loses Normandy and all of his hereditary possessions in France, forever earning for himself the nickname “John Lackland.”

**July 30, 1914:** Tsar Nicholas of Russia submits to political pressure and orders the mobilization of Russian forces in response to the mobilization of Austro-Hungarian forces against Russian ally Serbia. This triggers Germany to launch attacks on Russian allies, launching World War I.