

THE LAST RAIDER

**TO CELEBRATE THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE DOOLITTLE RAID, AERO TRADER
TAKES DICK COLE ON A FLIGHT IN B-25J
PACIFIC PRINCESS**

BY MICHAEL O'LEARY

An honor," said Aero Trader's Tony Ritzman. "That would be the simplest way to describe what I felt taking Dick Cole for a flight in our Mitchell *Pacific Princess*." Cole, at 101-years-old, is now the Last Raider — the final survivor of that group of 80 men that took the war to Japan on 18 April 1942. What is even a bit more remarkable is that Cole was Jimmy Doolittle's copilot and was in the

first Mitchell to travel down the deck of the USS *Hornet* lurching through storm-tossed seas to roar aloft and head for the Home Islands on a mission of vengeance.

The date was 17 May 2017, and Dick Cole was visiting Aero Trader prior to attending a book/photo signing event across the ramp at Planes of Fame Air Museum (the museum staff did a great job hosting the event and making everyone feel at home). At 101, Dick still moves around pretty good and his mind is still as sharp as the day he went airborne on what many said was America's first installment on the payback for the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor.

As a teenager, Cole, like rest of America, was battling

through the massive effects of the Great Depression. He had gone up for a ride in a Ford Tri-Motor and liked it. "Cost a dollar," he remarked at Chino. When he finished high school he knew the job situation would be bleak. That is when he saw an enlistment poster for the Army Air Corps. "I knew at that point that I liked airplanes and I knew the Air Corps would be steady employment," recalled Cole. "I was going to be a forest ranger or a pilot, so in November 1940 I went to the recruiting office and signed up with the Air Corps."

His first assignment was with the 17th Bombardment Group based at Pendleton, Oregon, and the 17th was scheduled to get the new B-25 Mitchell twin-engine bomber (replacing the unit's totally inadequate Douglas B-18 Bolo and B-23 Dragon bombers) that was starting to emerge in substantial numbers from the North American production line at Inglewood, California.

Then came Pearl Harbor. "At the time we were on detached duty in Augusta, Georgia, participating in the the massive war games that the government had started. One of the guys heard the news on the radio and it quickly spread. Needless to say, rumors abounded but we were soon loading

our gear on the Mitchells and flying back to our home base at Pendleton. Once there, our aircraft received some modifications and we were assigned anti-sub duties. Much of America thought we were under the threat of invasion by the Japanese. We established a grid system and patrolled off the Northwest coast."

However, that mission would not last long. In Washington, plans were being made to strike back at the Japanese — a strike that would do much to reduce the panic of the average American citizen and restore confidence that the enemy could be beaten. "We received orders to transfer to Columbia, South Carolina," recalled Dick.

"When we got there, the conditions were not good. The field was still under con-

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Ready for the mission! Left to right: Bradley Grose (who has been instrumental in many of the Doolittle Reunions and carrier flights), Dick Cole, Tony Ritzman, and Carl Scholl with *Pacific Princess* serving as background.



"We had hoped to catch the Japs by surprise," said Cole. "Running into the picket ship changed all that. We knew they had fighters — lots of them — so we kept our eyes open." Dick is sitting directly behind Tony Ritzman, keeping an eye out for the enemy.