

PIKES PEAK PILOT CENTER

NEWSLETTER

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Jimmy Doolittle

The daring young man in the flying machine



Doolittle was undoubtedly a knowledgeable and talented pilot. He understood how airplanes worked and knew the abilities of many aircraft. He practically redesigned an airplane for racing and aerobatics. He planned trips and maneuvers carefully, but he also had the daring of a test pilot. Many flight-hours were spent practicing or trying new stunts: spins, barrels, spirals, loops, wing walking, flying under bridges, you name it. Jim had many crashes and "washed out" more than few planes. There were several close calls, but circumstances saved him from a fatal accident.

Jimmy Doolittle was born Dec 14, 1896 in San Francisco, an only child. Six months later his father followed the gold rush to the Klondike. After three years, Jim, his mother, and her sister joined him in Nome, Alaska. Jim lived there until age 11, when he and his mother moved to LA in 1907. He lived the rest of his youth with just his mother, and saw his father little.

"It was just after I turned 13 that aviation came into my life," he wrote. In 1910, Jimmy went to the first aviation meet held in the western U.S.. Glenn Curtiss set a world record for flying 55 mph with a passenger, and Louis Paulhan climbed to a new altitude of 4,165 feet at that air show. In another 8 years Jim would take his first flight.

At 15, Jimmy put his street fighting abilities to boxing matches. He won most fights, becoming the West Coast amateur flyweight champion, and later held his own with the World Champion bantamweight. It became a steady means for extra income. Exceptional for someone my size - 5 feet 4 inches and 105 lbs. Though he never grew above this height, he went on to fight in the middleweight category. He usually surprised his opponent. In 1917, Jim knocked out one man in 83 seconds, and another in 5 seconds!

He studied mining engineering at UC School of Mines, and worked summers in Nevada mines. While at school, he honed his acrobatic skills, which would come in handy later. Doolittle achieved a doctorate in aeronautical sciences from MIT in 1925.

Jim married his high school sweetheart, Josephine (better known as Joe), in Dec 1917. He had enlisted that Fall and studied ground school. His first flight was at Rockwell Field, San Diego in early 1918. Doolittle's experiences at the base and his unfulfilled wish to fight overseas were much the same as Byrd's (see Aug & Sep issues). They both fell in love with flying with the first lesson, and were of the few who survived the dangerous life on a training base.

He soloed after 7 hours. From there on he took to practicing aerial tricks, often getting grounded by his commander. After learning one of his men sat on the wheel axle while the plane was landing, the commanding Colonel gave orders to have Jim grounded for a month. "It has to be Doolittle," he said, "No one else would be that crazy!"

September 4, 1922 Doolittle took off from Pablo Beach, FL on the first coast to coast flight under 24 hours. He made one stop in San Antonio, before ending in San Diego. The 2,163-mile trip took 22 hrs 30 mins. Exactly 9 years later, he was the first to fly the continent in under 12 hours (11 hrs 11 mins).

Soon afterward, he was transferred to Dayton, Ohio. The Air Service Engineering School at McCook Field taught a one-year course on mechanics and aeronautics. It was a main research facility for flight experiments also. Jim and his classmates often performed in air shows. And recreation was playing follow-the-leader with a friend - flying under a bridge, skimming water, doing low-level maneuvers,

etc. "Stunting was our avocation; testing was our vocation," he said.

He won the Schneider race for seaplanes in 1925, making a 232.573 mph speed record. His "secret" was setting the propeller pitch to have more rpms at full throttle. He flew in many races, retiring in 1932 after his Thompson Trophy race win. The plane, a Gee Bee R1, was the most dangerous he said he had ever flown - it was inclined to snap-roll unexpectedly. "It was fast, but flying it was like balancing a pencil or an ice cream cone on the tip of your finger. You couldn't let your hand off the stick for an instant..." He clocked in at 309.04 mph.



Gee Bee R1 Supersportster: fastest land plane 1932

In 1926, Jim flew a 5-month tour of South America to demonstrate the Curtiss airplanes for various countries. May 25, 1927, Jim performed the first outside loop, (the top of the plane remains on the outside) which was thought impossible.

He headed the blind flying department of a fund for aviation safety development. The Full Flight Laboratory began at Mitchel Field, NY in 1928 when instrument flying was preliminary. Jimmy came up with the idea for the artificial horizon and directional gyroscope. Elmer Sperry and his son, engineers who developed many innovative instruments for aircraft, created these first essential IFR tools. By the end of the research in 1929, the laboratory had created or acquired, tested and arranged 9 more instruments: magnetic compass, airspeed indicator, altimeter, rate-of-climb indicator, outside air thermometer, vibrating reed homing range indicator, and vibrating reed marker beacon indicator (early VOR).

Up until one saved a test pilot in 1922, parachutes were considered "sissy" and worn by few. It then became a standard part of pilot equipment. While practicing aerobatics before an air show in September 1929, Jim's airplane wings popped at the joints. He bailed and opened his parachute at 1,000 feet. He became a member of the Caterpillar Club (created by the Irvin Parachute Company) in honor of the thousands of silk worms that helped save his life. He was obligated twice more to reinstate his membership.

1930 marked the end of his active duty career. He became a Major in the reserves and headed the aviation department at Shell Petroleum St. Louis branch. There, Jim helped develop high-octane fuel. He also made cross-country flights to promote aviation and Shell products - city to city time records, route to the capitals of Mexico, Canada, and the U.S., special mail deliveries and more. Joe and he made a trip around the world for Curtiss (demonstrating the new P-6 Hawk) and Shell in 1933.



on the USS Hornet, April 1942
before the Tokyo Raid

Since a child, Jimmy said he knew there were two things he wanted to do in life - "build things and see the world." As an aeronautical engineer and researcher he helped build safer and more versatile aircraft; he certainly saw the world during tours and missions; and with 71 years of marriage with his beloved Joe (to whom he dedicates his book), he surely achieved his childhood ideals. His eloquent closing words remove all doubt: "whenever I'm asked, I say that I would never want to relive my life. I could never be so lucky again." He died September 27, 1993.

N. Kunz

Quotes taken from the book:

I Could Never Be So Lucky Again by Gen. James H. Doolittle



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HAPPY NEW YEAR!



ET CETERA

The first to submit the correct answers wins a prize! Winner and solution will be in next issue.

Do You Remember?

Circle the correct answer.

What was the name of the Fokker plane Byrd and Bennett flew to the North Pole?

- A. America B. Josephine Ford C. Spruce Goose

Who was the first to fly a heavier-than-air aircraft in Europe?

- A. Hans von Ohain B. Alberto Santos-Dumont
C. the Wright brothers D. Gen. De Gaulle

What is the airport code for the Buenos Aires main airport?

- A. BUE B. AKL C. EZE D. GIG

What was the real name of WWI German flying ace, The Red Baron?

- A. Richard Baron B. Manfred von Richthofen
C. Oswald Boelcke

When was the first flight around the world?

- A. 1921 B. 1924 C. 1932 D. 1940

Jason Jepson was the winner for December's game. Congratulations!

Word Scramble

1. aileron
2. magneto
3. cowling
4. elevator
5. rudder
6. throttle
7. petot tube misspelled in scramble; *pitot tube* is correct
8. trim
9. propeller
10. gyroscope



Solos & Certificates

Solo

Mary Thurner - Dec 6
Chris Schutt - Dec 21

Instrument

Dean Freeman - Dec 10

CFI

Greg Carlin - Dec 7

Multi Engine/Commercial

Kevin Browning - Dec 8