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# Dick Cole, co-pilot of Jimmy Doolittle in famed Tokyo raid, buried at San Antonio's Fort Sam

*Sig Christenson*

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The five B-25B Mitchell bombers flew slowly over Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, soon followed by a pair of C-47 Dakota cargo planes, then a four-ship F-15E missing-man formation.

The crowd in the cemetery's assembly area craned their necks as one of the supersonic F-15s, engines roaring, broke from the formation and streaked high into the blue to salute Col. Dick Cole, the last of the legendary Doolittle Raiders.

The elaborate sendoff included a caisson ride for the cremated remains of Cole, who was Jimmy Doolittle's co-pilot in the daring bombing mission over Japan that boosted American morale after five months of spectacular defeats across the Pacific.

The bombs did minimal damage on the ground but shredded the air of invincibility Japan had maintained until then, both for its own

people and the outside world. Tokyo's red-faced commanders moved up their timetable for attacking Midway Atoll, and after losing that battle were on the defensive for the rest of the war.

After two years of delays at Arlington National Cemetery, the family of Col. Dick Cole decided on Fort Sam Houston. The sendoff Tuesday included flyovers of the World War II aircraft he flew and a "missing man" formation of F-15Es, a tribute that seemed not just for Cole but all 80 of the fabled Doolittle raiders. Video: Billy Calzada, Express-News

Cole, who lived outside Comfort, once said of his longevity, "For me, I think the secret is you've got to keep moving like the sheriff is after you." He outran the sheriff until April 9, 2019, dying at 103 at Brooke Army Medical Center.

His family wanted him buried in Arlington National Cemetery. Cole's daughter, Cindy Chal, said the Pentagon was heavily involved in planning a service for that August, but senior Air Force officials couldn't attend.

The family then decided on April 18, 2020, the 78th anniversary of the raid, but the arrival of the coronavirus pandemic upended that plan.

"It wasn't anybody's fault," said Chal, 76, of Comfort. "It was just a matter of timing and world events."

Tuesday would have been Cole's 106th birthday. He joined five other Doolittle Raiders who rest at Fort Sam — Col. Edward "Ski" York, Col. Joseph Manske, Col. James "Herb" Macia Jr., Col. Travis Hoover and Brig. Gen. Richard "Dick" Knobloch.

Cole himself saw nothing special in the raid's achievement. He always believed the war's real heroes flew bombers over Germany, landed on Normandy beaches or fought island to island in the Pacific. Late in life, as the tributes accumulated, he was known for his sense of humor, easy personality and humble heart.



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*Lt. Col. (Ret) Dr. Rich Cole and his sister, Cindy Cole Chal salute the cremains of their father, Col. Dick Cole, at a burial ceremony Tuesday at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery. Cole was the last surviving member of the Doolittle Raiders and died on April 9, 2019 at the age of 103.*

Jerry Lara /San Antonio Express-News





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*The cremains of Col. Dick Cole, the last of the Doolittle Raiders, are carried at the start of the burial ceremony Tuesday at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery.*

Jerry Lara /San Antonio Express-News







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*A missing man formation of F-15 fighters fly over the urn holding the ashes of Col. Richard Cole, who was co-pilot to Jimmy Doolittle on the daring World War II raid on Japan in 1942. Cole died at age 103 and he and his wife were laid to rest at Ft. Sam Houston National Cemetery on Tuesday. Sept. 7, 2021.*

Billy Calzada

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“One of my favorite stories, among many, was the nurses telling me he had demanded to get out of bed and stand up that morning. The nurses assisted him to his feet and he just stood there until

one of them asked, ‘Sir ... why did you want to stand up?’” retired Gen. David Goldfein, who had been the Air Force chief of staff, said of a hospital visit he and his wife, Dawn, made the day before Cole died.

“His reply: ‘Because I don’t want to die lying down.’”

The Air Force decided to posthumously promote Cole, a retired lieutenant colonel, to full colonel and did so at a memorial service at Fort Sam Houston’s golf club before the burial. During the ceremony, Chal received the eagle insignia worn by Cole’s friend and fellow Tokyo raider, Col. Bill Bower.

“This is something that I think has been a tradition in the services over the years, that a senior officer will donate his rank to the man coming up below him and pin him,” said Bower’s son, Jim Bower, who handed his dad’s eagles to Chal. “It starts when you’re a cadet and you get pinned with your second lieutenant bar.”

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, the Air Force chief of staff, told the crowd he had met Cole’s daughter earlier and “she mentioned that when her father enlisted in the Army Air Corps the staff sergeant told him, ‘Never volunteer for anything.’”

“And she did say he volunteered for just about everything he did, and I would say we’re glad he did, because of the rich heritage that your father brought to our Air Force as part of the Doolittle Raiders.”

The promotion and burial closed out an epic adventure that began 79 years earlier, in the days after Pearl Harbor, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt repeatedly asked about attacking the Japanese main islands. Everyone agreed a strike should come quickly. The question was how.



*A caisson carries the cremains of Col. Dick Cole, the last of the Doolittle Raiders, during a burial ceremony Tuesday at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery.*

Jerry Lara /San Antonio Express-News

The idea of launching medium bombers from an aircraft carrier originated with the Navy, but Army Lt. Col. Jimmy Doolittle, a celebrity pilot who held advanced degrees in aeronautical engineering, was tapped to lead it.

The B-25B Mitchell bombers were to fly off the USS Hornet to strike Tokyo and four other cities, but surprise was feared lost when an enemy trawler was spotted more than 200 miles from the expected launch point. Doolittle ordered an immediate takeoff, at the extreme end of the bombers' range.

Lt. Richard Eugene Cole, then 26, sat beside Doolittle, whose time as an Army aviator included a stint at San Antonio's Kelly Field as a flight leader and gunnery instructor. It was Cole's first combat



mission and Doolittle had been his childhood hero.

They were the lead bomber among 16 as the carrier turned into the wind over choppy seas, the swells topping 30 feet and lapping over the flight deck.

Most of the raiders would end up bailing out over China or its coastline. Of the 80 volunteers, 17 of them wouldn't live to see the first anniversary of the raid. Some later perished in the China-Burma-India theater, North Africa or Europe. Another 13 were taken prisoner in various theaters of war but survived.

At heart, the raiders were inspired by their charismatic commander.

"I had my own confidence, but we all had Jimmy Doolittle," Cole once said. "His confidence flowed into us and we would have followed him anywhere."

Retired in California, Doolittle died in 1993. All the raiders were awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 2015.

By the time a large crowd celebrated Cole's 103rd birthday at Singing Water Vineyards near Comfort in 2018, he was the sole survivor and had put some distance between himself and the guts-and-glory legend.





*Lt. Col. (Ret) Dr. Rich Cole arrives with an urn for his father's cremains, before the start of a burial service Tuesday at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery. Col. Dick Cole, the last of the Doolittle Raiders, died on April 9, 2019, at the age of 103. Patriot Guard Riders honor the legendary pilot.*

Jerry Lara /San Antonio Express-News

“I feel like the Tokyo Raid is pretty beat up,” Cole had said in an interview the year before. “I think there are more fertile stories to tell.”

Later in the war, he flew supplies from India to China over the Himalayas, then towed gliders into Burma at night, carrying commandos on secret missions.

It could be a Hollywood movie, though Cole would probably say at the end, “I was just doing my job,” said retired Air Force Maj. Gen. Charlie Baldwin, a one-time chief of chaplains for the service, in his eulogy.

“Those World War II combat missions start the story but they do not capture all the character and great legacy of this man, who was a faithful husband, a loving father and grandfather, a successful businessman and an icon for the Air Force as he traveled the nation to honor all those who fought to keep our nation safe and free,” Baldwin said.

Cole retired in 1966 with more than 5,000 hours in 30 different aircraft and 250-plus combat missions. He settled with his wife, Lucia Martha “Mart” Cole, and five kids in the small town of Alamo,

in the Rio Grande Valley to grow grapefruit, oranges and avocados on 20 acres.

In the 1980s, Cole moved to San Antonio, then Canyon Lake and finally a place near Comfort where he fielded fan mail, signed autographs and planned visits to air shows and other events.

“He was a thoughtful leader and an amazing person,” Lt. Gen. Brad Webb, who leads the Air Education and Training Command, said in a prepared statement. “I know that Colonel Cole valued his time as an air commando, as well as being a Doolittle Raider, and we are able to trace a direct lineage from his many accomplishments to our current special warfare airmen.”

Cole spent time hunting and fishing in Colorado with a few of former Tokyo raiders: Bower, Hank Potter, Dick Knoblach, Bobby Hite and sometimes Doolittle.

“And they were good friends,” said Jim Bower, now 71 and a Denver resident. “They were like the tight little group and (Doolittle) was their mentor, he was their boss — he was always the boss. But whenever he came up to visit them, he was just one of them.”

At reunions, the man who would become the last of the 80 crewmen was the life of the after-hours party. Jim Bower remembers Cole staying late, chatting up people around the room.

“He was just that kind of guy, and he made my dad a better person all the way around. He just did. Dad was a quintessential grumpy old man. He got along fine with everybody but he was pretty much within himself, and Dick just changed his mood so quickly,” Bower recalled.

As Tuesday's funeral closed with the flyovers, Jeff Thatcher, 66, of Little Rock, Ark, called it a "poignant moment."



*Lt. Col (Ret.) Dr. Rich Cole, center, salutes his father's cremains, as his sister, Cindy Chal, right, and her husband, Jim, left, join him Tuesday at Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery Col. Dick Cole, the last of the Doolittle Raiders. Cole died on April 9, 2019, and was buried on what would've been his 106th birthday.*

Jerry Lara /San Antonio Express-News

The son of Cpl. David Thatcher, one of three raiders to earn the Silver Star on the Tokyo mission, said Cole had come to his dad's funeral in Montana "and was so gracious," adding, "He did not anticipate being the last raider."

Thatcher said he once asked his dad if he had been afraid, given the raid's uncertainties.

"He said he was excited ... He just felt like they were so well prepared with the training that they had done, at least the part involving the raid worked out pretty well. It was just after the fact

when they ran out of gas they had to fend for themselves, and fortunately the Chinese were there to help out.”

For many years, Cole rarely talked about the battle that had changed his life.

Chal said she didn’t even know about it until reading a book in the fifth grade.

“Dad just had a real inner quietness about himself,” she said. “He didn’t need somebody telling him he’d done a good job, now you’re a hero or whatever you wanted to say. He’s one of these humans who put their best foot forward and was satisfied with what they did.”

*sigc@express-news.net*