

Okay, I know it should really say 'Over Tokyo', but did you know that the Bombardment Group that flew that impactful raid in 1942 also flew over Oregon as well?

In 1941, even before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States Army Air Corps' 17th Bombardment Group was one of four military units stationed at Pendleton Field in Eastern Oregon in April, with their B-25 Mitchell bombers arriving in November. In December of that year they began flying antisubmarine patrols in the new bomber. In February of 1942 their task changed to providing heavy bombardment training, and they went on maneuvers with Army ground forces in the South, but returned to Pendleton immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Wanting to strike back on Japan following that attack, an idea was floated up the chain of command by a submariner who was an Admirals staffer in Washington DC. Multiple light bombers were considered for the task, but ultimately, the B-25 was chosen as the best plane for the task.

While some claim that epic event was the first time a B-25 was flown from a carrier deck, including a 1943 newsreel, it was in fact not the first. During planning for the flight in early 1942, two B-25's were loaded onto the USS Hornet on the east coast to test the theory. Obviously it worked, and the plan proceeded.

With the successful test, the plan was approved. The 17th Bombardment Group had been one of the first groups to receive the B-25, and therefore was the most experienced flying the new plane as well. In early 1942, they departed Pendleton Field and flew off into the history books with that epic flight.

Originating in 1934 by United Air Lines flying the old Ford Tri-Motor between Pendleton and Portland, Pendleton Field was designated an Army Air Corps station for training in 1940. At one time, its ranks of military personnel numbered around 2,500 enlisted and officers, in addition to around a hundred civilian workers. Ninety-year old Doris Grover was one of those, an Adjutant General aide, and she still resides in Pendleton today.

During its years as a military facility, over a hundred planes that flew from Pendleton Field crashed, including B-17 Flying Fortress. As the war wound down in the mid-1940's, the Field's roles changed to training, maintenance and even firefighting with the famed 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion also known as the 'Triple Nickle'. In November of 1945 it was one of eleven military airfields in Oregon declared surplus, and was signed over to the City of Pendleton in 1948.

Today Eastern Oregon Regional Airport is a modern facility, now providing multiple daily flights to Portland, although in a much more modern aircraft. It is also the home of Pendleton Air Museum, dedicated to the memory of its Doolittle connection. In 2017 to commemorate the 75th anniversary of that mission, they held a gala event which included the appearance of a B-25 Mitchell bomber out of the Erickson Air Collection in Madras, itself a WWII B-17 training base. Once again, the drone of those Pratt & Whitney radial engines floated over the airfield, punctuating Oregon's rich military heritage.

You can learn more about the Pendleton Air Museum by visiting their website at www.pendletonairmuseum.org; and about the Doolittle Raid by visiting www.doolittleraiders.com.