

# Our Pearl Harbor Moment

*By Jeff Thatcher*

When U.S. Surgeon General Jerome Adams recently referred to the COVID-19 pandemic as “our Pearl Harbor moment,” his comment set me to thinking about Pearl Harbor, how the U.S. responded, and how my late father, a 20-year-old farm boy from rural eastern Montana, was part of that initial response.

The date was April 18, 1942 and the response to Japan’s surprise Dec. 7, 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbor, which brought the U.S. into World War II, was a reciprocal surprise bombing, the Doolittle Raid, on military and industrial targets in six Japanese cities: Tokyo, Yokohama, Yokosuka, Nagoya, Kobe and Osaka. The Doolittle Raid was the first significant U.S. victory of WWII, electrifying our country and lifting morale at a dire time when our nation desperately needed some good news.

This week, I had planned to be in Washington, D.C. to join “my extended family,” relatives and friends of the Doolittle Raiders. We were going to participate in the funeral ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery for final Doolittle Raider Lt. Col. Richard E. “Dick” Cole, who passed away on April 9, 2019. We also planned to participate in other events honoring the Raiders organized by the Department of Defense, including the turning over of Cole’s last silver Raider goblet and a commemorative toast to the 80 brave men who comprised the Doolittle Raid.

Instead, our group will remotely gather in the confines of our homes and raise a glass tonight, the evening of April 18, to honor the Raiders. We hope to physically get together the end of August when the events that had been planned for this week have been rescheduled, but that may just be wishful thinking on our part – as there are no givens in this crisis.

I’ve been following COVID-19 from its earliest days when I read about an outbreak of the disease in late December 2019 in Wuhan, China. From that point forward, I tracked its spread regularly and literally became obsessed with the virus. Some of my family members, friends and co-workers likely got sick of me talking about it. I suspect they thought of me as a “Chicken Little.” But unfortunately, my concerns have borne out and then some.

In early February, a non-profit organization I lead, the Children of the Doolittle Raiders, received a plea from friends in Quzhou, a city of approximately 2.2 million people in Zhejiang Province, China, which borders Hubei Province where Wuhan is located. They had a desperate need for personal protective equipment (PPE) to help them combat COVID-19.

We subsequently issued a request for donations to our CDR family and friends and quickly raised more than \$9,000. The funds were then used to acquire and send some boxes of PPE – masks, goggles and gowns – to our primary contact in the Quzhou foreign affairs office. The remainder of the funds were wired to the Chinese Red Cross, which subsequently acquired PPE and distributed the needed items to the city.

Although our response was relatively modest in the grand scheme of things, our friends in Quzhou were extremely grateful for our efforts. In a time of dire need, some faraway Americans had given them a glimmer of hope.

That moment was ironic for me, personally, because on April 18, 1942, my father and the other Doolittle Raiders had also provided the Chinese with a glimmer of hope in combatting the Japanese incursion into their country during the Raiders' "Pearl Harbor moment." The Chinese had been battling the Japanese since 1938, suffering defeat after defeat. The Doolittle Raid provided the Chinese, as well as many Americans, hope and a belief that the Japanese were not as invincible as they believed.

After the Raiders bombed Japan, they ran low on fuel and were forced to parachute out over China or crash land their planes. When this group of strange white men descended upon various locations throughout their country, instead of turning them over to the Japanese who had invaded their land, Chinese villagers, fishermen and guerillas selflessly rescued the Raiders and helped many to safety including my late father.

For their generosity and selflessness in helping the Raiders, 250,000 Chinese were subsequently slaughtered by the Japanese in a three-month campaign of terror that included the use of bacteriological and germ warfare. The Doolittle Raiders never forgot.

Recently, in another twist of irony, I received word that our friends in Quzhou wanted to urgently reciprocate the CDR's earlier generosity in their battle with COVID-19 by offering to donate 20,000 surgical masks and 200 gowns. CDR representatives evaluated the offer, looking at various locations for the supplies to be sent. But none of those were feasible. Given the fact that PPE is needed just about everywhere in the U.S., we decided to see if it might be sent to Arkansas where I reside.

Fellow CDR member Melinda Liu and I have since been working with representatives of Arkansas state agencies to get the offered items shipped to a warehouse in Little Rock, where they can later be distributed to entities in need. There are still some logistical issues to be worked out, but the effort sounds promising.

Besides the horrific health consequences of COVID-19, this pandemic has taken a toll on the economies of our state and nation. I feel very fortunate to still be employed, working remotely from home. My employer, the Arkansas State Chamber of Commerce/Associated Industries of Arkansas, is doing its utmost to provide COVID-19 information and updates to state businesses, organizations and workers.

Thankfully, federal stimulus legislation has been passed in recent weeks including the Coronavirus Preparedness and Response Supplemental Appropriations Act, The Families First Coronavirus Response Act, and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The Federal Reserve has also stepped in with a broad array of actions, including up to \$2.3 trillion in lending to support households, businesses and local and state governments. State agencies in Arkansas have also stepped up, designating significant funding to assist businesses and workers in need.

Thanks to the efforts of our Congressional Delegation and the steady leadership of Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson, members of his Cabinet and other dedicated state agency personnel, Arkansas is faring better than many other parts of the country. But we still have a long way to go.

As I think back upon my father's "Pearl Harbor moment" and my "Pearl Harbor moment," I am reminded that despite mankind's differences in race, color, culture, religion and other aspects, we are also united by many common characteristics that define us including empathy, compassion, hope and love.

I am also very thankful for our healthcare providers, those on the front line, who are selflessly taking care of the ill and suffering at great personal risk to themselves during this pandemic, and our other frontline providers, the grocery workers, truck drivers, delivery personnel, Postal Service workers and many others who continue to work diligently under difficult conditions to keep our state and country functioning. Like the Doolittle Raiders on April 18, 1942, they provide our country with hope that we will ultimately emerge from the darkness into the light at the end of this horrific tunnel.