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## **MEMORIES OF DOOLITTLE RAIDER**

### **SGT. HAROLD A SPATZ**

*By Carolyn Spatz Davidson*

(Cousin of Harold Spatz, Engineer-Gunner on Crew #16)

In March 2014, I sent Kaitlyn Davidson, my 22-year-old granddaughter studying at the University of Hawaii, a package of goodies along with a request for "a gift in return".

I asked her to go on an adventure to the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu and locate the grave of my cousin, Sgt. Harold A. Spatz. Harold was a Flight Engineer/Gunner on one of the 16 B-25 Mitchell bombers in the Doolittle Raid on April 18, 1942 headed for a mission to bomb Tokyo, after Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Kaitlyn went on this adventure with her friend, Aaron. She wrote, "The National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific was very beautiful, peaceful and quiet there. Once Aaron and I found Harold Spatz's grave stone, we sat next to it for half an hour talking about him and just couldn't believe what he did and were blown away by this whole thing! Aaron wanted me to tell you that he loved this idea of doing this and that he thanks you. He was very touched and emotional, while I was too, when we were sitting around Harold's grave reading the story on what happened to him during the war. We couldn't believe that he was only 22 years old when he died, which had us thinking more on how great he was and how much he accomplished before he died at that age! Aaron

said that even though he is not related or even knew or heard about him, he felt like he knew Harold already. It was an amazing experience. Aaron helped me pick out some flowers to put on his grave. It was definitely one of the best adventures Aaron and I have had!"

Harold "Skinny" Spatz was a normal Lebo, Kansas kid back in the 1930's. When Harold was born, his dad said, "He is Skinny" - so the nickname continued through his life! He grew up in Lebo, played sports and did well in school.

After graduation from high school in 1939, Harold joined the U.S. Army Air Corps, and was assigned as a crew member of a B-25 aircraft. He volunteered for and was selected by Lt. Colonel James H. Doolittle to be one of 80 select crew members for a secret mission in 1942. Since a plane as large as a B-25 had never flown from an aircraft carrier, the crew was challenged to launch the 30,000-pound B-25 from an aircraft carrier in just 500 feet. The crews practiced on a field approximately the size of the deck of an aircraft carrier. On each side at the end of the field, a rope was strung between two poles with flags hung several yards off the ground. The idea was that if the plane was not high enough to clear the flags, it could not possibly avoid the water below when it went off the end of the carrier.

After two months of intensive training, the 16 B-25 crew members boarded the USS Hornet for their still unknown mission into history. The carrier was on its way to a position close enough to the Japanese coast that the 16 B-25s could fly from the carrier to bomb Tokyo and have enough remaining fuel to fly to an area controlled by the Chinese forces. The Japanese were alerted to the location of the carrier several hundred miles further off-shore than planned and all the planes had to leave much earlier than anticipated.

Because of the extra distance needed to reach land and complete their bombing, the planes ran out of fuel before reaching safe Chinese territory. Harold's plane, "Bat Out of Hell," was the last of 16 planes to leave the carrier. After the bombing, his plane ran out of fuel and his crew bailed out over a part of China that was tragically under Japanese control. Harold was captured by the Japanese and became a prisoner of war.

Six months after the Raid on Tokyo, Harold was court-martialed by the Japanese. Three soldiers, including Harold, were told to write letters to their families. Harold's father, (his mother had passed away), sister and brother lived in Lebo, Kansas. He wrote this to his dad: "I want you to know that I have died fighting for my country like a soldier. My clothes are all I have of value. I give them to you. And Dad, I want you to know I love you. May God bless you."

The crew members were taken to Shanghai's Public Cemetery No. 1 and told to kneel down in front of crosses. Hands were bound behind them, their eyes covered and a mark placed on their foreheads. A firing squad then executed all three soldiers. Their bodies were cremated and boxes of their ashes were taken to the International Funeral Home in Shanghai where they remained until the end of World War II. Harold's ashes were then returned to the States for interment in the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii. After the end of World War II, Sgt. Harold A. Spatz's family received the following medals awarded to him - The Purple Heart, Prisoner of War Medal, Distinguished Flying Cross and Aerial Gunner Badge.

In 1997, a memorial stone was gifted to Lebo, Kansas by Harold Spatz's sister, Reba Jean Spatz Barnett, which was from her farm in Chase County, Kansas, and was prepared honoring six local service men. This memorial is standing in Lebo Memorial Garden at the center of town.

On November 10, 1999, Colonel John F. Gaughan II, Vice Commander of the Department of the Air Force, sent a letter to Harold's sister, Reba Jean Spatz Barnett stating: "It is my distinct pleasure to inform you of the intention of the United States Air Force to honor your brother, Harold A. Spatz, by dedicating an enlisted dormitory in his honor. The unquestionable courage displayed by your brother during the Doolittle Raid, and while held captive by the forces of Imperial Japan in 1942, deem it fitting to have his memory enshrined to inspire current and future Air Force members. With your concurrence, the United States Air Force will proceed with plans to dedicate building 340 at McConnell Air Force Base to honor your brother, Harold A. Spatz."

Spatz Hall was dedicated in Harold's name at McConnell AFB in Wichita, Kansas on May 20, 2000. The military escorted Bob Spatz (Harold's brother) and his wife Caroline; Reba Jean Spatz Barnett (Harold's sister) and her husband Edwin, to the platform for the Dedication. Also present were General Charles Boyd, guest speaker; Lt. Col. Bob Hite, co-pilot of Harold's plane; Col. Fred Roggero, Commander of the 22nd Air Refueling Wing; and Lt. Henry A. Potter, navigator of Doolittle's plane.

Caroline Busboom Spatz donated land to the town of Lebo, Kansas for the HAROLD A. "SKINNY" SPATZ MEMORIAL PARK. Relatives of Harold attending the Dedication were Carolyn Spatz Davidson, Senator Jim Barnett, Edwin Barnett, Reba Jean Spatz Barnett, Caroline Busboom Spatz and Bob Spatz.

Senator Jim Barnett, son of Reba Jean Spatz Barnett, was the speaker at the Dedication of the Park on November 1, 2003.

His speech follows:

"On December 7, 1941, an event occurred that would forever change the future of our great country and dramatically impact the community of Lebo. President Franklin Roosevelt correctly referred to that day as "a date which will live in infamy". In response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, President Franklin Roosevelt sought to restore the honor of the United States. A bold and unprecedented plan was designed to retaliate by bombing mainland Japan. Plans for the Doolittle Raid were crafted in secrecy. Harold Spatz was to become a key member of that historic raid that led to the first World War II victory for the United States of America. On April 18, 1942, 80 young men, many little beyond their teens, took off from the Navy Carrier USS Hornet to bomb Tokyo.

Most of Doolittle's squad ran out of fuel and crash landed in China. Eight were captured, placed in solitary confinement, then tortured. Later three were executed on October 15, 1942. Harold "Skinny" Spatz was one of those unfortunate men who underwent execution and subsequently gave his life for what has been felt to be a turning point of the war against Japan.

For the community of Lebo to commemorate this park in honor of Sgt. Harold Spatz should come as no surprise. Lebo has a long history of answering the call to defend the freedom of the United States. Harold was one of those brave men. He was the youngest son of Robert Spatz, a long-time resident of the Lebo community. Many other young men of this community crossed the seas to serve their country. Quoting a newspaper clipping from Chester Evans, Lebo prides itself in patriotism. Normally a town of 600, it is down to 450 now, the other have gone to work or defense work."

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## **Attachments**

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