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Eglin neighbors remember Doolittle Raiders

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Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



EGLIN NEIGHBORS REMEMBER DOOLITTLE RAIDERS

By HAMPTON DUNN

VALPARAISO --- On the first of March in 1942, the dashing, daring air racer turned warrior called together a group of young airmen at nearby Eglin Field, and in no uncertain terms laid out what was ahead:

"If you men have any idea that this isn't the most dangerous thing you've ever been on, don't even start this training period. You can drop out now..."

Nobody dropped out. Everybody on this special task force turned to and the next few weeks at this isolated Northwest Florida base were frenzied. Jimmy Doolittle was training crews to take off in B-25s from an aircraft carrier to bomb Japan!

Families lived here and at Fort Walton but rarely saw their men. The fliers were practicing short takeoffs, night flying, and scooting through the skies from Eglin to Fort Myers, Fla., thence across the Gulf of Mexico at very low level to Houston and back home.

Precisely at 12:30 P.M. on April 18, America struck back at the Japanese. Doolittle and his Raiders were in action! They took off from the USS Hornet, 16 plane loads, and invaded the Emperors homeland. Tokyo, Yokohama, Nagoya and Kobe were targets. The planes had been spotted and took off earlier than planned and most of them were forced to crash before reaching their intended destination of friendly China. The strike was a morale booster at home.

Today, just inside the city limits of "Val-P" there is a memorial to this historic event. The last B-25 built is a central part of it.

