

Robert Truetken gives Army and Air Force veteran John Hunt a drawing prize at a Saturday talk about Gen. James Doolittle at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport.

RORYE O'CONNOR/
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Speaker shares stories about Gen. James Doolittle with veterans

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MT. VERNON — Veterans and others gathered at the Mt. Vernon Outland Airport Saturday to hear anecdotes of Gen. James Doolittle, the man who led the first carrier-bomber attack on Japan April 18, 1942.

"There's an old military term Doolittle taught me, called 'Ale,'" Robert Truetken, United Service Organizations St. Louis board member, told the crowd. "No lies, no lies and no excuses. I won't tell you any today."

Truetken, a friend of Doolittle, gave a talk on his friendship with the man who led 16 B-25 bombers on a raid over Japan hoped to cause a crisis of Japanese confidence in their military, according to Doolittle's report to the commanding general of the Air Force after the "Tokyo Raid."

Truetken met Don Davis, the event organizer and a member of the Experimental Aircraft Association, while Truetken was working as the head of security at a St. Louis hospital Davis was visiting.

"We were watching this little guy in a hat walk all over the hospital, and I went to go check on him," Truetken said. "I went to the elevator and out comes Don Davis wearing a B-25 hat. I asked him where he got it, and he said, 'Pilgrim, let me tell you.'"

The two bonded over Davis' B-25 hat, Truetken told the crowd, and Truetken showed Davis the Doolittle memorabilia he had in his security office, including a photo of Doolittle holding Truetken's 12-

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gauge hunting rifle.

Truetken said he told the crowd "what he knew" about Doolittle and the kind of man he was.

"He was feisty, mean, ornery and obnoxious, but he was a great man," Truetken said.

Truetken said before the raid on industrial centers in Japan began, Doolittle made an effort to speak with each man from the 17th Bombardment Group readying to take off from the aircraft carrier.

"They were so fearful about taking off, being

attacked, running out of fuel and getting back," he said. "He talked about their fears and wants and he didn't get to bed until about 6:30 a.m. before the raid."

Truetken said he asked Doolittle about his feelings about the Tokyo Raid.

"I said, 'How do you feel about what you did?' and he said, 'I'd do it 10 times over,'" Truetken said.

Doolittle went quail hunting with Truetken, and he said he got to know the aviator as an individual.

"He went out of his way to help anyone financially, spiritually or morally," Truetken said. "We don't have that anymore. In the days of World War II, they had everything. That's why I'm proud

to be a Korean veteran."

Truetken gave out military-themed gifts to the crowd, including silk maps of Japan that sailors would wear around their necks that Truetken said are worth as much as \$1,500.

He said his brother found the silken maps in a warehouse where Air Force caps and other uniform details are manufactured.

Truetken said until one has the opportunity to know a man like Doolittle, one hasn't lived. He also said his office

in St. Louis had a large variety of Tokyo Raid and Doolittle memorabilia.

"Don saw my office," he said. "It was Doolittle. I feel like I am Doolittle; I know in my heart who he was, what he was like."

Davis said he was "pleased beyond tell" with the event and its turnout.

"I didn't know what to expect, but I did expect veterans," he said. "I am thrilled with the friendship he and I have developed over the

years."

Doolittle's report: <http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/AAF/rep/DoolittleReport.html>

More information: "Calculated Risk," by Jonna Doolittle Hoppes