

# What can the history of the Douglas 63<sup>rd</sup> Army Air Forces Flying Training Detachment tell us about World War II?

- Even before the attack on Pearl Harbor, the United States was preparing for possible involvement in the war. The Douglas 63<sup>rd</sup> Detachment started training cadets in October 1941, 2 months before the attack.
- World War II was the first war where superiority in aerial combat and strategic bombing played a significant part of war strategy. The detachment at Douglas was just one out of many facilities of the Army Air Forces Civilian Pilot School (AAFPCS) group that prepared men to become pilots in the aerial war.

- The United States Army Air Forces conducted rigorous training with high academic standards to create a highly trained combat pilot. Scores of nearly 90% were required on exams. At the end of the nearly 7 month training, USAAF pilots had almost 360 hours of flying time compared to Germany's 110 hours and even less for Japan, Italy, and USSR.



- Many people were needed to fight the war including pilots. The United States asked young men and women to do all they could to help win the war. The number of cadets learning how to fly nearly quadrupled from 50 during the first class in 1941 to nearly 200 in 1942. By the end of the War, the U.S. Army Air Forces had graduated 250,000 pilots!

**"The easiest way for the Axis to win the War is to have the flying line lie down on the job"**

*Letter from John T. Stickney, Major Army Air Corps Supervisor to Mr. Raymond and Mr. Richardson at Douglas 63<sup>rd</sup> Detachment on March 31, 1943.*

- Everyone throughout the country mobilized for war. It wasn't just the cadets and military who revealed their patriotism. Women signed up for service and many people on the home front did all they could for the war cause. Both women and men civilians worked at the Douglas 63<sup>rd</sup> Detachment and letters that the Cadets received and wrote while here show the patriotism and support from home.
- World War II was truly a global war. Cadets from Douglas went on to receive orders to serve overseas in every theater of the war. "They fought in the skies of Europe, the Americas, and North Africa, at palm tree level over the islands of the Pacific, over the humid Indian Ocean, the lonely stretches of the North and South Atlantic, and hopping the deadly hedgerows of France. The Douglas 63rd Detachment men flew bombing runs over Germany, transported important war cargo over the Himalayan 'hump', shot down Messerschmitt fighters over Italy, and soared through blazing anti-aircraft fire as a matter of daily survival."





# World War II Flying Training

## Words to Know



**Allies** – A group of countries working together to fight against Axis countries. The three largest powers included the United States, United Kingdom, and Russia, but it also included many other countries. Beginning in 1942, this allegiance of countries was called the United Nations.

**Altitude** – the height of an object in the sky above the earth's surface.

**Army Air Corps** – A unit of the Army that included all aviation personnel and equipment. In 1941, the Army Air Corps was renamed Army Air Forces. After World War II, the Army Air Forces separated from the Army and became its own organization named the United States Air Force.

**Axis** – a group of countries fighting against countries of the Allies. The three main countries included Germany, Italy, and Japan. These countries believed in having powerful dictators or imperial leaders.

**Barracks** – a building or group of buildings for housing soldiers.

**Bombardier** – the member of the plane crew that operated the bombsight and bomb release switch.

**Bomber** - a plane designed to drop bombs. On multi-engine bombers the crew consisted between 5-13 men and included pilot, co-pilot, bombardier, navigator, and gunners. Specific bombers used during the War included B-25, B-17 Flying Fortress, B-24 Liberator, B-26, and B-29 Superfortress.

**Cargo** – a plane designed to carry cargo and supplies. The crew consisted of a pilot and co-pilot and sometimes one other. Specific cargos used during the War included C-47 Skytrain, C-46, and C-54 Skymaster.

**Cadets** – a student who receives military training to become an officer.

**China, Burma, India Theater** – (CBI) Part of the War that took place in Southeast Asia primarily supplying and assisting China in fighting Japan.

**Civilians** – people who are not in the military.

**Detachment** – a separate military unit for special purposes, such as training.

**Doolittle Raid** – Also known as the Tokyo Raid, it was a bombing raid by the United States on the Japanese mainland on April 18, 1942. 16 U.S. Army Air Forces B-25 bomber airplanes took off from the *U.S.S. Hornet* aircraft carrier in the West Pacific Ocean. The raid was the first time the Japanese mainland was attacked by the United States and gave the United States a huge morale (positive state of mind) boost.



**European Theater-** (ETO) Part of the War that took place within European countries primarily fighting Germany. The theater was divided into the Eastern front bordering Russia and the Western front bordering Great Britain and France.

**Fighter or Pursuit** – a plane primarily designed to fight another plane in the air and to escort and protect bombers. The crew consisted of usually one pilot. Specific fighters used during the War include P-40 Warhawk, P-51 Mustang, P-47 Thunderbolt and P-38 Lightning.

**Flying Tigers** – Fighter pilots that protected our ally China from Axis Japan. The flying group began as the American Volunteer Group (AVG) even before the War started. After the war started, the Flying Tigers were combined under the U.S. Army Air Forces.

**Home Front** – the place where people live and work when their country is at war in another country.

**Link Trainer** – A flight simulator machine that was used to teach cadets how to fly. It allowed pilots to get the feeling of flying an airplane. It was the most popular type of simulator used in World War II.

**Mediterranean, African, and Middle East Theater** – (MTO) Part of the war that took place in Italy, Africa, and Middle Eastern countries, primarily fighting Italy and Germany.

**Pacific Theater** – Part of the war that took place in countries and islands around the Pacific Ocean and Asia, primarily fighting Japan.

**Pearl Harbor** – A United States Naval Base in Hawaii that received a surprise bombing attack from Japan on December 7, 1941. The attack led to the United States entry into World War II.

**Navigator** – The member of the plane crew that directed the plane to the destination and return. He needed to know the exact position of the plane at all times and calculate it using many types of navigational methods.

**Norden Bombsight** – A mechanical computer that enabled a bomb to hit a target by calculating the bomb's path based on the movement and path of the plane. At the time, it was the most accurate bombsight technology available and the United States considered it one of its secret weapons.

**Squadron** – The smallest division within the Air Force that contains a group of men.  
For example: Air Force # >> Wing # >> Group # >> Squadron #

**Trainers** – Planes used to train pilots. Specific trainers used during the War included PT-17 Kaydet, PT-19, BT-9, BT-13, and AT-10.

**Washed Out** – Failing out of pilot training.

**W.A.S.P** – Women Airforce Service Pilots program was an auxiliary (support for Army) pilot program for women. After earning their wings the women pilots delivered planes from factories to bases, towed targets, and transported supplies.





# World War II Flying Training



## Words to Know WORDSEARCH

Find the words from the *Words to Know* sheet in the grid below. Note: Mediterranean, African, Middle East Theater and China, Burma, India Theater are not in the grid.

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# ANSWERS World War II Flight Training

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