

General James (Jimmy) H. Doolittle

12-14-1896 to 9-27-1993

Resided in Nome Alaska 1900 - 1908



Born on December 14, 1896, in Alameda, California, Doolittle grew up there and in Nome, Alaska. In October 1917 he enlisted in the army reserve. Assigned to the Signal Corps, he served as a flying instructor during World War I was commissioned first lieutenant in the Air Service, regular army, in July 1920 and became deeply involved in the development of military aviation. On September 24, 1922, he made the first transcontinental flight in under 24 hours. He was sent by the army to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for advanced engineering studies. Assigned to test-facility stations, he spent five more years in diverse phases of aviation, winning an number of trophy races, demonstrating aircraft in South America, and in September 1929 making the first successful test of blind, instrument-controlled landing techniques. He left the Arm but continued to race, winning the Harmon trophy in 1930 and the Bendix in 1931 and setting a world speed record in 1932. He served on various government and military consultative boards during this period.

Jimmy, his mother and her sister joined his father in Nome in the summer of 1900. His father had gone to Alaska in 1897 as part of the gold rush. They sailed to Nome on the steamer *SS Zealandia*, one of 30 that carried nearly 10,000 people to Nome that gold-rush summer. Jimmy started school, began hunting, and delivered the Nome Nugget Newspaper. Of his childhood in Nome, Jimmy wrote (in his autobiography, *I Could Never be so Lucky Again*).

“There were two kinds of heroes to the kids of Nome in those days, runners and dog team drivers. We had a large gymnasium and the older boys and men would run 100 and 100 mile marathon races indoors. They would go round and round, stopping periodically to have a cup of coffee or a sandwich or to go to the bathroom. They never slept. A race would sometimes take two days and there was no letup.

“Almost every kid in town ran. I did not have a team of sled dogs, so I ran too. I ran one time until I collapsed. I also liked acrobatics and practiced handstands and tumbling, and worked out on the parallel bars by the hour. Years later, I was told I had a heart murmur, which gave me a little trouble in physical exams for flying. Doctors told me it was probably from overexertion when very young.

“Dog sled races were then and still are a popular winter sport in Nome. Races were run from Nome to the Solomon River and back for a fair division of a public purse and side bets. It was always a time for celebration when the dog teams left and when they returned.” Mrs. Doolittle and Jimmy left Nome for Los Angeles late in the summer of 1908.

