Ms. Jonna Doolittle Hoppes

“Just Doing My Job: Stories of Service from World War II”

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Moderator: One of our real special moments last year was this particular time in the program where Jonna Doolittle came on stage and chatted about her book about her grandfather, Jimmy Doolittle. If you recall, those of you who were here, it was a terrific time, calculated risk.

Well Jonna has a new book this year. It’s called “Just Doing My Job: Stories of Service from World War II”, and to give you a feel, I’m going to read a little bit from the intro that was written, the forward that was written by General Arthur Lichte, just recently retired commander of Air Mobility Command.

He said, “President Roosevelt often suggested that the efforts of civilians on the home front supporting the war through personal service was just as critical to winning the war as the efforts of the servicemen themselves. For most during this time period sacrifice was a daily part of life. Countless people from all walks of life contributed to the war effort without ever donning a uniform. The role of women during this period is well documented and symbolized by the likes of Rosie the Riveter. This generation stands en masse among great people of character in our history who have answered the call to defend our liberty and our freedom. However character is just not passed on in the genes, it must be taught, studied, nurtured and encouraged.” And Jonna will tell you all about that in this great book she just wrote, “Just Doing My Job”. Jonna Doolittle.

Ms. Doolittle Hoppes: First of all I want to thank you for including me in your program. I’m extremely honored.

They call them the greatest generation for a reason, but if you call them heroes they’ll argue with you. They’ll tell you that they were just doing their job.

That’s true of my grandfather. My grandfather was going to Cal Berkeley in 1917 when the United States became involved in World War I. He dropped out of school and enlisted in the Army Signal Corps as a flying cadet and he was very very disappointed to find out that he wasn’t going to be deployed. You see, he wanted to go over and fight in the air war in Europe.

On December 7, 1941 the United States was attacked by Japan and the world as we knew it changed forever. A week later,
almost to the exact hour, the President called his Chiefs of Staff together and asked them to find a way to bomb Japan.

Jimmy Doolittle is best known for the raid on Tokyo, our retaliation against Japan barely four months later. The mission was so top secret that only a very few people knew about it, not even the crews. They trained 24 crews, but only 16 planes could go onto the carrier.

When Bobby Hite showed up with his plane, the 16th plane was already being loaded. So when they announced that this task force is bound for Tokyo, Bobby wasn’t quite as jubilant as some of the others. But two days before the mission on April 16th, Bill Farrow came up to Bobby. He’d had a falling out with his copilot and asked Bobby if Bobby would consider being copilot on his plane. Bobby readily agreed.

They took off the deck of the USS Hornet, bombed Japan, and headed for the coast of China. Now they were short of fuel, so the kamikaze winds blew them as far as they could go but they couldn’t land, they couldn’t reach the airfields. Unfortunately for Bobby, he was on one of the crews that was captured by the Japanese.

There were eight Americans captured by the Japanese that day. Three of them were executed by firing squad; one of them they starved to death; and the other four they kept in solitary confinement for three years and four months. They went through a great deal of torture during that time, but the most difficult thing was that they were in solitary confinement and they weren’t allowed to speak to each other.

Now Bobby’s cell was right next door to Jake DeShazer and during that time in prison the only thing they had to read was a Bible, so they passed it to each other.

As you can imagine, they weren’t allowed to speak to each other, but Jake and Bobby had devised a way to communicate. They would knock on the wall, one would answer, and then they would head back to the corner of the cell where there was a banyo, a little hole in the floor to be used as a toilet, and they’d talk to each other through that hole.

One day Bobby knocked on the wall and Jake didn’t answer. He knocked a second time and Jake didn’t answer again. Pretty soon the guards came to Jake’s cell and there was a lot of commotion. Shortly after that they brought the doctor in and then they all went away.

All day long Bobby waited to speak to Jake. He didn’t have a clue what happened. Later in the afternoon, quite late in the afternoon, Jake knocked on the wall. Bobby answered and he
hurried back to the corner. Jake said, “The war’s over.” Bobby goes, “How do you know?” He said, “The Lord told me to pray and I’ve been praying all day.” It was August 9, 1945 -- the day that we dropped the bomb on Nagasaki.

The first command that my grandfather was offered after the raid was the 12th Air Force in North Africa. You use, he told me the most difficult job he had was convincing General Eisenhower that Eisenhowe was Doolittle on his staff. You see, they went to Eisenhower and Eisenhower said I’ll take Eaker, Spaatz and Frank in that order. Well Marshall and Arnold outranked Eisenhower, so he got Doolittle, and Doolittle was asked to command the 12th Air Force.

Most of you might know Bob Hoover. My grandfather called him the best stick and ruder man that ever lived. Bob was sent over to the 12th Air Force as kind of a test pilot. As they reconstructed the planes over in North Africa he would fly them. He talked his way into a fighting group, into the 52nd Fighter Group, and on one of his, well on his last mission he was shot down.

Now it would be an airman’s dream, I think, if you were a POW to escape and steal a German plane and fly to freedom. That’s exactly what Bob did. Some of his co-prisoners created a distraction. He and a couple of guys went over the fence. They found this deserted airfield with all these German planes hidden in revetments. Bob climbed into one of these planes thinking he could fly almost anything. After all, he’d spoken with a co-prisoner who had spent ten hours in a Focke-Wulf 190, so he figured he could do it. He climbed in, and everything was in German.

He didn’t have a parachute or anything to hold him up high enough for him to really see out of the cockpit, but he figured that wasn’t too big of a problem. Unlike some of the stories told, he didn’t taxi to a runway. He started the engine, he revved it up, and he took off right out of the revetment. He got up into the sky and realized here he was with no navigational gear, could barely see out of the plane, no way to defend himself, and he’s flying a German plane into allied territory.

He thought he’d made kind of a big mistake at that point, but he decided he would head to Holland. He’d go until he could find windmills and then he would land and explain that he was an American.

By the time he saw windmills he couldn’t find an airfield, so he found this open field and he landed in the field and he looked up and there was a ditch. He figured he had just barely enough time to ground loop the plane to keep from going into the ditch.
Well, he got out of the airplane and he started toward the road which wasn’t too far away, and turned around, and there were all these farmers heading at him with pitchforks. You see, they thought he was German. He had to talk his way out of being captured again.

My grandfather was a follower of Billy Mitchell and he believed very very strongly in a strategic Air Force. In fact it actually got him in a little bit of trouble because he pushed to have the 12th Air Force as a strategic force. What they did was they took it away from him and they divided it in half and he took the strategic wing.

He must have done something right because what they ended up doing was giving him the 15th Air Force to form and command. The 15th Air Force was used as a strategic force.

Wes Coss was a B-17 pilot that flew for the 15th. He was over southern France when his B-17 was shot down. He parachuted out and landed in French occupied territory and needed to make his way to Spain.

The members of the 15th Air Force really didn’t know anything about the French Underground so it was sheer luck that got Wes to this young man who was working in one of the vineyards whose parents happened to be members of the French Resistance. What happens when the allied airmen are found by the French Resistance, they’re moved from one safe house to another, and this is what happened to Wes.

But the first hurdle Wes had was an interview with this French woman who spoke perfect English. She wanted to know about him. She wanted to know about his crew members. She wanted to know about America, about their homes, their mission, their squadron. It didn’t take very long for Wes to realize that what she was doing was proving that he was an American and not a German plant set out to break up the resistance.

It really wasn’t until the end of his adventure which took a good two months that he realized the danger that those Frenchmen put themselves in by helping out the allies. For example, when he got to the foot of the Pyrenees he had been reunited with one of his crew members and he was put in a little apartment that was owned by this young French woman. She was a school teacher, and she was going to hide them.

Two days later, two more of his crew members were supposed to join them, but the next two days they didn’t show up. Very soon they found out that the crew members had been captured and that the young couple who was guiding them had been executed.
The trip over the Pyrenees was perilous. Not everyone made it. But Wes and his copilot did.

One day General Eisenhower was trying to find gramps and he couldn’t find him much of any place, when somebody said oh, Doolittle, he’s up in a Spitfire. Well, Eisenhower got on the little walkie-talkie with him and he said, “Jimmy, I’ll give you a choice. You can bust back to lieutenant and stay here and fly Spitfires, or you can land and I’ll give you the 8th Air Force.” He landed. [Laughter].

One of the gentlemen that flew for granddad in the 5th Air Force was a guy by the name of Bill Cullerton. Bill flew P-51s out of England, Steeple Morden. On this particular day Bill took off to strafe the airdrome at Ansbach. Well, the first of his nine lives was used up when he was shot down out of that airplane and he was so close to the ground that his parachute opened just barely before he hit the ground. He was in occupied territory, obviously. He was in Germany.

So he decided to make his way to the front lines. He did so by traveling at night and hiding in the woods during the day time. On the third day as the Germans were retreating, Bill waited in the woods. He figured he could stay there long enough for the Americans to overtake him and he’d be home free. But he was sitting in the woods that morning and all of a sudden the trees started to explode around him. The American artillery was hitting in the forest, and he knew that he better run for his life.

What he did was he decided to run up this knoll and try to make it over to the front line. As I said, the Germans were in retreat, so he ran up this hill, smack dab into a group of SS officers. One of the officers came up to him, took Bill’s 45 and said, “For you, the war is over.” He stuck the gun in his stomach and pulled the trigger.

Bill remembers a body looter taking off his watch. He remembers being lifted and dumped into a cart. He remembers waking up on a table and a Jewish doctor leaning over him and saying, “Are you Catholic? Do you want to write a letter to your mother? You’ve been shot through the liver. There’s no way that you’re going to survive.”

Bill woke up in a ward where all the fellow patients were Germans. They weren’t very happy to have an American among them and they were a little unkind. They did things like drop him down a flight of stairs. The German officers wanted the prisoner, so they would come every day to the hospital and tell the doctor, “Give us the American.” The doctor knew that the war was drawing to an end and that the Germans were retreating so he said, “I want a signature.” Nobody wanted to sign for the
American. What they did was they waited until the Germans were on full retreat and they knew that they were going to evacuate the hospital, and they decided to take the American with them.

So this doctor and a young Dutch boy took Bill to the window and they helped him jump into a cart that was filled with manure. The manure broke his fall and the driver took him out into a field and he hid in a culvert until the Americans came over and rescued him.

After the war was over in Europe, granddad took the 8th Air Force over to Okinawa. One day he saw a young boy who had been badly injured by our bombs and that night he wrote a letter to my grandmother. What he wrote was, “Joe, we must realize that nations are just groups of individuals, and if individuals will fight, so will nations. More readily, in fact, if incited by mass hysteria which can be induced by carefully arranged and controlled propaganda. We no longer have geographic isolation from Europe and Asia. Scientific development of the future will bring all parts of the world relatively still closer together. Someday I hope the world can disband its military establishment and we can devote ourselves wholly to truly constructive pursuits. But until that time comes, let us do everything possible to so train our children and so direct our nation as to give them both the highest possible degree of security in the world in which they find themselves.”

On September 11, 2001 the United States was attacked and the world as we know it changed forever. Heather Penny was a rookie. She’d spent eight months. She’d just finished a training in Nellis Air Force Base and was in a routine briefing at Andrews when she was told that she needed to scramble. Within six minutes of reaching her plane she was airborne in her F-16. She was one of the first two F-16s scrambled over Washington, D.C. on that day.

Heather didn’t know who her enemy was. She didn’t know what was going to be asked of her. Her plane had training rounds, it didn’t even have exploding ordnance. But Heather was willing to do exactly what we needed to do, just like the kids from World War II. Heather went on to serve two tours in the Middle East, even though she had two little girls that she had to leave at home.

We call them the greatest generation, but the same can be said about our military personnel today. The kids of today’s armed forces are just as great as the kids in the past, and you can call them heroes, but I can guarantee you they will tell you that they were just doing their job.

Thank you.
[Applause].

**Moderator:** Great presentation, Jonna. Thank you.

*Remember, “Just Doing Our Job” is the name of the book.*

Tell us a little bit about how you chose the folks, the 19 folks that were in the book.

**Ms. Doolittle Hoppes:** When I started lecturing on my grandfather one of the very first times I went out I started meeting these different veterans. The day that stands out the most was visiting a library and I had a guy from World War II come up to tell me a story, and I had a guy from Desert Storm come up, and they started sharing the stories with each other. I realized the common thread that ran through this. But what stood out even more was the fact that my grandfather’s story is out there, there are a lot of people who know about him. But every one of these stories is just as important.

So I started with the guy that was telling the story that day, and it just went from one to another. Now I owe General Dunn a thank you because he just introduced me not too long ago to Johnny Allison, and because of Johnny there will be a third book.

**Moderator:** All about Johnny Allison?

**Ms. Doolittle Hoppes:** No, Johnny’s just one of the stories.

**Moderator:** So in the next book there’s going to be another bunch of stories similar to this?

**Ms. Doolittle Hoppes:** Another set of stories from World War II.

**Moderator:** When you developed the stories, the narratives, did you actually interview the persons who were still living?

**Ms. Doolittle Hoppes:** What I did was with each story I would interview and sit down and tape the person, then I would write up the story. What I tried to do was something called narrative non-fiction, to tell it in a story form so that not just adults would read it but also middle school and high school kids would read it.

One of the times that stands out the most is I would take the story back to the person that I wrote it to, and this guy was Bob Coates, he’s a Navy fellow in Boise. I brought Bob his story and I handed it to him and I watched his face fall. I looked at him and I said, “What’s wrong?” He goes, “Jonna, you made me sound like a hero.” I go, “Wait a minute, Bob, did I get
anything wrong?” He said, “No.” I said, “Did you stand at your duty station even though your ship was under fire?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “Is that true of everybody on the ship with you?” He said, “Yes.” I said, “Well Bob, if I didn't get anything wrong, and you sound like a hero, maybe you were.” [Laughter].

**Moderator:** So the reaction from the rest of the folks, similar? Different? Did you find some that you asked to be interviewed who did not want to be interviewed? Were there those who were thrilled? Share that kind of --

**Ms. Doolittle Hoppes:** It’s funny. They’re very reluctant at first to tell their stories, but they do warm up to it. The one story that I did collect and then at the very end he didn’t want it published is Walter Ehlers who was an Army Medal of Honor recipient. Walter just didn’t want it out again. But everybody else seems to be pretty willing to do it.

I didn’t want to just do military, either. I wanted to capture the women that were involved in, I even have a guy in there that was 4F who ended up doing something very special for the Navy. But it was a generation that pulled together. I really hope that the same will be able to be said about our generation if we need to.

**Moderator:** There have been more generations since World War II, perhaps two or three. Did you find something special about this particular one? If so, you are writing about them, so share that with us, please.

**Ms. Doolittle Hoppes:** I have to tell you, though, this is just a start. It’s become a passion for history to be recorded. I’m working with World War II right now because we’re losing those stories, but their story is just the start, as you said. My dad is a veteran of both Korea and Vietnam. Those stories aren’t told. I got him to talk for the very very first time a year ago. I took him over to Hawaii and he actually did an oral history for the museum over there. Up until that point he would not discuss his history at all.

I think all of the stories are important, especially the stories that are coming out today. Again, not just the warriors, but everyone. It’s all part of the fabric that made this country great. So I’m hoping this is a start. I’m going to be knocking on the doors of people from Korea pretty soon.

**Moderator:** Are we talking about a series, seven or eight books that talk about World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and up to today?

**Ms. Doolittle Hoppes:** I’d love to do that. I’d love to see all the stories recorded. You know, this is digressing a little
A few years ago there was a movie that came out that was put out by Disney and it was Pearl Harbor. The original script of that movie was pretty disrespectful, but we were able to work with Disney and they cleaned it up. But I’m a firm believer that if we don’t put our history out there, we can’t really blame the people writing movies and we can’t blame people writing scripts or TV shows or books for not knowing the truth. So I guess if you don’t put your story out there there’s a chance that Alec Baldwin might play you. Maybe. [Laughter].

Moderator: No comment.

Can you share with us a couple of stories that just come to you from the more current generation?

Ms. Doolittle Hoppes: I haven’t really focused too much on it so I really can’t.

Moderator: Are there others coming out in the book that you can share with us? The new book.

Ms. Doolittle Hoppes: The new book has a ton of new stories in it. I just got back from Philadelphia where I interviewed a Marine. A lot of the stories are just what people are doing every day. One of the gals was with the OSS. She was a reporter in Hawaii when Pearl Harbor was bombed and she ended up going into the OSS and was an operative in Burma. There’s also a gentleman who is in Idaho who created the detonator on the atomic bomb. So it’s kind of across the board, a lot of different stories. A gal with the Red Cross that was in Burma.

Moderator: Dick Hamada, that was one of the stories toward the end of the book. You know, I could ask you to share a little bit about him, but also is there any reason the order that these folks, is there an impact by having somebody at the end and somebody at the beginning? Random? It’s not alphabetical.

Ms. Doolittle Hoppes: The book starts with Pearl Harbor and it ends specifically with Nick Moramarco. Nick was a B-17 tail gunner. He was shot down. He was captured. Throughout that time period he was moved across Germany as the war was ending and they were trying to hide the prisoners. One of the stories is he’s on a train and there are cars filled with Jewish people that are packed together so tightly that they can’t even sit down. That train pulls up to Dachau and it leaves them.

Nick came home. He lived a very fruitful life. He lived a very responsible life. But one day he was watching television and he saw one of our aviators who was captured during Desert Storm and he just had a breakdown. Now he worked through that breakdown and he continued to live a very productive life, but the reason that story is there is because even though the war has
ended, it doesn’t mean that it’s over for the people who fought it.

I don’t think that we can even really begin to express our appreciation to the military -- World War II, the people fighting today. Without that we wouldn’t have the freedom we have. I want kids to know that.

Moderator: Those of you who obtain the book and look at it, you’ll see there are some very interesting things in there. She has a story about an English war bride. But in particular Dick Hamada struck me because as the Japanese-American soldier in Hawaii at the time of the attack, and the difficulty that the Japanese had, and I’m going to stop right there and let you continue. Share that with them.

Ms. Doolittle Hoppes: Dick Hamada, he’s amazing. Dick was actually a carpenter. He was working at Pearl Harbor on the base when the Japanese attacked. Now he took it personally because these were his ancestors attacking his country and that’s exactly what he’ll tell you. He was an American. He wasn’t Japanese. A little irony, his family had come from Hiroshima. His father returned to Hiroshima just a couple of years earlier to die. So his family had the tie there.

It took two years for him to be accepted in the military. He finally got into the Army, came to the mainland for training, hadn’t even finished training when he was pulled from the unit and offered a one-way mission. It was so secret, he didn’t even know that he was working for the fledgling OSS.

He basically spied for us. But the irony, the way it comes back and ties in to some of the other stories is that his last mission he was dropped into Peking and his job was to help rescue the four Doolittle Raiders who were still there.

When I started the book, my daughter said to, “Mom, you should put a thread and string them all together.” I said, “Stacy, there’s no way, it just would be impossible.” But there’s a thread that connects every single one of those stories in some way.

Moderator: It is amazing how you did that. The connection between the earlier pilots who are captured and then kept in prison, then later on rescued by somebody else, and then you tell a story about them. Just a terrific way of approaching this whole area.

How about the USO lady? Carmelita Pope.

Ms. Doolittle Hoppes: Carmelita Pope, now that’s a story of romance. Carmelita was this young woman who was working her way
to Broadway when she heard about the USO and the fact that they could participate and go and entertain the troops. So she headed over to Italy and she met this young guy named Ben. They had this wonderful romance. They came back to the United States and Ben proposed to her but she wanted to still act on Broadway. So she stayed on the East Coast, he stayed in the military, ended up being a general, but his family was from Hawaii. So they both married other people and they both ended up single again, dated very briefly, married other people, they’re both widowed, and now they are dating again.

**Moderator:** The audience comes to me with a question about what about the home front? And of course you tell a story of Rosie the Riveter. So perhaps that’s one way of answering that question.

**Ms. Doolittle Hoppes:** It’s interesting because this country is as strong as it is because we pulled together the way we did. The Rosie the Riveter story, you could take her story and it’s a blueprint for so many of the women who pulled together and did what they needed to do. They filled in at the factories, and then lo and behold, as soon as the war was over most of them were expected to go home.

The same is true of the story about our WASP. Vi Cowden, I’ve got to tell you about Vi Cowden. She’s no bigger than a minute. She’s a little bitty gal. For her 89th birthday she went sky diving with the Golden Knights. For her 90th birthday she went hang gliding with her granddaughter. And last year at 91, she did a filming for Weird Al Ankovich where they suspended her ten feet above the ground like she was jumping out of an airplane.

Vi was one of the very few who ended up flying pursuit planes and she was the first one to deliver an airplane to the Tuskegees.

**Moderator:** Terrific stories and they can go on forever. We could be here the whole afternoon, but I’m going to stop it right here. For those of you who will be at the ball tomorrow night, your table favor will likely be the book that we’re talking about today, and that’s special. I believe you autographed those. Not only that, the proceeds of any book sales related to that are actually accruing to AFA.

So thank you very much Jonna. Great book, great stories.

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