

A Dash: The Life of Richard E. Cole

We've heard "The Dash" marks one's start and end,
Yet, it holds a tale that few can comprehend.
When born, the future is unwritten, a page clear and new,
This is the story of how he filled that book, a life lived bold and true.

Between the bookends of a life well spent,
There is the dash — a line not showing all it represents.
For Richard E. Cole, this line holds the tale
Of skies and wars where only the bravest hearts prevail.

Born in September 1915, one hundred nine years ago,
Dayton, Ohio's skies is where young Cole watched planes go.
With wings as his goal, he found a path to the clouds,
Following Doolittle, under his command he couldn't be more proud.

April 1942, and a daring flight,
Eighty brave souls rose up to the fight.
From the Hornet's deck, their B-25s soared,
Over Pacific waves, their courage roared.

Doolittle and Cole, their bomber packed tight,
With bombs meant to stir the dawn's early light.
Across Tokyo's fields they cast their fierce blow,
A signal to foes, America's strength on show.

It caused only light damage, but spirits it raised,
Back home, the nation cheered, proud and amazed.
And in its wake, Midway's battle turned the tide,
With codebreakers' work, Japan's fate was defined.

Into China's vast lands, through fog and through rain,
Cole parachuted, his freedom to gain.
Amongst pine and mist, survival he sought,
With the guerrillas' help, his safety was bought.

Years fled like the planes he once deftly flew,
Through Himalayan skies, his legend grew.
Later, a farmer of citrus, under a Texas sun,
Selling his fruits, his new life to come.

Yet yearly they reunited, the Doolittle Raiders of old,
Toasting the brave, the young, and the bold.
With goblets of silver, names upward-faced,
They remembered the lost, while praying for grace.

He lived not for glory, nor medals, nor fame,
But for those by his side, who'd flown into flame.
Each reunion grew smaller, he'd softly proclaim,
"It's not about us, but those that we name."

Cole's final flight, at a reunion's last call,
At ninety-eight, he still showed them all.
With steady hands, a B-25 again took to the sky,
Proving time hadn't claimed his pilot's reliable eye.

And when the last toast was solemnly made,
He stood with his comrades, their memories paid.
"To the gentlemen lost," his voice then did swell,
"May they rest in peace," his final farewell.

Years turned to decades, as time likes to do,
Survivors, like shadows, grew fewer than few.
Till Richard stood last and alone, his final view
A moment that history carved deep and true.

The dash upon his stone is more than just a line,
It's the flights across fear and waters, a youth in its prime.
Richard E. Cole, from the skies to the ground,
Lived each moment fully, with honor so profound.

From Ohio's fields to the skies where eagles dare to climb,
Cole flew life's mission with a daring spirit working overtime.
A reminder that at the end, when our day wanes,
It is not how long we lived but how much love remains.

So here's to his dash, between the dates set in stone,
For the life that it holds, and how it is known.
May we all fly our paths with courage so bold,
And cherish our dashes, like the story of Richard E. Cole.

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