



John Birch, missionary and American intelligence officer in China during WWII, spreads a message of hope while risking his life behind enemy lines.

During a chance meeting, he is led to Colonel James H. Doolittle and members of the World War II raiding party that had just completed the dramatic and legendary bombing raid on Tokyo, in April, 1942.

This accidental meeting behind enemy lines proved to be the rescue the airmen had hoped for. With his encyclopedic knowledge of the language, customs, and geography of China, Birch was able to convey Doolittle and the crews of many of the other American bombers to safety in free China.

Birch, an American Baptist missionary serving in China since 1940, then became an intelligence analyst as a second lieutenant with the China Air Task Force of the American Army—General Claire Chennault's legendary "Flying Tigers." He was the first American to live and work in the field with a Chinese army fighting against the Japanese. Performing high-risk intelligence-gathering missions on the ground, Birch earned the reputation as "the eyes of the 14th Air Force," devising an early warning system that enabled U.S. air units to come to the aid of Chinese units under enemy attack. He also organized a rescue system for pilots who were shot down by the Japanese. Chennault credited Birch with the fact that 90 percent of his downed flyers were rescued.

The story of Birch is not as well-known as Doolittle's raid, but plays an integral role in leading the downed airmen to safety. Without Birch, many more of the raid may not have survived to tell their story nor perhaps would victory come as quickly as it did in then free China. Ten days after the war, Birch was killed by Chinese Communists as he was on his way to rendezvous with small pockets of Japanese soldiers, who were to surrender to him.

Birch would never know the fact that details of his death were kept from the American people. Nor would he know of Robert Welch, who would found an organization bearing his name and who would continue Birch's quest to spread the message of freedom. He also would not know that his parents would proudly accept life memberships into the organization.