

## Flying Tigers Scholarship Ezra Littman

My grandfather, Arthur Littman, who I called "Pop," went to high school in Brooklyn. He was drafted into the United States Army in 1942 when he was nineteen. He was inducted at Camp Upton on Long Island. On January 6<sup>th</sup> he was shipped to Atlantic City, New Jersey, and he stayed at the Marlboro Blendheim, an historic resort hotel.

After his stay in Atlantic City, Pop was shipped to Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri, which was an engineering base. He then left for basic training. Some of his buddies from basic training were shipped to Italy where half of them died.

After basic training, Pop was assigned to the United States Air Force which at that point was still part of the US Army. He was sent to Seymour Johnson Air Force Base to study airplane mechanics. After his schooling, Pop was then sent to Caldwell, New Jersey, where they made plane propellers. He was then sent to Westerly, Rhode Island, for Hamilton Propeller School. After completing propeller school, Pop was sent to Vandalia, Ohio, to Wright Patterson Air Force Base which he said was like Amherst, New York, where I live.

Once he had his airplane mechanics and propeller training, Pop was prepared and ready for his assignment. In February of 1944, he boarded a ship, U.S.S. Benson, to Bombay, India. As they had to dodge submarines, it took the ship five weeks to cross the Pacific Ocean. They stopped in Australia before arriving in India. From Bombay, the soldiers took a train to Calcutta, which took five days. My grandfather said, "It was the worst days of my life." He never went into detail why, perhaps it was because I was so young when I talked with him about it. I suspect that he was very nervous to get to the front lines of the war and did not know what to expect.

From Calcutta, he went to Camp Shapiro in Bangladesh. From there he took a trip on the Burma Road. The Burma Road linked Burma to the Southwest of China. The road is 717 miles long and runs through rough mountain country. The sections from Kunming to the Burmese border were built by 200,000 Burmese and Chinese laborers during the Second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 and was completed by 1938.

It took twenty-eight days on the Burma Road, which Pop called the "Lido Road." The soldiers drove slowly in six by six trucks. My grandfather said one time he was walking back to his truck and saw an enemy soldier who was trying to hide in the back of his truck. Pop shot the man in the head with his .45. His buddy helped him throw the dead man over the side of the road. In May, they arrived in Kunming, where Pop serviced fighter and transport planes with the 69<sup>th</sup> Repair Depot.

After the war, all the equipment was turned over to the Chinese Nationalists who were fighting the Chinese Communists. My grandfather was then flown to Shanghai and was a military police guard assigned to guard criminals of war. He was in

Shanghai for one month. From Shanghai he took the USS Marine Phoenix to Seattle. Then he took a "troop train" to Fort Dix, New Jersey.

Pop was officially discharged on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 1946 as a U.S. Army Corporal. From there he took a long taxi ride to Brooklyn, which "only cost a couple bucks, not much." He couldn't wait to get home he said. After the war, Pop started working in a factory and later went on to run his own factory. When I was done interviewing him he recalled with a laugh that, "back in those days a shave cost fifty cents."

The medals he received for the war were the Good Conduct Medal and the China Liberation Medal. During his free time, Pop hung out with girls, played no-limit five card and seven card stud, shot dice, and sold cigarettes by the carton.

From talking with my grandfather, I learned the sacrifices the soldiers made for their country, families, and for each other. Many soldiers died and many others were injured. It's an important lesson to learn about the history of the 69<sup>th</sup> Repair Depot. I am very proud to be Pop's grandson.

Now members of the 69<sup>th</sup> Repair Depot are in their 80s and 90s. When they first went to to Calcutta, India and passed through the Burma Road to China they were in their early 20s. The squadron has been getting together since 1982 to celebrate annual reunions. Pop attended every reunion until his death last year.