

In His Own Words

Donald C. Harader

Flying Tigers unit: 69th Depot Repair Squadron (DRS), 301st group, 14th Air Force, Army serial number: 38 565 798

Interviewed By: Jennifer Demaree

I've never understood what the Flying Tigers were or what they did before this interview with my great grandpa. He had a wife, Elsie, and a son, Walter, at the time he left home. He is 90 years old and didn't remember everything he wanted to tell me, but he had a little black book that he wrote down every time and date when he left or arrived somewhere.

Draft Notice: 2nd floor, Post Office building, Blackwell, Oklahoma, 10:00 am, September 26th 1943

- "I had basic training at Wichita Falls, Shepard Field, Texas. I went to Chanute Field, Illinois for sheet metal training and had fuel cell repair training in Akron, Ohio.
When we were at basic we were training to go overseas, but we didn't know it."
- Left Kelly Field, San Antonio, Texas: February 16th, 1945
- Left Los Angeles: February 27th, 1945
- Crossed the equator March 6th, 1945, by ship

"The boat had meal tickets; the ship name was 'WS Benson'. There were ten thousand soldiers on that ship. Fifteen men were selected to sweep the decks and I was one of them. We got a Shell back certificate when we crossed the equator."

- Arrived in Melbourne, Australia: March 14th, 1945
- Left March 16th, 1945, "We didn't even leave the ship."
- Arrived in Bombay, India: March 27th, 1945
- Left same day and got onto the train to Calcutta, India. The camp name was Kamcharapara: March 30th, 1945
- Left Calcutta to start on the Burma Road: April 21st, 1945.
"The convoy on the Burma Road took about 29 days to go 18 to 19 hundred miles. One day there was a stupid Japanese zero fighter plane flying low. We had a Jeep with a 50 caliber machine gun on it in front and a weapons carrier with a 50 caliber in back. The last I saw he was trailing black smoke. "
He named his truck "Elsie" after his wife.
- Arrived in Kunming, China: May 14th, 1945.
His second son Kenneth Harader was born during this time.
"I was told to pack up and that we were leaving, but then the next day we were getting ready to ship out to Shanghai."
- Left: December 24th, 1945 at 1:30 by air.
- Arrived in Shanghai: December 24th at 6:30.

"We stayed in Shanghai for six months for occupation duty. I serviced air planes, and put them in storage."

- Stayed until April 24th, 1946
- Left by boat to San Francisco: May 7th, 1946
- Left Camp Stoman in San Francisco: May 8th, 1946

"Coming into San Francisco on a boat, we could see Alcatraz. Missina was from Chicago and back then everyone was worried about the Chicago gangsters. Brown was always kidding about it with Missina (Moose) and Brown said 'You see your old dad out there Moose?' And I think that made Moose mad."

- Arrived at Fort Douglas, Utah, Salt Lake City: May 9th, 1946
- Honorable discharge: May 13th, 1946

Total length in service (continental) one year, four months, fifteen days

Total length in service (foreign) one year, two months, eleven days

- Going home: May 14th, 1946
- Arrived home: May 16th, 1946

Final rank as Staff Sargent

Month	Grade	Military Occupational Specialty
2	Pvt.	Army air force basic training (521)
20	S. Sgt.	Air plane sheet metal worker (555)
4	S. Sgt.	Fuel cell repair man (665)

Badges: China/Burma/Indian Theater, Flying Tiger, Staff Sargent, air force and Air Craft Mechanics

Medals: Fairly good conduct

Ribbons: Battle star indicating over sea service, European-African, Mid. Eastern, Asian Pacific, and Army and Navy occupation

"I could have gotten out earlier, if Ken had been born when he was due. I would have come home about six months sooner. But he was born ten days late. When I got out I was making \$75 or \$76 per month. They had what they called a dependent pay for recent dependent."

Insurance: \$10,000.00

Insurance premium monthly: \$6.60

Atonements: \$40.00

Pay reservation class: A

- Japan surrendered and signed a treaty at Tokyo Bay: September 2nd at 9:04.
"Here's something almost no one knows, the Japanese had more territory occupied than Germany did. They murdered over 300 thousand people in Nanking, China at that time and very few people know that."

What are the flying tigers?

"I don't know how you'd put that. They were there to attack the Japanese by air force but the one we were in was to keep the air force flying and repair the planes."

Was there ever an issue of supplies?

"No, not really. They had problems before; the Japanese had everything blockaded off to China, Burma and India, the only way to get stuff in was to fly until the Burma Road was opened."

When you went over the Burma Road did you take your own supplies?

"Yea, in Calcutta we got supplies, trucks and did a little training. But when we crossed we took supplies we were going to use to work on air planes, gas and food."

What kind of friendships did you make and with whom?

"Buddies I guess, where would I start? I knew many people, Norman Brown, Dwayne Koshark, Raymond LaRoche, he lived in California. Jack Higby, Marty Oxenburg, Will Missina, Kraus, McClelland, Christian, Meaders. We called ourselves 'the crew'. We all had different jobs also."

What's one of your strongest memories of WWII?

"When we left Wichita/Kelly Field Elsie and Walt were both down there. I don't really know, could be a lot of things but that's the first that came to mind."

"Riding the train in India, that's something that you want to forget, we had nothing but wood benches to sit and sleep on. We had nothing to drink except hot tea and it was about 100 degrees outside. We were on it about 5 days and never got to get off. There was no space and no restrooms."

How has the Flying Tigers affected your life after the war?

"The main thing is when I got home I had no idea what I was going to do. I thought about farming, but I didn't want to do that. I went and saw if I could work on railroads, so I went and got a job. But the first thing they wanted me to do is go down to Oklahoma City, but I told them no since I was away from home for so long. So I decided to work at the local John Deere."

Did you get to write back home? How was communication?

"By letter was about the only thing, no telephone or radios. When my second son, Kenny, was born they sent a radio gram saying "You have a son. Anxiety unnecessary. Love you daddy." And I actually got a letter that told me my son was born and was well before the radio gram. It took about five days for mail. When they said secret, they meant top secret. Elsie didn't know where I was for a six month period of time. They read all our letters to make sure we weren't telling what we weren't supposed to. An old army Sargent in Calcutta was going to write a letter about Bombay and Calcutta and they censored it. They wouldn't let him tell anyone where they were."

What made you want to go to the air force?

"I didn't want to be in the Army. I was drafted but I chose the Air Force."

What did you eat?

"Whatever we could get and it wasn't very good. Usually it was water buffalo, a tuff old meat. While I was in Shanghai I ran into my brother, John Wayne, he was in the Navy. I hadn't seen him for two years or so. I was given permission to board his ship; I saw food I hadn't seen for so long, like fresh fruit and bread. He got the measles later and was quarantined. I had three brothers in service at the same time. "

Did you ever get in trouble?

"I was never in jail. In Shepard Field, Elsie came down for a couple weeks. And one day I was taking a shower and I hung my dog tags on a nail and forgot them. We had an evening retreat and the captain said get out your dog tags, so I grabbed for them and they weren't there. I about broke out and ran to the shower to get them but I knew I couldn't do that. But the captain walked right by me and didn't say a word. This was good because I wouldn't have been able to leave and see Elsie for those weeks. There was another time I left a pair of socks in my shoes under my bed, and you're not supposed to leave anything in your shoes. I got two hours of close drill."

Donald C. Harader now lives in Arkansas City, Kansas. I am proud to be his great granddaughter. Learning about history from him in his own words is the best way to learn about history. It keeps it interesting and it shows how this really happened. We don't study this in school. I am proud of my great grandfather and I honor our veterans past, present, and future.