

My first encounter with the 14<sup>th</sup> Airforce 69<sup>th</sup> depot repair squadron was in 2005 when I attended the Flying Tigers Reunion in Indianapolis with my family. We attended this reunion because my grandfather (called Zaidie by all of his grandchildren), Arthur Littman, served with this group during WW11. This was one of the rare times we all got to spend time together because we lived so far apart. I never got to hear Zaidie talk about his war experiences because they lived in New York and we lived in Texas so we did not get to see each other that often. At the reunion, I remember hearing stories about The Flying Tigers but, because I was only eight year old, did not understand much of the historical significance. Recently, I visited The Flying Tigers website to read more about the history of the group and was actually surprised by what I learned.

While reading the history of The Flying Tigers, I learned that Zaidie had been part of a group of 350 men that ranged from maintenance officers, mechanics, repairmen, welders, and drivers, to mail clerks and cooks. These men were sent to China with a mission to provide essential air support to keep China in the war. Their role was to maintain Army Air Corp fighter planes, transports, and bombers. Before reading this, I was unaware that Zaidie had been a part of such an important group during the war. I continued reading about their journey overseas and the uncomfortable conditions that they faced. I can only imagine the reaction to arriving in Bombay, India to humid weather and masses of people begging for food. As I continued reading, I learned about their 1800 mile journey through the tropical jungles in Burma and over the highest mountain range in the world. They drove on for days on roads that had 4,000 foot drop offs with meals of ration food and one canteen of water per day. If Zaidie were still with us, this is something that I would certainly ask him about. Reading all of this shocked me because I

realized how dedicated these men were to their country to carry out their mission in these conditions.

Earlier this month my father attended the most recent reunion of The Flying Tigers in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, Zaidie was not in attendance at this reunion because he passed away earlier this year. My dad shared with me that this particular reunion was unique because there were special guests including some men from China who wanted to thank the men who helped free them from the Japanese 70 years ago. After telling me about the reunion, my dad explained to me more about the group and Zaidie's involvement during WW11.

I learned from my dad that Zaidie served with the flying tigers from 1944 to 1946 in the China/ Burma/ India theater as an airplane mechanic. He said that Zaidie did not talk much about the war but he often talked about driving the Burma road. My dad explained to me that they drove trucks over 1000 miles on the Burma road through the Himalaya mountains. I learned that this was the only supply line into China. They drove this road so that they could supply the American and the Chinese forces with supplies to set up an airfield in Kunming, China. He explained that the road went through winding mountains with no guard rails for thousands of miles. They carried spare parts, fuel, and other necessities to set up an air base. Zaidie was stationed there for the rest of the war and spent this time fixing airplanes. The types of planes he fixed were P-40s and P-51s. He stayed with the 69<sup>th</sup> depot repair squadron the entire time. After the war was over he stayed with many of his unit for several months until 1946 when he was discharged as a Corporal.