

Being the proud grandson of E. Raymond Burkett, 308th Bomb Group, 425th Bomb Squadron, 14th AAF, I grew up hearing many stories of what I refer to as the adventures shared in the CBI, or forgotten theatre, during WWII. These men were basically just kids, following orders. As proud Americans, so many enlisted and began training for combat. During trainings the soldiers mastered military tactics and weaponry while building strong camaraderie and still managing time to enjoy some shenanigans. My grandfather told many stories of times shared during trainings, but his facial expression, especially his eyes, would change when he would describe flying his first real mission. He said that instantly the fun was gone, and the reality slapped him in the face as he thought, "Man, this is real". From that point forward, his crew learned to live with fear, always alert, yet still recognize the beauty that surrounded them, realizing that each day was a blessing one should never take for granted. Grandpappy always said, "God gives us the ability to remember the good times and fade out the bad." He knew this from experience. He formed amazing lifelong bonds with the guys in his crew enduring all of the amazing feats they performed throughout their service to our country, they, like so many in the 14th Air Force, maintained a sense of humor, an appreciation of life and nature, and remained humble as they faced daily dangers to carry out their assigned duties.

Members of the 14th Air Force have a rich history that falls to the descendants to ensure it is never forgotten. As I stood and watched my grandfather's casket being lowered into the ground last May, I realized that he has left me a rich heritage and that belonging to the 14th Air Force was an enormous part of what made him the amazing man that he was. Flying the Hump, those men learned to face their fears and stay focused on the mission. In the face of danger from both enemies and mother nature, they never gave up, and never turned back.

According to Carroll V. Glines (6), the 308th wide-ranging activities through nearly three years of bitter air warfare are virtually unknown, despite the fact that it performed some of the

most accurate bombing of the U. S. Army Air Forces, and used the first American “smart bomb” called the Azon. The 308th also sustained the highest casualty rate in the USAAF, for its missions were long and hard, often conducted at very low level and at night through the very heart of Japanese-occupied territory and over their controlled sea lanes.” My grandfather, a proud member of the 308th, advised that it was true that crews viewed combat missions as less stressful than the haul over the Hump, and that it took about four trips hauling supplies over the Hump to be ready for one bombing mission. I am proud to say that my grandpappy was there.

My mind continually floods with the stories not only read in my research, but those shared personally by my grandfather. One experience that will always stick with me is when flying a mission, the crew member in the bottom ball turret got shot. My grandfather, well trained, but still basically a kid, knew he had to pull him up into the plane. Once he was pulled up, grandpappy laid him down on the floor of the plane. It was then blatantly obvious that he had been shot in the ass, basically blew one “cheek” off. They were at high altitude, and following both basic army training and common sense from childhood about applying direct pressure, grandpappy pulled down his buddy’s pants, poured sulfur on it, and sat on him until they landed safely. He would laugh, years later, when sharing the guy said, “Hey, Burke, what am I going to tell my girlfriend?” as they took him away. Cimi not only lived, but returned to the crew to fulfill his obligation with his friends. I was impressed with this story because I thought it was such a heroic act, that grandpappy saved that guy’s life. But grandpappy, even when being asked to be interviewed by people, would always say, “I didn’t do anything special, I was just a kid doing my job, we all were.”

Another experience that exemplifies how they always enjoyed humor and the beauty of their natural surroundings amidst the traumas of war was his story of watching some movies in a clearing in the jungle occasionally during their down time. I’m pretty sure they were simple reel to reel films common for the era. Grandpappy would always chuckle when he said at the

end of one movie they turned on the lights, and the monkeys were perched as if they had been watching the movie with them. He would always end the story with "that's for real". He shared endless encounters with snakes, tigers, and tribes such as head hunters. In fact, my mother owns a topaz ring made from one of the gems he received from a head hunter in a trade for gum. It is amazing that they managed to share so many good times amidst the ongoing dangers faced daily and everywhere, not just from the Japanese.

Clearly, the amazing feats of the 14th Army Air Force have been documented over time through personal anecdotes, and novels printed. It is a part of history that helped change the outcome of WWII. The men who served in the 14th Air Force did their jobs successfully and lost many comrades in the process. To be able to visit first hand with soldiers like my grandfather enables one to view what they endure through their eyes, a truly priceless experience. My memories of the many experiences shared during the war by my grandfather, not only make me proud of him, but all who served with him, and all who continue to willingly serve in the military endeavors of our nation.

Clines, Carroll V.. Chennault's Forgotten Warriors: The Saga of the 308th Bomb Group In China. PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd., 1995. Print.