

## Flying Tigers

Saverio Zolfarelli now age 89, also known as my Nonno, Italian for grandfather is a great man that I have a lot of respect for. He was involved in WWII, and also a part of the 300 first airborne supply squad they were called the 300 first air depot group 69<sup>th</sup> repair quadrant. He was kind enough to tell me about what he did and told me about the Flying Tigers and his experience being involved in the Flying Tigers and the War. He gave me some basic background information about the Flying Tigers were a Volunteer Air Force civilians and pilots flying against Japanese in china for the Chinese Government. They were flying P-40 air planes. These volunteer pilots worked for the government and Claire Chennault was in charge of the flying tigers. The 14<sup>th</sup> air force symbol was of a flying Tiger and was yellow and blue, he still has some things with this symbol and also gave many of the things he has with this to my father. My Nonno was drafted in 1943 to join the Air Force. Right away he was shipped of to do basic training and went to Bombay India. In Bombay he went to the staging area, he remembers waiting to get into these trucks; they were 6x6 trucks that were being loaded with people. From there they were given a certain date to arrive and set towards China. He traveled the Burma Road while the Americans and Japanese were still fighting, he ended his travels in Kuming China, and there was the flying 14<sup>th</sup> air force. My Nonno was involved in this repairing and rebuilding air planes which was also known as the Metal Men. There he worked on many air planes rebuilding and stayed there until 1945. These men also brought all their equipment they needed with them to the base and repair facility. As he was telling me all of this he distinctly remember and kept saying that he spent Christmas there which was difficult for him being away from his family at

the holiday time. Soon after that he was deployed to Shanghai and was supposed to fly to another destination but that was interrupted because the bomb dropped in Japan and he ended in staying in Shanghai. When leaving the air strip and he had arrived back the 14<sup>th</sup> air force was later called the Flying Tigers. Some of the men were asked to join the American Air Force some accepted others did not. My Nonno decided it was time for him to go home and he left in 1946.

After talking to him a second time my Nonno had told me that he kept a journal of his starting travels and shared some of that information with me, first he noted the Burma Road was 1,700 miles from china to the base. Claire Chennault was the commander of the Volunteer American Group from 1941-1945 also known as the AVG. This group had pilots that were not in the military. He also remembers that the CBI had a symbol that was a shield, at the top of shield it had a blue background, 2 white stars, 3 red strips 2 white strips on the bottom. A memory that is still very clear to him was in India there was the stage area where everyone was assigned a vehicle. They had to learn to drive that truck, it was a general motors' truck they drove over the Burma Road. Each truck had equipment, his contained machine products and he was lucky enough that his truck was not filled to the top of the canvas; this was where he slept at night, instead of sleeping outside on the ground he was able to have a covering of the canvas and sleep in the back of his truck. Here is a timeline he gave me; they started on mission to Kelly field in Texas February of 1945. On February 19<sup>th</sup> they were in Riverside California, then boarded the USS Admiral on the 27<sup>th</sup> and on Wednesday March 7<sup>th</sup> they crossed the equator to Australia at 2pm, on March 14<sup>th</sup> they had left again and March 16<sup>th</sup> crossed back over the equator and on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, March 25<sup>th</sup> went to Bombay India arrived at 11am, boarded the train that night to go to camp Kanchaatara. April 21<sup>st</sup> the first convoy left only drove 30 miles, April 22<sup>nd</sup> the second group left and April 23<sup>rd</sup> the third group left. On May 8<sup>th</sup> they drove 3 miles only to wait around and then on May 10<sup>th</sup> they went to the Salween Mountains, crossed over a suspension bridge one truck at a time went 9,000 feet elevation. May 11<sup>th</sup> drove 139 miles, he remembers running out of gas that day and on May 12<sup>th</sup> they drove 13 miles that was also the day that Russia declared war on Japan. May 14<sup>th</sup> left at 10:30 from the mountains. Throughout the time driving in the mountains he recalls it being very dusty, there was always dust clouds and dirt everywhere. They drove for 122 miles and had a good meal of rice and eggs for breakfast. Arrived at Kuming and the total travels was 1,708 miles.