

## War Era Story Project 2012

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Current home town: Cincinnati, Ohio

Age: 89

I graduated from High School in 1941 and worked one year before being drafted. I went to St. Petersburg, FL for one month to learn the basics of marching. We lived in tents on a golf course. I was sent to the Gulf for one month for Air Force basics and then was sent to Chanute AFB for one month for Instrument Training. I was sent to California for one month to work on planes. My squadron, 426 Night Fighters, was formed in Delano, CA.

I crossed the USA by train, and with 6,000 GIs, both male and female, I boarded a ship on the east coast. We went through the Panama Canal, to Australia for gas, then on to Bombay, India, in 30 days. When we finally disembarked, GIs from the previous ship helped us unload our things. As I was walking down the plank, I heard "Hi Ed!" It was a high school classmate there in Kunming, China! Kunming was the first base on level ground. We took a five-day train ride to Calcutta.

Our squadron had 250 troops on base. We assembled the planes; it wasn't hard to do. Our plane was the P-61; it was a black two-engine plane with RADAR. It was a new plane to help cut down on night bombings. Full moon was bomb night, as they could see the shiny planes. We were assigned pilots to work for. Pilots flew over the Himalayan Mountains - "The Hump" - for two hours at 15,000 feet to China. China provided foot soldiers, we provided planes.

All of our supplies had to be flown over "The Hump," two hours at 15,000 feet in all kinds of weather. We were given one of four bases: one for B-29s, one for P-47s, another for P-51s and the fourth for our 16 P-61 Radar Night Fighters. We were now officially called "The Flying Tigers." Planes went on missions two at a time; there were very few losses.

As the Chinese troops lost ground, we loaded remaining planes and supplies and retreated slowly. The war was going against the Japanese and we went on the offense. We went on missions at dusk with trains and trucks as our main targets. If pilots complained about their instruments, I was told to check it out. I was skilled enough to "remove and replace."

The only entrance to China from India was the Burma Road, but when the Japanese won the battle, they closed the road to any traffic. The only way to get supplies into China was by plane. The first level spot was at Kunming, and most planes needed gas at this point.

My buddy and I decided to go to town. We had to find a bank to get Chinese money. We were approached by a Chinaman who said, "Change money Joe?" I gave him 10 dollars; he gave me 3,000 cian. We probably just flew them over the "Hump." We bought pillowcases for 300 cian, one bottle of wine for 300 cian, and one steak dinner for 500 cian. A six-piece band played "In The Mood" to a

different cadence; we couldn't figure it out. Dancers spit on the floor. I bought the pillowcases to send home – a way to let family know where I was stationed.

Some other memorable occurrences:

- I helped unload cargo for two Hollywood stars for a show: Pat O'Brien and Jinx Falkenberg.
- I was bombed on my birthday at midnight.
- We had a full moon air raid; no planes or airmen were hit.

The best plane ride I had was in the C-54 over the "Hump." Two hours up above the clouds. This plane was "supercharged" and could fly above rain clouds. The worst ride I had was a C-47 twin engine with no supercharger; therefore it could only fly under the ice.

My worst experience was watching a P-47 land in a group of workers. It killed five and they were buried "on the spot" in an hour. The plane lost power.

My best experience was when I was flown in a P-61 from a close base to pitch against the B-29 base in a softball game. The officers were just paid and a thousand dollars was bet on the game. We wondered why the game was so late starting. We found out! A Jeep with four stars arrived – with General Chenault in it! He was in charge of the Asian Theater. We won, and General Chenault wanted to bat against me. He batted left handed, and I almost hit him!

Another terrible experience – The war was over and we were waiting for a ride home. Some of us were playing softball, and some of us were watching a movie. All of our P-61s were already sent away. As each P-61 was sent away, the pilot would "buzz" our tent area. If the plane didn't shake our tents, it wasn't a good "buzz job." I was catching in a "slow pitch" softball game. A P-38 was approaching at full speed – 400 mph – over the treetops – going down – down – down – down. The center fielder and the first baseman hit the dirt – or they may have been hit by the plane. We didn't have a P-38 on our base! So where did he come from? The pilot hit the Mess Hall made of plaster. He went up the roof destroying the plane, killing the pilot and injuring four "helpers." The pilot was picked up in a blanket. The war was over. He was "fooling around." Helpers were rolling on the grass to put out the flames.

I was in China for three years and when the war was over I had to stay in 6 more months, as I didn't have enough "points." I was at Cheng-Tu and 4-Sian. I was discharged in February 1946 as a S/Sgt.