



1st. Lt. Bob Lather
413th Headquarters
Group Armament Officer

Bob is 87 years old, born in 1921. When I said I was going to document Dad's WWII experiences, Bob said "that sounds like a dadgone good idea".

In June 1942, Bob volunteered as an aviation cadet, but "washed out" in his initial training. You were expected to fly solo in 10 days and he couldn't. He was then assigned to Kelly Field in Texas as a mechanic, even though he didn't know much about repairing anything.

At some point the Air Corps decided that soldiers should be assigned to specialized training schools and Bob chose a school because it was in Denver which he'd heard was a "good soldier town". In January Bob arrived at Buckley Field where he volunteered as an aerial gunner. Even though he passed the physical, the hospital kept him for ten days due to illness. "I

guess they were looking for warm bodies", said Bob. In any event, Bob went to armorer school instead, falling back a class due to his illness.

Upon completion of his training, Bob took advantage of an opportunity to attend officer's training school. Training took place at both the Boca Raton Club in Florida, which sadly had been fitted out with Army cots, and Yale University. Upon his graduation as an armament officer on 7/1/43, Bob was assigned first to bases at Westover, MA, Providence, RI and then in late 1944 he became the Group Armament Officer for the newly formed 413th Fighter Group at Blumenthal, NC where he met, and first worked with, Dad.

When it was time to ship out, Bob remembered that Dad left before the rest of the 413th to be sure that their supplies were where they should be and ready to go. In his absence, Bob had to handle some of the supply issues. In one case, "trained men came to box equipment" and Bob had to assist them to be sure all the unit's equipment was packed up. In another, Bob signed for some supplies (spoons and forks) which later were found to be missing, which led to some difficulties.

Eventually Bob arrived at Ie Shima on the Kota Inten. Each of the 413th's three squadrons had an armament officer and Bob's responsibility was to review their work. Armament included the

P-47N's 8 guns, racks for bombs and rockets, the bombs and rockets themselves and the gun site. A significant part of their job involved the failure of equipment such as gun stoppages and dud rockets.

As far as being in harm's way, Bob recalls, "I was a 22, 23 year old kid and thought it was fun. We had a lot of bombings. It was frightening sometimes, but the bombings weren't near me."

However, Bob shares one unpleasant memory with Bert Collison. "There was an open air theatre where we'd watch movies. You'd sit on empty boxes." One night a Japanese bomber flew directly over the theatre with its engines off, unheard by the audience until it throttled up and headed towards one of the airfields to drop its bombs.

"I'm sorry that I don't have more memories of your father, There was such a difference in age". "Your Dad didn't act like he wanted to be there, but he did his job pretty good I guess."

When I reminded Bob of the time he was with Dad when his Jeep was stolen, Bob chuckled.

"Your father was kind to me. In 1964 I came to New York City with my wife and three children and he took us to dinner at the Yale Club.

Before the war, Bob had been a locomotive fireman. When he returned home he went to Indiana University to study accounting, but didn't enjoy the work. "I went back to the New York Central [which became the Penn Central and then Conrail] as an engineer", from where Bob eventually retired.

