

NEWTON DANA

World War II veteran was a member of the Flying Tigers

By Jeff Werner
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BUCKINGHAM – Newton Dana lived a lifetime in 1945.

It was during that historic year that Dana flew with the infamous 14th Air Force's Flying Tigers under the command of Gen. Claire Lee Chenault. He co-piloted a B-24 Liberator, flying harrowing bombing and supply missions over the Himalayas and into China during World War II.

"Because of what we were doing in China, the Japanese had to split their forces in the Pacific," said Dana. "They had to bring forces over to China and that made it easier for our guys in the Pacific who were bombing Japan."

A native of Trenton, Dana graduated from Trenton High School in 1941. After high school, he enrolled at Ohio State University to study animal husbandry. In 1943, World War II interrupted his education. He left OSU and volunteered for the draft to become a flight officer with the U.S. Air Force. He was 18 years old.

"I always wanted to fly, but it was in the back of my head. Now, here I am enrolled in flight training," said Dana. "And I always knew I was going to end up in China. No rhyme, reason or correlation. There was nothing on paper as to why this should occur. I just had a feeling," he said.

For the next year, he underwent extensive training to become a pilot with the U.S. Air Force. He took basic training on the 12th floor of the Claridge Hotel in Atlantic City. He then trained in West Virginia, Florida and Alabama before earning his wings in September 1944 from twin engine pilot school in Arkansas.

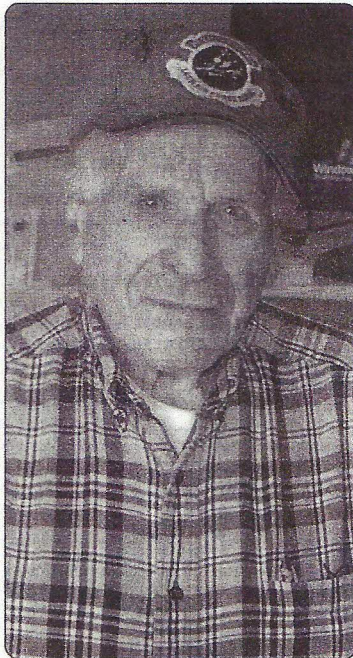
From there he was sent to Texas where he was trained to fly the Liberator and then to Westover Field in Massachusetts where he met his flight crew in October 1944. The crew trained together in Charleston, S.C., before flying to Mitchell Field to pick up their plane, which they named the Manhattan Maiden.

In February 1945, the 12-member crew with Dana in the co-pilot's seat departed on the long flight to China with stops in Bermuda, the Azores, Marrakesh, Tunis, Benghazi and Iran. The crew arrived in India before traversing the Himalayas to their final destination, an airbase in China.

During their seven months there, Dana and the crew of the Manhattan Maiden flew 40 bombing and supply missions over Eastern China, hitting targets occupied by Japanese forces.

"If it wasn't for the Flying Tigers, they would have overrun China," said Dana, of the Japanese.

One of their most frequent missions was the Yellow River Bridge that crossed the



Newton Dana, now and in the 1940s during World War II.

Yangtze. "That was the main link going down into China and our job was to knock that out," he said. "But every time you'd hit it, they'd rebuild it overnight," he said. "We were constantly going over it. It was heavily armed."

Dana said the crew frequently flew through exploding flack, which caused tension on the plane. He remembers one mission where a burst exploded overhead and one of the guys ducked his head down too quickly and broke his scalp open. Blood dripped down onto the navigator's charts causing some concern until they determined the injury was not life threatening.

During a mission to bomb a power plant, Dana said several planes in their formation were lost. "Coming back we lost people running out of gas because it was over 12 hours. 12 hours in the air is a lot of damn time," he said. One of the planes barely made it back after losing two of its engines.

With the end of the war approaching and after exhausting their targets in China, the crew relocated to an airbase in India and flew supply missions over the Himalayas.

Flying "over the hump" was scarier and more dangerous than the bombing missions, said Dana. And the statistics bear him out. The Air Force lost 580 aircraft between air transport and heavy bombers

during that time period.

"Imagine not having navigation, no stars to look at and you're fighting weather, sometimes with winds of over 150 mph, and you can't get a real good fix. You had no control over your destiny," he said.

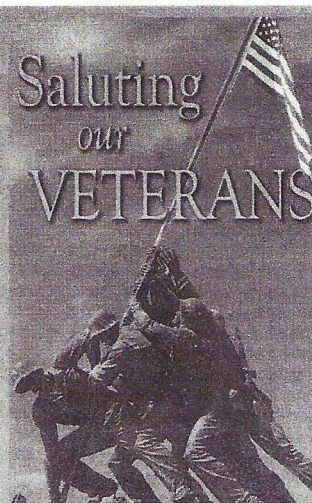
"Every bomb we dropped, every gallon of gas we used we had to fly over the Himalayas," said Dana. "We lost more people hauling gas than we did in combat."

Inside the cockpit, Dana said he felt invincible, like nothing was going to happen to him. "When you're young and 20 you're stupid," he says today. "Whatever happened, happened to the other guy. The only time you got excited is when something comes close to you. Over the hump I got rid of that feeling. Flying over the Himalayas was worse than combat. The Himalayas was enough to scare the hell out of anyone."

The crew returned to the United States in early October 1945 not long after the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan putting an end to the war in the Pacific.

"Had President Truman not dropped the bomb, I wouldn't be sitting here," said Dana. "I guarantee you that. We would have had over 50 percent fatalities."

Following the war, Dana returned to Ohio State University and finished his degree in animal husbandry, graduating in 1948.

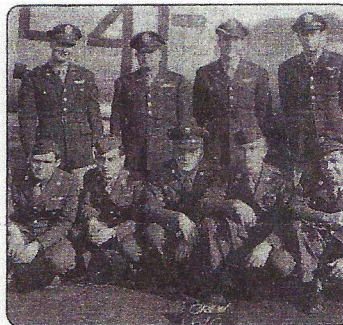


Each week we'll bring you a story about the men and women who have defended our country during times of war. The contribution of these heroes who walk the streets of our community is often overlooked. We thought it fitting to tell their stories here. If you know a veteran whose story should be featured here, please contact the editor at: Advance@BucksLocalNews.com.

He returned to Trenton where he worked for his family's meat packing business, Delaware Valley Meat Packing. He was married in 1952 and moved across the river to Bucks County in 1955. He eventually moved to Lower Makefield where he raised his family.

He recently moved to Buckingham Springs where he continues to work as a food broker, a job he has done since 1964. He'll be 87 next month.

"I lived a lifetime in a very short time and the only heroes are not in this room," he said, his voice filling with emotion. "This was a war of survival. There was no choice on this. It was just something that had to be done."



The crew of the Manhattan Maiden.