

Decorated Lafayette WWII Veteran Lives Life to the Fullest

By Lou Fancher



Dan Baker with a model of the Curtiss SB-2C Helldiver aircraft. Photo A. Scheck

Dan Baker is a man of action. Ask the 94-year-old former World War II Navy fighter pilot and still-actively practicing attorney about his late wife, Arlene, who passed away in 2012, he springs out of a chair in his Lafayette home's sunroom and races down a hallway. Returning with a black-and-white photo of his wife of 64 years, he spouts poetic and practical reasons for marrying her within three months of their first meeting. "She was charming, inside and outside. Look at her: she was beauty itself," and "She was working and making

money: I wasn't," he says. Then, like the Grumman F6F Hellcat he flew long ago in combat, a subsequent inquiry about WWII battles sends him running again. Returning, he brings medals, mounted in a display box: a Navy Cross, for bombing the Japanese battleship Nagato; the Distinguished Flying Cross, for destroying a second enemy ship; an Air Medal, for shooting down a Japanese fighter plane. Baker grew up in San Francisco and says he was "a party boy," a kid who started as an honor student and "went downhill" just gradually

enough to still graduate from college. A heart murmur kept him out of the Army, but when the country started to re-examine even legitimate outliers like Baker, he joined the Navy on May 10, 1942. "Nobody had a choice," he says. "Everybody had the idea they wanted to go because there was a war going on."

After training on a two-winged Stermann airplane at Navy Preliminary Flight School in Livermore, Baker was sent to Florida. Trained on combat planes, he became an instructor and scouted the Atlantic coast, looking for German submarines. After 10 months, he was assigned to Air Group 18 and found himself on the 900-foot-long U.S.S. Intrepid, an aircraft carrier that is now the Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum located at Pier 86 on the west side of Manhattan.

But in October of 1944, the Intrepid was a launch pad for the Battle of Leyte Gulf, arguably the largest battle in naval history. "We took down the two largest battleships ever built in Japan, the Yamato and Musashi," Baker says. Japan used all the steel the country produced to build and arm the two signature battleships, distinguished by their size and then-record-setting 18.1 inch guns. "Our group was responsible for sinking the Musashi," Baker says.

Although unafraid to assert the importance of the U.S. military victories, Baker isn't sentimental about his role. "I was trained to do one thing: fly a plane with guns and bombs and go after the targets," he says. "They gave you an award for what you did. When I returned, they thought I was a hero. I thought I'd accomplished the things I was trained to do, and did it successfully."

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Samira Says



Samira Davi is a Nurse Liaison for ManorCare Health Services in Walnut Creek. Samira has over 10 years of experience working in health care in Contra Costa County, which has gained her a wide view of what is important to the health care consumer. She will be posting common questions and comments in each issue of the Lamorinda Weekly. You are welcome to contact Samira directly at 925.270.8766

Pre-Op Counseling

We at ManorCare recommend that patients who are planning a surgery visit a few post-acute rehab centers prior to their hospitalization. By making these pre-surgery visits, stress and anxiety can be greatly reduced. Now you can focus solely on your recovery.

We would be pleased for you to call one of our centers and schedule a tour or to ask any questions that you may have. For patients who are unable to visit or would prefer "pre-op counseling" in the physician's office at the time of an appointment - we are happy to do that as well. We are happy to meet with you in either location and explain what to expect from a post-acute rehab center. Any patient that the physician feels would benefit from post-acute rehabilitation is appropriate for this service. ManorCare staff will also investigate your insurance coverage on your behalf.

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You will get to decide where you rehabilitate. We encourage you visit, to ask a lot of questions, to do your research, and to ask your physicians for their opinion. We are here to help, so please feel free to ask any member of our team for assistance at any time.

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