

Navy League of the U.S. | Imperial Valley Council November 2019 Speaker Biography

JOHN COLLVER and WARDOG

Pilot and Plane, Wardog Airshows

We are pleased to introduce John Collver and “War Dog” a 1944 Marine SNJ-5 Texan who together have been thrilling audiences with their aerial tribute to the military for 36 years.

John’s father’s WWII military service influenced John’s choice to fly the T-6 Texan.

The Texan is a WWII trainer celebrating its 80th year of service; known as the pilot maker because it trained more military pilots than any other airplane in history.



John’s flying career began over 50 years ago, at the age of 13, and at the age of 16, he soloed 5 different types of airplanes. At this time, he has logged more than 15,000 hours flying time and has been entertaining audiences across the west, with more than 1200 air show performances at major military and civilian air shows. His aerobatic career started with competition in 1974 in the International Aerobatic Club, where he achieved high rankings in their Gold Cup Championships.

Simultaneously, he was flying as a corporate pilot for Northrop/ Grumman, where he flew everything from turbo-props to jets. At Northrop/ Grumman he became a captain who flew such notables as, Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger, State Senators Diane Feinstein, and Barbara Boxer, and Brigadier General Chuck Yeager. Among the more than 50 different types of aircraft John has flown are the Goodyear Blimp “Columbia” and television’s “Airwolf” helicopter. And in “War Dog”, John flew Louis Zamperini, made known to many through the book and movie “Unbroken.

When John acquired “War Dog”, he chose to restore her to her original paint scheme, from her El Toro days. The green stripes on her wings designate her as an instrument trainer. In 1946, after serving at El Toro, she was reassigned to serve at Marine Corp Air Station Miramar. Later, she was assigned to the Naval Training Command where she was used for carrier qualifications aboard the USS Cabot off the coast of Pensacola, Florida. In the 1950’s “War Dog” was retired from the Navy and was sent to Japan to serve in the Japanese Self Defense Force. After several years of service with the Japanese, “War Dog” was retired and was due to be scrapped. Instead, she was saved along with several other T-6 Texans when they were purchased by civilians in the US. John helped with her restoration and eventually became her sole owner.

A measure of the respect John carries in the field of aerobatics is his designation as one of the air show industry’s Aerobatic Competency Examiners, entrusted with ensuring the competency of other aerobatic performers. John and “War Dog” have been featured in film and numerous national and international publications. He even performed for Vice President George H. Bush.