



**Dean
Laird**
Navy

Dean Laird

Feb 17, 1921 - Aug 10, 2022

BIRTHPLACE: Loomis, CA

SOLDIER DETAILS

HIGHEST RANK: Commander

DIVISION: Navy, USS Ranger (CV-4), USS Essex (CV-9)

THEATER OF OPERATION: European

SERVED: Dec 7, 1941 -

MILITARY HONORS: Distinguished Flying Cross, Congressional Gold Medal,

HONORED BY: The Eisenhower Foundation

BIOGRAPHY

Dean Samuel "Diz" Laird was born in Loomis CA. His nickname came from a popular character at the time "Dizzy Dean". He played baseball in High School and had a pilots license by the time the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. On December 7, 1941, Laird drove to San Francisco to enlist. Laird entered the U.S. Navy cadet program. On August 11, 1942, he became a commissioned officer. In NAS Miami, Florida, on October 21, 1942, he became a Naval Aviator. Laird shot down 5.75 enemy aircraft in combat and he damaged an additional plane. Two of his kills were German planes: A Ju 88 and a He 115 in October 1943 near Norway. The other kills were Japanese planes so Laird has the distinction of being the only Navy ace to have scored air victories against both Germany and Japan. He flew F4F Wildcat and then F6F Hellcats and was assigned from November 1942 to March 1943, to the aircraft carrier USS Ranger (CV-4). November 1944 to March 1945 he was assigned to the USS Essex (CV-9). In December 1944, Laird was almost shot down. His F6F Hellcat was riddled with bullets over the Philippines, but he was able to pilot the plane back to the USS Essex which was 250 miles away. His landing gear did not work and Laird landed the plane skidding on its bottom across the deck of the aircraft carrier USS Essex. He received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions on February 7, 1945. Laird was escorting bomber planes which were attacking heavily defended Japanese aircraft engine factories. He shot down two Japanese planes during that mission near Tokyo, Japan. In 1969, Laird was a stunt pilot. He performed many of the stunts in the 20th Century Fox film Tora! Tora! Tora!; he helped choreograph the reenactment of the attack on Pearl Harbor and was the lead stunt pilot. He was one of the three main pilots in the film and he flew approximately 164 hours during production. In 1958 he moved to Coronado, where he co-owned and operated the Coronado Municipal Golf Course restaurant; in 2015 he moved back north to Walnut Creek to be close

to his daughter and her family. Courtesy of American Veterans Center and Wikipedia.com.