

A GREAT LIFE SKY KING



JACK ★ CONES

the

FLYING CONSTABLE OF TWENTYNINE PALMS

BY CHRISTOPHER FREEZE

"FROM OUT OF THE CLEAR BLUE
OF THE WESTERN SKY..."

Mention the name *Sky King* to just about all pilots over 50 and chances are a smile will come to their faces as they begin to tell you about how, as a child, they watched the show on weekend television and dreamed of flying someday.

September of 2011 marked the 60th anniversary of the television series first airing. Many a pilot was inspired to fly by the radio and television adventure series *Sky King*. The story featured Arizona rancher and pilot Schuyler "Sky" King who, on the weekly show, chased black-hatted "bad guys" and helped "good guys" in his Cessna T-50 Bobcat *Songbird*, registered as N67832, with the periodic assistance of his niece, Penny, or his nephew, Clipper, who were both also pilots.

The series originally ran, off and on, from September 16, 1951, until March 8, 1959, but continued with reruns until the late 1960s.

What is not generally known is that the fictional exploits of *Sky King* paralleled the real-life deeds and adventures of Orville Jackson "Jack" Cones, known locally as "The Flying Constable of Twentynine Palms" in California from 1940 until his death in 1960.

MIDWESTERN ROOTS

Born and raised in Missouri, Jack received only a grade school education before enlisting in the Texas National Guard in 1917. From the Midwest, he went on to serve in France during World War I where, in the 17 months he served there, he became the personal motorcycle dispatch rider for Gen. John Pershing, the commander of the American Expeditionary Forces, and was also wounded in combat.

After the war, he moved to Southern California, where he met his wife, Clara. The couple decided to become homesteaders in the Mojave Desert in 1929. An experienced tractor operator, he helped build many of the early roads in San Bernardino County.

In March of 1932, he was appointed the second constable of the small township and was reputed to be able to "make a tin can dance in the sand with his gun." Initially, he patrolled the more than 2,800 square miles of his jurisdiction on horseback or automobile. A skilled marksman with his well-worn six-shooter, he preferred to handle crises with words and conversation before resorting to gunplay, earning himself the moniker "The Last of the Peace Officers."



THE LAST AIRCRAFT USED was a 1960 Cessna 310D, registered as N6817T. This plane was used only for promotional tours and advertising, not in the actual show. After its duties were complete and the show was canceled, the aircraft was sold and changed to a different color scheme. It sat forgotten at the Nut Tree Airport (KVCB) in California for a number of years, until it was purchased by its current owners, Paul and Valerie Erickson of Novato, California. When they learned of its prior history, they gave the plane a complete restoration—down to the aluminum.

Virtually everyone associated with the production of *Sky King* is dead today. While Jack's exploits were well-documented in the press of the day and for 15 years before the first airing of the *Sky King* radio show in 1946, no direct connection can be made today.

Today, in downtown Twentynine Palms, a 16-foot by 60-foot mural of the pilot and lawman adorns the town. The artist, Tim O'Connor, of Twentynine Palms, came to admire the constable—whom he never met—after hearing stories

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