

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY SHERIFF'S AERO SQUADRON

WHERE THE LITTLE CABLE CARS.....

by Jim Palmer

Article I of the original constitution of the San Francisco Sheriff's Air Squadron reads in part: "the organization is instituted for the association of gentlemen desiring to constitute a volunteer flying force for advancing the interests of and to advertise the City and County of San Francisco; etc. etc."

Elmer Tushoff, the Flicking Photographer of Fresno, in one of his Budda-like, sage observations, once said, "San Francisco (he was speaking of the Sheriff's Air Squadron) has more characters than all of the other Western States Squadrons put together."

And so, with no resentment but rather with pride in our accomplishment, the Sheriff's Air Squadron admits that it has characters - and character, thus keeping in pace with-our heritage and hoping that we are accepted everywhere as is our City.

One foggy, dripping evening in August, back in the dim year of 1941, two well-seasoned, blue-yonder fly boys, Larry Hall and George 'Cap' Richards, stopped in at a Bush Street bistro to quench their thirst and discuss and promulgate a most important idea.

Our heroes, strong in their purpose, marched over to an empty table, flinging aside the clinging, sensual bodies as they went, seated themselves and proceeded to concentrate on drawing up a constitution and by-laws for, the San Francisco Sheriff's Air Squadron.

Though it was a tough battle, that night, our staunch warriors lived to gather a nucleus of throttle jockeys, Wallv Morrison, Harold Simpton, Bob Francoz and Fred Vivaldi, around them, and this was the first, and finest, of Sheriff's Air Squadrons -- SAN FRANCISCO.

When WW II ended and combat men came home to San Francisco from all corners of this slightly elliptical orange, the Squadron again became active, and there was a clamoring at the gates and mass supplication from the returning eagles for membership in this elite of elites.

Finally, we were allowed to stretch our membership to thirty-five active members, and the Squadron leaned itself out and started to climb.

There was not much opportunity for search and rescue in the City itself, but we tried hard. One Sunday, it took us all of ten minutes to find and bring down from his lofty perch a student flyer who, solo in an Aircoupe, was buzzing some of his pals playing baseball in Golden Gate Park, and who made the mistake of trying a power-off landing in a huge eucalyptus tree. But, there were flights, practices and the BT patrol over the City, and the Squadron flew at every excuse.

Along about this time, a group of several Sheriff's Air Squadrons got together one weekend at Bass Lake, and the Western States Association was born. Now there were more excuses to fly, more places to go, other birds to pick feathers and hanger fly with, and we drank deeply from this cup. The mutual assistance and exchanges of ideas with, the Squadrons gave us strength.

Many of you will recall when we asked you to fly in and help us with our Disaster Day Exercise in 1951. You responded, 47 planes strong, and brought in over a ton of simulated medical supplies and many nurses and doctors.

Convinced by this dramatic flight that the extensive plans on which Bob Borrmann, Edson Adams, Del Abell and Ed Titlow had worked for months were 4.0, the Civil Defense brass took our carefully outlined report and put it on file in file thirteen! But we had fun doing it and appreciated the help of Western States'

We had our own flights every Sunday, though, and all hands participated.

There was that Sunday in May, 1949, when we delivered an old bell that was being returned from Spain to the Mission Jolon. Charley Parker picked up the unwieldy object at San Francisco Airport, roped and hog-tied it in an old Norseman he had borrowed and led a formation of BTs, 140s, T-craft, Luscombs and you name it, all strung out like a flight of lost, Canadian honkers, toward the mission over the hills from King City.

By inviting the Squadron to a fly in to his diggin's up on the Trinity river - sleeping bags, outdoor cooking, hanger flying around the campfire and all the trimmings, Ted Muegge made a mistake that set the town of Weaverville back nearly a hundred years.

For precise and exhibition flying, John Winblad won a beautiful trophy when he demonstrated how to take out a barbed wire fence with the landing gear of an AT-6. Boy! Where the natives over a Warm Springs restless that Sunday" Of course, Ed Cahill is our stunt and crash expert. He always walks away from them.

There have been hundreds of flights - flights for purpose and for fun - down through the years; Raney and Borrmann to Manzanillo for disaster relief; the search for the head of Pancho Villa at Perral; and many other sorties into the land of Tequilla. As a matter of fact, Raney's Navion and Borrmann's old Spartan have more hours in the air over Mexico than does the Mexican Air Force.

During this time, the Squadron was going through a change. The slow chugging BTs, Airknockers, T-Crafts and 140s were starting to be replaced as newer, faster, cleaner birds began to make their appearance and new nannies showed on the roster. Ken Wentz, Gerry Stroh, Pete Dardani, Louis King, Bill O'Keefe, Dave Heffle, Leo Packoski, Chet Smith, Doc Gill, Doc Bennett, Harold Morton; all joined enthusiastically, pitching in with a will, and soon many were serving as officers, organizing flights and generally stimulating the Squadron to further activity - and, developing, into characters.

In the last few years, again, a metamorphic transformation has taken place. Larger and faster aircraft carry the winged star, and the names of Dick Gerry, Bill Drumm, Art Harris, Bob Rown, Elwood Hansen, Art Brownrigg Ivan Nealon, Jay Quetnick, Carl Hathaway, Damon Raike, Bill Meck and Dick Meyer show prominently in tree activities of old No. 1, as officers, committeemen and delegates to Western States.